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**“You can say that I’m one of the lucky ones. I’ve been given a chance to do a useful job and I’ve been able to do it.”**

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I was born in 1954, in Fort Providence. But when I was two, I contracted polio, and was sent out to Edmonton. I lived there for four years in the hospital, and the only people I knew were nurses and doctors. When they would take me out for walks, I would say “Hi, nurse” or “Hi, doctor” to complete strangers in the street. So they finally introduced me to the foster parent program, and I lived with these foster parents for three years and went to school.

In 1963, they wanted to send me back to my parents. In all that time, I saw my father only once. Just before I left Edmonton, he came to the hospital with TB, so I had a chance to see him.

I was kind of scared to go back home, because I didn’t know much about Indians. I knew I was supposed to be one, but all I knew was what I saw on television. Little teepees, and things like that. I sure didn’t see the Indians win very many things from the cowboys. So you can understand how scared I was to go back home.

Anyway, I ended up at home, and things weren’t so bad. I got used to it, even walking to school on those cold winter days. I went to school at Fort Smith, N.W.T. for eleven years, but I only went home for one or two months a year. But I com-

pleted grade twelve, and I went to college down south for a year.

College was really worthwhile, because I got a job at the regional fire centre, working in forestry. And I’ve been there since 1974. In fact, a little while back, I took a break to train somebody else, and I applied to go into the renewable resources program.

Even though I was handicapped, people believed in me. And they knew I had knowledge and grim determination. I just graduated this year with my diploma, and I’m on my way to a new job with the Territorial Government as a fire Technician. Field trips were hard for me because of my disability, but determination got me through the program.

You can say that I’m one of the lucky ones. I’ve been given a chance to do a useful job and I’ve been able to do it. Sure there are some problems with the cane, but I make up for that in many other ways. There’s a lot of work that I can do a lot better than other people. You’d be surprised.

I know that a lot of my friends who are Native run into lots of problems up here. There are problems with discrimination, and there are problems with jobs, and I guess there are lots of problems with families being separated. Anyway, all the fault

isn’t on one side. Lots of Natives are drunks and I don’t think you can just blame everybody around for that. What I’m trying to say is that people’s attitude will change on a person to person basis and you just have to keep working at that. I’m not a drunk just because I’m a Native, and you aren’t mean just because you’re white. For example, I’m an active player and member of the Northwest Territories Badminton Association. I may not win any trophies, but I can sure win friends by taking the opportunity and trying.

You know, you change as you get older, and I guess you get wiser, too. I know now that I could never live in Edmonton anymore. I was helped in Edmonton and I got a good start for somebody with polio, but look at what’s going on in the cities today. And then come up here where it’s nice and quiet. Where would you choose?

I suppose the only kind of recommendation I would like to make to the government people is that they try to move the services for disabled people closer to their homes. When people have to go to a foreign community, it’s natural to adapt to the hospital there and never want to leave again. I was like that as a boy. Just consider all the beautiful things and wonderful experiences I would have missed out on if I had stayed down south.

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