

Story of Florence Pine

In memory of Florence Toulouse (Pine), 1919 - 1990

by Janice Toulouse

Born Florence Pine in 1919 in Garden River First Nation, to Alice Meawasige from Serpent River and Peter Jarvis Pine from Garden River. During her childhood years she attended Shingwauk Home Residential School in Sault Ste Marie.

"I had a dream once as a young woman, after I had graduated from grade nine. I wanted to be a fashion designer. I always loved sewing and making clothes, the nuns at residential school said I would be a good seamstress. I don't think they were referring to my dream, it was more like a maid or laundry woman.

I was treated special when I was a little girl at the Shingwauk Home. The nuns gave me new shoes and a nice dress to wear. I was called Ogema Kwe, "Princess Shingwauk", because my grandfather was Chief Shingwauk. I don't have good memories of that school, something bad happened to me there I don't want to talk about it. I can't teach you the language, we were beaten in those schools for speaking Anishinaabemowin. I kept my language, no one could take this away.

I had to quit school to raise my siblings, being the eldest girl. I married Joseph Toulouse from Wikwemikong, I had 9 children. My designer dream never came to be, so I sewed those pretty dresses for you girls. I had to move to Toronto to find work in 1960, your dad left us to work in the states. I got my children back from residential school, and moved to a rooming house in CabbageTown, Toronto. I was not taught how to love, I loved with my heart but never gave hugs, kisses, tucking my kids into bed at night with a bedtime story, no tenderness at all. I thought this was the way all children were raised.

I loved to cook, people called me "Mom", our doors were always open. I was the cook at the Toronto Indian Centre in the 70's. Your grandmother helped me, she lived with us after her and your papa Peter Pine left the reserve. In those days this was the only place that fed the Native homeless. I raised you kids on my own. Later I cleaned rich people's homes. I lost both legs from diabetes, time for me to go. I worked all my life to be independent and now I'm dependent.

It was hard for a single mother of nine children to feed you all, at times we didn't have anything to eat. There was so much racism. My saying was, "Be grateful for what you have". Even with the hard times we had much laughter to keep us together as a family. I worked hard and did my best to raise my children and to be a good mother."