

forests, colourful northern lights, unforgettable sunsets and numerous lakes. On this reserve the houses are all situated on one side of Oxford Lake. The opposite side is the area where most of the men go to hunt, trap and chop wood for fuel.

At Oxford House most of the older people do not speak nor understand English. Very few have even a Grade 6. Although some may understand English, they cannot speak it. And even though almost all the young people can speak and understand the language, they do not practise it outside of school.

When I first came to Portage la Prairie I had a difficult time learning to speak English all the time. Even though I was in Grade 9 at the time, I had never used the language orally unless I was asked a question in class. When I arrived here, I found difficulty in expressing myself in English and pronouncing the words correctly. I had to think first in Cree, and then try to translate my thoughts into good English sentences. People must have gotten the idea that I was either dumb or just plain rude not to bother answering because they would just stare back or give me a strange look. That look would make me feel uneasy and my mind would go blank. Also, because I was very shy about speaking English, that made the situation even harder for me.

On that first separation from my home in the North at the age of 14, I left with great expectations. I knew I was about to enter into a world that was completely different from mine but I never realized it would be so complicated and harsh. I had expected, in the new world, that things would be modern, brighter, happier, more beautiful and easier. That trip to reach what

would become my new home meant my first long plane ride and my first exciting bus ride. It also meant my first glimpse of the lovely cars, the great city of Winnipeg, and the beautiful Prairies. Here, too, I was introduced to television, the modern telephone and the stamp machine. Everything was so much fun and so exciting.

**A**FTER a while I was settled in my boarding home. I found it hard to communicate with the family with whom I was living, and also with the other students at school. Because I did not know what was expected of me, as a result, I could not get along. My high spirits began to slide downhill as each day passed, and more and more I began to miss my family and long for home. I missed, moreover, being surrounded by nature and its sounds. I detested sitting inside a huge building all day with so many strangers. I hated the roars of the city and its continuous traffic. I could not find a corner all my own; everywhere I turned there were buildings, automobiles and people.

So many times I seriously considered quitting school even though I was determined to go on. I realized there was no future in returning home with no education. My ambition had always been to go through high school and in some way become of help to my people. These thoughts kept me here.

The school year dragged on and on. At long last the end of June finally came and I could leave. That was a glorious day when I got home. It seemed as though I was in some sort of heaven with sweet, fresh air, the placid lake, the lovely forests, the sounds of birds and animals calling out to

me, and the very atmosphere of freedom and wilderness. For the next two months I never spoke one English word.

In my second year, I moved to a new boarding home. Things continued pretty much the same as in the previous year. Now, whenever I think back to those first two years, I truly wish I could relive those times and make them better. I had been so wrapped up in my own troubles and problems I had never really considered other people. During those times I had actually considered life not worth living. I didn't even try to run away or take to drinking; I knew I would come face to face with the same old situations I was already in, and probably I would make it worse.

Oh, the misery, the desperation of those times !

I used to wonder how much longer I was going to go through that kind of life, but then I used to tell myself, "Nothing lasts forever, it will end sometime." Then, too, I thought of all the handicapped people I saw every day around the city and how their burdens were far greater than mine. I also thought of the people who had no homes or a family such as mine to go home to. Thoughts such as these were incentive enough for me to continue what I had begun.

I clearly remember the day I was to go home again for the summer. To my surprise, I discovered that though I yearned to be back home once more, yet I wanted to stay here. Maybe I wanted to remain to try to make up for another bad year, or maybe I had resigned myself to city life for by now I had grown accustomed to it.