

LIONEL STONECHILD

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

“If I miss one session, I will become very sick. If I miss two sessions, that’s about five days, I might die.”

When you look at me you probably think that I’m about thirteen years old, but actually I’m eighteen. I have a kidney problem that has restrained my growth. It’s funny because little kids who are thirteen years old think that I’m one of them, and they are always surprised that I talk like an older person.

I’m used to talking about my kidney problem because so many doctors and nurses have asked me to describe my symptoms. I go for treatment at St. Paul’s Hospital here in Saskatoon, so I guess I’m part of the teaching course for a lot of new doctors. They come around to see me, so I have to tell them over and over again what’s wrong with me, but I don’t mind because most of them are enjoyable to talk to.

“Up until awhile ago I was in pain most of the time. My bones ached all night so much I couldn’t sleep.”

The kidneys don’t take the poisons out of my system, so I have to be hooked up to a dialysis machine three times a week. This cleans all of my blood. If I miss one session, I will become very sick. And if I miss

two sessions, that’s about five days, I might die. So being on time and making the sessions is very important for me. I think about death sometimes, probably a lot more than other people my age. But the big thing is just to make sure that I make the sessions.

Getting to the hospital has been a big problem for me and my mother. There are just the three of us, my mother and I and my sister. We used to live in Fort Qu’Appelle and that meant we’d have to go to Regina by bus, and then take another bus ride to Saskatoon. It cost us so much money for bus tickets and hotels overnight in Saskatoon or Regina, that we finally had to move here. Another reason is that I had a kidney transplant. Too much pressure and strain.

My mother doesn’t have much money and there’s all of the regular expenses to think about as well. We live here now, but it’s still a problem because of the taxi fare to and from the hospital. I think that each month it costs me almost \$120 to take taxis, and my mother only gets about \$600 total from the government.

She’s a great mother and she’s had a hard time. Just before I got sick she lost both my father and my grandmother on the same day. And she has to take care of the house, and my sister, and make sure that there

is money for my transportation. She could have put me away somewhere but she didn’t. My sister spent most of her time when she was little playing in hospital lobbies because of all the time that we had to spend there.

The doctors and nurses have been very good to me, and sometimes they will lend me money for taxis when we are short. The problem is with the government agencies. We are Status Indians, but when we moved away from the reserve, no government agency wanted to take responsibility for our expenses. Sometimes the money was only available for six months or a year and then we would have to look someplace else. When the trouble first started, my mother spent three or four weeks phoning various government offices before she could even find someone who would take responsibility for this kind of service.

Up until awhile ago I was in pain most of the time. My bones ached all night so that I couldn’t sleep. The bed was too hard and I’d be up until three or four in the morning lying awake just thinking. So I have had a chance to think about a lot of things in my life.

There are a lot of problems connected with the kidney failure. For one thing, I haven’t grown a lot, as I mentioned, so that all of my friends are a lot bigger than I am. Actually, most of my first friends are back in Fort Qu’Appelle, so I had to start all