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## Two voices (Sylvia Jamieson Sandy, Mohawk, Ontario)

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# **TWO VOICES**

by

**Judith Jamieson Mitton  
B.A., Wilfrid Laurier University, 1998**

**THESIS**

**Submitted to the Department of  
Religion and Culture**

**in partial fulfilment of the requirements for**

**Master of Arts**

**Wilfrid Laurier University**

**2001**

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# TWO VOICES

*Told by: Sylvia Jamieson Sandy*  
*Listened by: Judith Jamieson Mitton*

## **ABSTRACT**

*Two Voices* is the life story of Sylvia Jamieson Sandy, a 95 year old Elder and Clan Mother of the Wolf Clan, Mohawk Nation, Six Nations Territory on the Grand River. The thesis employs the methodology of borrowing in which the participants use each other's gifts and talents; the participants are Sylvia and her urban-raised cousin who has been entrusted by Sylvia to carry her story outside of Six Nations Territory. In her own words, Sylvia tells of her experiences and memories of the Jamieson family, and her life as a teacher, an entrepreneur, a community member and Elder. Sylvia's story, spanning most of the twentieth century, shows the effects of assimilation on her people, the degree to which assimilation has penetrated and changed Haudenosaunee culture and Sylvia's own adjustment to and battles against this encroachment. Included are discussions of Sylvia's agency, independence and her life long service to her family, her community and her people. The collaboration from which *Two Voices* arose also highlights how Sylvia helped to bring home her urban-raised cousin.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**In Memory of**

**Monica Venus and Lydia (Bennett) Jamieson**

**Eileen Jamieson  
1902-1907**

**James Claude Jamieson  
1895-1974**

**and all the rest of *our* relations**

**Niaweh**

**Sylvia Jamieson Sandy  
for entrusting her story to me**

**Thesis Committee:  
Dr. K. Koppedrayner, Chair  
Dr. C. Duncan  
Dr. L. Christie**

**My Borrowees:  
Helen Blackburn  
Dr. Kathy Brock  
Cherie Harrison  
Maggie Horvath  
Sylvia Morscher**

**and**

**all *my* relations**



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## **INTRODUCTION**

**This work is the outcome of conversations between two women, Sylvia Jamieson Sandy, a (now) 95 year-old Clan Mother, Wolf Clan of the Mohawk Nation at Six Nations Territory and me, Judith Jamieson Mitton. It tells how these conversations came about, presents Sylvia's life story that came out of those conversations and offers my own reflections on Sylvia's life story and our conversations. Our decision to tape Sylvia's story and produce out of it a life story grew out of our mutual interest in genealogy that Sylvia had initially generated in me over four decades ago.**

**Of the two voices heard in this work, Sylvia's voice has precedence over mine. Nonetheless, some individual biographical information needs to be included about Sylvia's listener and carrier. It was Sylvia who brought me from there to here. Sylvia has always been a most powerful, behind-the-scenes, moving force in my life. I was born into a family in which my paternal line seemingly began with my father and ended with my grandfather. My paternal forbearers were absent but not quite nonexistent—an open, in-house sort of secret which was acknowledged, but not talked about. My grandfather's own personal history prior to his service in World War I as given to me was spotty, sparse and told with an air of evasion. Visits from our relatives "from Brantford" were very infrequent and, while not unwelcome once the visitors were there, I felt the visitors were not encouraged to appear very often if at all. As a consequence, I felt as if I was missing a whole half of myself.**

**What Sylvia planted in me when we first met, a story I tell below, took two decades to sprout into action. In piecing our family story together, I discovered that I possessed a proficiency in genealogical research, the ultimate consequence of which was to provide for three generations of my family's branch of the story of where we came**

from. Through Bill C-31 my father, my brother and my children and I were registered on the band list and we received our status cards, a concrete affirmation of our history. Unlike my father, my brother and I, my children were able to grow to adulthood knowing whence they came. My interest and work on family history had resulted in my being elected to two terms as president of the Ontario Genealogical Society and paved the road to my tackling an undergraduate degree at the age of forty-seven in company with both my daughters, Sylvia smiling maternally upon and encouraging us all. Sylvia's story as subject matter for my next academic step was inevitable.

As Kateri Damm has observed, family history

is not linear, chronological and progressive.... It is a web in which people, actions and events are interconnected and not easily disengaged or delineated. Cause and effect are not simply revealed through a listing of successive dates of events but are enmeshed in a tangle of events, emotions, histories, beliefs, values.... (Damm 1993:101)

Like a spider's web, a familial web is a composition of two distinct types of filaments. The backdrop of cross-threads is constructed first in a starburst or asterisk pattern that situates, anchors, shapes and determines the strength of the structure. Upon this foundation each family individual weaves and attaches their own topical threads of their circle of life in concentric circles upon and around the surface of the background cross-threads. Sylvia's life story, as one of those topical threads, exhibits this interconnected patterning of our family web.

The multidirectional filaments work in concert, forming a strong, unique base of the past, the present and potential for the future. The effects of external events and internal action reverberate throughout the entire structure. If these effects are of sufficient strength, the resulting vibrations are quite capable of changing, weakening, damaging and

even destroying portions of, or even the entire network. When viewed as a whole, Sylvia's life story is easily identified and separated from all the other topical concentric circles lived by her parents, her siblings and the others of her extended family of those immediate generations. What is not readily apparent, and can remain unnoticed, are the supporting foundational cross-threads laid by the previous generations. As the support, anchor and shaper of the family web, these behind-the-scenes cross-threads are the family foundation, "the contents and tone" which "will largely determine" not only the "direction and meaning" of each individual topical thread, but also "the meaning and effect in any given sphere of activity" (Gunn Allen 1992:243) of each individual circle.

Guided by, and answering our family's predilection and tendencies to preserve our family history, Sylvia and I have joined in a collective remembering of our familial origins. By our remembering, telling, listening, recording and preserving, we not only affirm and strengthen our family ties, we also satisfy our responsibilities to one another, to our ancestors and to those of the coming generations of our family.

### **Cousin Sylvia**

In a recent newspaper article, Sylvia was compared to Hillary Clinton, former American First Lady, as a "local" example of a strong woman. As an Elder at Six Nations, Sylvia is described as "dynamic in speech and action," a "strong advocate of the Native culture." About herself, in the article, Sylvia says she is "neither a Canadian nor American citizen, but a Six Nations citizen" (Marshall 2000:15). Brian Maracle, in his personal account of coming home to the Grand River Territory, includes his impressions of modern Haudenosaunee women. Despite having lost much of their political power in the half millennium since the Europeans came, Haudenosaunee women are "still strong—mentally,

emotionally and spiritually.” They have “an abundance of vitality, guts and determination.” “Spunky, impassioned and tenacious,” “born with a robust sense of humour,” they “confront adversity with courage and resilience.” Maracle sums up his description with a single word—“tough” (Maracle 1996:216-7), always my own word to describe Cousin Sylvia.

Sylvia has resided all of her now ninety-five years on Six Nations Territory and has stated that she never wished to live anywhere else. Coming in the middle of a large family—“seven-seven, seven boys and seven girls”—Sylvia’s stories of her childhood portray a spirited, independent, sometimes mischievous child who was adored and appreciated by her father. For her mother, however, Sylvia was often a source of distress and concern that resulted in much conflict from Sylvia’s to anything to do with the oven, the sink and rocking babies.

As in all family histories, there is no beginning and no ending. Of Sylvia’s generation, she is the last remaining member and the archives, the Keeper not only of her generation but of all those who came before and of all that which occurred. The cross-threads of Sylvia’s Haudenosaunee background have been shaken, broken, mended and have had different cultural strands added many times since first contact with Europeans. Originally a gynocracy,<sup>1</sup> Haudenosaunee society, guided by the Great Law of Peace, the

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<sup>1</sup> There is no term that accurately describes Haudenosaunee social structure. Trapped by the English language and opposite opposites, rather than complementary opposites, terms such as “matriarchy,” “matrilocal” and “gynocracy” carry connotations of female dominance over males, which was never the case. The two sexes were regarded as the same but different. Each had their own domain of influence—men, the forest and women, the clearing. Rather than a war between the sexes, there was an equal partnership state of cooperation. Male and female duties, responsibilities and obligations were determined by both gender and age. The term “matrilineal,” which describes line of descent and the “from whence” an individual came, while more accurate in capturing the precedence of female before male, does not also carry the equal cooperation which existed between the sexes. For that reason, while I may employ the other terms for sake of variety from time to time, I have used, in the main, the term “matrilineal.”

**“culturally destructive activities of the Christian missionaries” began in the sixteenth century. With “the heavy hand of European sexism,” the Iroquoian Creation story was brought “into line with alien Christian theological themes.... Overall, much of the tampering worked to emphasize male over female content” (Johnsen 2000:83-4). The concept of cosmic balance as reflected in the four cardinal directions was distorted and distilled down to the twins, Sapling and Flint, one good, one evil, opposing rather than complementary opposites forever locked in battle for world control.**

**In addition to these outside cultural influences seeping into and changing the Haudenosaunee social conscience, monumental external events leading not only to the disruption of the social structure, but also the displacement of the Six Nations from their original homelands reverberated and ricocheted throughout the network. The American Revolution succeeded in splitting the Confederacy. Unable to come to a consensus as to their response, the Six Nations decided to act individually. The Oneida and Tuscarora Nations supported the Patriots. The Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga and Mohawk Nations supported the British, primarily through the efforts of Joseph Brant and his sister Molly, a Clan Mother. Haudenosaunee nations fought Haudenosaunee nations and, because the clan system cut across national boundaries, relatives fought relatives.**

**Brant, as a Pine Tree chief of the Confederacy and holding a commission in the British Army, was held in high esteem and was a man of great influence on both sides of the Atlantic. Even after two centuries, opinions about Brant are sharply divided and are concerned with Brant’s degree of acculturation. Through her maternal line Sylvia is descended from the Brants. As a loyal supporter of her famous forbearer, Sylvia applauds and supports Brant’s actions for our people. Ronald Wright, in *Stolen Continents* observes that Brant “paid a price for his bicultural dexterity: he embraced the white world**

too warmly, and this, along with his rash temperament, made it hard for him to distinguish between the interests of his own people and those of the British” (Wright 1992:137). Brant was caught up in events far beyond his control.

In the fall of 1782, the British abandoned the war and discarded their Haudenosaunee allies, as did the Patriots. The Treaty of Paris, 1783, which formally ended the conflict, established the international boundary through Haudenosaunee Territory. In the following year, the second Fort Stanwix Treaty declared the Haudenosaunee to be a conquered people who had forfeited their lands, “most of the negotiations were held at gunpoint and the Iroquois were forced to give up claims to much of their ancestral territory” (Johnsen 2000:23). For his assistance to the British government, Brant was granted 675,000 acres along the Grand River. By 1790 Brant’s Mohawks were joined on the Grand by bands of Onondaga, Cayugas and some Senecas.

It was with Brant that James Jamieson Sr. (Sylvia’s great-grandfather) came with his Cayuga mother and her nation to settle on the Grand. James Sr. was the grandson of Mary Jemison, White Woman of the Genesee,<sup>2</sup> whose own life story was taken down in 1823 by Dr. James Seaver. As a white captive, Mary was adopted into the Seneca Nation during the time of the French and Indian Wars. Mary had two Native husbands. By her first husband she had a daughter who died in infancy and a son Thomas. Widowed soon after the birth of Thomas, she remarried and had more children. Mary’s son, Thomas, had

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<sup>2</sup> James Seaver, *The Life of Mary Jemison*, 20th Edition, The American Scenic & Historic Preservation Society, New York, NY [1824], 1918. This edition, which includes information on all previous editions, contains extensive footnotes (which are not included in recent editions) as well as an extensive amount of research as well as portions of subsequent conversations Mary had with others, a copy of her will and accounts of her burial and her re-interment in Letchworth Park. While not a particularly useful volume for genealogical information on Mary’s Six Nations descendants, its value lies in its relevance to our family, as an example of one of the later white captive stories which abounded during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and also in the editors, one of whom was Lewis Henry Morgan, the “father” of anthropology.

four wives. In the aftermath of the American Revolution, one of Thomas' wives chose to accompany her family in one of the two Cayuga groups who followed Brant north.

Family tradition says that land south and east of the present day site of Paris, Ontario was allocated to Mary Jemison on the Grand for her assistance to Brant and Butler during the Revolution. She preferred to remain in New York State. In 1817 "an act was passed" for Mary's "naturalization, and ratifying and confirming the title" of her land (Seaver [1823], 1918:136). It is assumed that her allotment was given to her grandson, James Sr. Family tradition also tells us of the removal of the Jamieson family from that original allotment to the present site of the family homestead. The versions vary from branch to branch, not concerning the reason for the removal, but concerning the part that James Sr. played in the event. One version says our family was moved down the Grand to avoid a blood feud with another family. Other branch members say that James Sr. killed a man in a fight, the reason for the disagreement has been long since forgotten. Several family members have insisted that it was a quarrel about a woman.

Sylvia's version has her great-grandfather as the victim and says his children were moved down the Grand and given land allotments following their birth order, as far as there was room, on the south side of the river. Her grandfather, James Jr., as the youngest child, was given his allotment on the north side of the river. Sylvia summed up the story by observing that, in being situated across the river, we have been, from time to time, strangers to our own relatives on the south side of the river. No documented evidence has been found to confirm either version or to date the year or even decade of occurrence. The "facts" of the matter may indeed never be known. What is of importance is that Sylvia's and my branch experienced further isolation and detachment as well as having to start over again to establish their farm.



By the 1850s our branch was firmly established on the north side of the Grand in Onondaga Township, Brant County. Over a span of sixty-five years the family had experienced displacement and relocation twice, the first in the relocation from their traditional homeland in New York State to the Grand River and the second down the Grand River to the present homestead location which estranged and alienated our branch from the rest of our family and from the bulk of the Six Nations situated on the south side of the river.

Dating from the 1880s two pictures, one written and one a photographic representation, display the effects and extent of acculturation from the surrounding European society on our branch. A biographical sketch from *The History of Brant County, Ontario* (Warner-Beers 1883) details the three generations that preceded Sylvia's. Three themes predominate: importance of education, assisting others and preservation of the past. Among the biographical information it is noted that James Sr. "had no education, his children also being deprived of it, as there were no schools in those days"; of James Jr., he had but little advantage of education, but he has taken pains to educate his children to the best advantage of education, so much so that they have forgotten their own language and have to be addressed by their parents in English, which is a great disadvantage, as the parents are not thorough speaking English." James Jr. is also described as being "away visiting the Indians of the Indian Territory and Western States, teaching them how to plough, split rails, and make chairs, tables and other useful articles. This he does gratis, receiving no compensation whatever. He has many fossils, stones and other articles used by the old Indians of past days" (Warner-Beers 1883:643).

A formal studio portrait of James Jr. surrounded by three of his daughters shows a family group elegantly attired in Victorian garb. Books, both opened and closed, are

arranged on the furniture that borders the subjects. The impression from this portrait is one of a successful, middle-class, affluent Victorian family of which Sylvia's father was the youngest child. Sylvia's father was educated in Montreal. According to Sylvia, he accompanied Julie, one of his older sisters, when she went to teach music at Akwesasne.

In observing that our family appeared to have accepted Christianity very early, Sylvia responded that we were Christians 'way, 'way back and went on to describe our connection to St. John's Anglican Church which was initially built on the north side of the Grand on or near the Jamieson family farm. Benjamin, James Jr.'s eldest son, intended to go into the ministry. Her grandfather donated the lumber for the building. Benjamin died at a young age from consumption. In 1885, the church was moved across the Grand to its present location at Fifth Line and Tuscarora Road because the spring flooding of the Grand prevented people on the south side of the river from attending services. Sylvia remembers church attendance as a part of her child- and young adulthood. In talking about how her father and mother met, she says her father married the church organist.

Sylvia has far fewer stories and remembrances about her maternal line. She displays pride in recounting her family descent from Joseph and Molly Brant and her connection to Pauline Johnson, the Mohawk poet. When tracing her line of descent back to Molly Brant, her accounting is much less exact than that of her paternal line. Given the amount of time from that of Molly Brant to today, it appears that several generations of women are missing from her account. The missing (and perhaps forgotten) generations, since they are through the maternal line, can be accounted for by the patrilineal kinship system largely replacing the Haudenosaunee matrilineal kinship system, where the line of descent was reckoned through the mother and not the father. Specifics aside, on her maternal line, Sylvia is descended from two important Mohawk leaders. Joseph Brant

**“spoke good English ... had a European education ... was a Mason, a staunch churchman and a translator of the Bible into Mohawk.” “As a Clan Mother and consort of William Johnson” Molly Brant was “actually more influential within the confederacy than her younger brother, Joseph” (Johansen 2000:32). Several prevalent themes emerge from Sylvia’s maternal line: service to the people, Christianity, education and the importance of the preservation of Haudenosaunee culture. The cross-threads of both paternal and maternal lines entwined and impacted on Sylvia, defining and directing her circle of life.**

**Sylvia’s maternal grandmother is prominent in Sylvia’s story as the vocal source of Sylvia marrying within the group and as naming Sylvia as heir to the clanship. I anticipated more stories about her maternal grandparents. As both her paternal grandparents were deceased, one prior to her birth and the other shortly thereafter, Sylvia’s maternal grandparents were the only remaining set of grandparents she had. I heard only three stories about her maternal grandmother and nothing about her maternal grandfather. Perhaps Sylvia’s remembrances reflect the most memorable and the most potent teachings from her maternal grandmother that had the greatest impact on her life. By adhering to an early childhood directive, Sylvia married “in.” By her grandmother being present at Sylvia’s birth, Sylvia was named as her maternal grandmother’s successor to the clanship. These two seemingly innocuous events planted seeds that found fertile ground, grew and bore fruit that transformed Sylvia’s life.**

**Sylvia’s marriage was not all that she had hoped it to be. The union could be characterized as a “mixed marriage,” not one specifically of religion, but one of backgrounds. Despite criticism from some family members and the community about her marriage “to a Longhouse man (from down below) with all her education,” Sylvia is adamant that there was no conflict over religion. Sylvia explained to me about “above”**

and “down below.” More than a geographic designation, with Chiefswood Road being the dividing line, “above” or west of Chiefswood Road is where the educated, Christianized members of Six Nations tended to make their homes. “Down below,” east of Chiefswood, is where the more traditional thinking members congregated. Similarly, the phrase “cross river” I had heard used to describe our branch of the family contained more than a geographic designation. In asking one of Sylvia’s brothers for an explanation, I was told that “cross river” carried connotations of being an apple—red on the outside and white on the inside.

Other factors contributing to Sylvia’s marriage not being all that she had anticipated may have been the differences between their ages and their respective nuclear family circumstances. Sylvia was more than ten years her husband’s senior, a half a generation older. Gossip of the time that Sylvia repeated to me concerned Wilson marrying “an old woman.” Although she laughed as she told the story and of Wilson’s quick retort, Sylvia also told of dyeing her hair since 1947. Off tape she observed that she started going grey in two strips, one on either side of her head and she looked like a skunk! Hence her decision to start dyeing her hair, something else she will do until the day she dies. By starting to hide her grey hair three years after their marriage suggests that Sylvia was not only aware of the age difference, but also determined to make that discrepancy less apparent.

Wilson was an only child raised by a stepmother as her own biological child who discovered the identity of his birth mother by chance several years after his marriage. His parents seem to have doted on him because he was their only child. It could be said of his parents that they kept him in a state of perpetual adolescence. However, Sylvia stated in her story on an unrelated subject—non-Native women who marry Native men and receive

**Indian status—this is not our way. It is the women who are expected to take in and look after their men, not the other way around.**

**Sylvia is alluding to the Haudenosaunee matrilineal social structure and gender relations. Men were the protectors-of-life and their field of influence and endeavour was the forest. Women as the givers-of-life held sway over the clearing. On marrying, a Haudenosaunee male would move into his wife's longhouse. While being welcomed and assured a place in his wife's longhouse, a male retained his membership in his mother's longhouse and periodically would return to his "own" longhouse for extended visits. Perhaps the traditional male dual-residence of Haudenosaunee society conflicted with Sylvia's ideas of a traditional Christian marriage.**

**Sylvia, in coming from a large Christianized family, had instilled in her early the Protestant Work Ethic. To help her parents subsidize her education, she worked outside of Six Nations Territory each summer at the sink, the oven and rocking babies as a domestic helper and, later, a tutor. Sylvia, as a professional, economically self-sufficient woman, was, economically, a good marital catch. When Sylvia would point up this discrepancy of equality between their contributions and commitment to their marriage and urge Wilson to grow up, he would respond by reminding Sylvia that traditionally, he would not be considered an adult until he had attained fifty years. Until then, he could do as he pleased and he continued to act as a married bachelor. Unfortunately, Wilson died before he attained that age.**

**In Sylvia's own assessment of her marital problems, she ascribes the difficulties to Wilson's gravitating toward non-Native friends and alcohol. She extends this assessment to her own brothers' marital situations. She observed that all her brothers married non-Native spouses. In answering her father's question about what was wrong with the**

Indians, Sylvia responded by suggesting to him that he look no further than around his dinner table. Her response to my observation that my grandfather, Claude, imbibed freely and always more than was good for him or those around him, Sylvia opined that it was because he had served in the army during World War I. Sylvia presents her solution to her marital problems by saying that, unlike the women of today, she did not go running back to her parents, but stayed and made the best of her situation in accordance with her marital vows and the church's teachings on fidelity. Sylvia mentions she declined the marital opportunities that came her way when she was widowed.

Propelled, guided and shaped by her background cross-threads, Sylvia has defined herself in terms of relations and obligations to others. In obtaining an education—even to escape the tyranny of the sink, the oven and rocking babies—she used her education for the benefit of her community at Six Nations as a teacher. Citing all the baby rocking she did as a child, with a grin Sylvia confided several times that that is probably why she never had any children of her own. I suggested, based on all the loving stories she told about both teaching and caring for her students, that she was a mother many times over—as the Great Law states, a true mother of the nations.

Sylvia also opened several stores so that people would not have to go so far for staples. Besides providing a service for her community, Sylvia allowed that she was grateful having something useful to do, to go to after ill health dictated that she retire early from teaching. This led to an exchange about the ills of retirement, the value of always having something worthwhile to do and the love we both have for always learning new things.

For many years, before the banks located at Six Nations, Sylvia served as a lending institution. Admitting that more than a few people defaulted on their loans to her over the

years, she maintains with no bitterness that this was her responsibility to fulfill. Because of the poor economic conditions in the Territory and because people do not have title to their land, it could not be used as collateral for a loan from a mainstream lending institution. Sylvia could not stand by and see people need money for home repairs, because they were hungry or for transportation to their employment outside Six Nations, and refuse to help. Helping people makes Sylvia feel secure in the knowledge that she is living up to her parents' teachings-by-example. During the Depression, while most people would not feed the transients, her parents brought in anyone who came requesting food and fed them the same food the family was having for supper.

Her signature action, described when I asked her to relate "the biggest, the best, the most important thing" she did in her life is her fighting to keep her teaching position in the early 1930s. The situation, centred on Sylvia's job, had larger, cultural implications for the community. Her going to war *for* her job was, in fact, her battle *against* mainstream control of the Six Nations education system, the forceful replacement of the traditional Haudenosaunee government practices and the imposition of an elected system, a "more progressive form of government." Sylvia fervently expresses great annoyance and despair that her campaign appears to have gone unnoticed. She observes that in what she did, she showed the community that not only was resistance possible and necessary, but that it could be successful. In her telling, amongst her disappointment and regrets, she hugs to herself the knowledge that she did the right thing under the circumstances and she would do it no other way today.

Sylvia has passionate feelings about Six Nations sovereignty and the right to manage our own affairs without outside intervention or interference. At her own expense, Sylvia has had re-published *The Redman's Appeal for Justice: The Position of the Six*

*Nations that they Constitute an Independent State*, a 1924 position paper prepared for submission to the League of Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, in an appeal to the international community for support. Acting as an unofficial community archivist, Sylvia has ensured that this reprint and its accompanying volume, *History of the Six Nations Indian Settlement on the Banks of the Grand River*, have been circulated amongst the community and extra copies are available for any others who are interested in the events.

Sylvia has inherited from her father the responsibility of the keeping of the Jamieson family. She talks about her great-grandfather's collections and how her own house is like a museum. Some of her collection of family memorabilia I have seen include Joseph Brant's cradleboard, the shoulder flash of the Brock Rangers (the all-Native company recruited in World War I), the plaques from James Jr.'s and his wife's caskets with their birth and death dates and an original copy of *The Redman's Appeal for Justice*. Sylvia also has in her possession Brant's war hatchet that she keeps in a bank security deposit box. She is also the keeper of the last remaining case of birds made by her grandfather, an amateur taxidermist.

From her father, Sylvia also inherited the keeping of the family cemetery, once part of the burial ground for St. John's. Sylvia has said that the front portion was reserved for the exclusive use of our family. Besides enclosing the cemetery with a stout metal fence, Sylvia has completed her father's project by erecting a large monument that includes a brief history of both parents' backgrounds as well as a listing of their children. For family members that are buried elsewhere, Sylvia ensures that markers for them are placed in the cemetery. Dedication of these commemorative markers have been central to previous family reunions. For the 2001 family picnic, Sylvia planned to have a service in St. John's church and the dedication of a plaque detailing her grandfather's participation



in its formation. I was pleased to see that Sylvia had also incorporated my genealogical research in a handout for the picnic.

The most profound event in Sylvia's life is the one about which she talks least, the one she is able to talk least about. Sometime in the late 1960s Sylvia was informed that she had been named by her maternal grandmother, Catherine (Burning) Bennett, as Catherine's successor to the Wolf clanship of the Mohawk nation. Sylvia was astonished by this revelation. She was unaware that, after her birth, her Grandmother Bennett had left Sylvia's name as her successor with her chief. Sylvia's own explanation about her grandmother's naming her as heir to the clanship resulted from her grandmother's attendance at Sylvia's birth. Sylvia, although her grandmother's fifth Jamieson granddaughter, was the first of those granddaughters she assisted into the world, was the first to hold her and was the one who named her.

Concerning the current state of the clan system, I will turn to Brian Maracle's assessment. "Today, after centuries of being attacked from without and being compromised from within, the Iroquois clan system—the heart of our traditional form of government—is in terrible shape.... (T)he people, clans and nations of the Iroquois have been fractured and dispersed for more than two hundred years" (Maracle 1996:188-7). The most dispersed of the Six Nations is the Mohawk nation, which is scattered amongst seven other established territories aside from Six Nations in other parts of Ontario, in Quebec and in New York State. There are nine Mohawk chieftainship chairs. From a recent informal survey Maracle reports that there were "more than seventy women claiming to be Mohawk clanmothers!" (Ibid. 189). My own personal experience has been similar. In asking about various Clan Mothers at Six Nations, the answer is always accompanied by an observation concerning that particular Clan Mother's legitimacy of

claim. I am aware that Sylvia's legitimacy is also questioned in some quarters. The question of who is and who is not a legitimate Clan Mother is not addressed here. These questions are currently being discussed at Six Nations and other Haudenosaunee territories. Being both clanless and not a resident on Six Nations Territory, I have no voice nor claim any authority to address this matter. My purpose in presenting Sylvia's life story is to carry her voice. From her telling, it is clear that she *has* assumed the responsibilities of the position and *has* diligently and tirelessly carried out those responsibilities of service to our people to the best of her ability.

In Sylvia's mostly roundabout tellings about herself as a Clan Mother she talks about her surprise at finding herself holding the position, what she did and who she consulted to learn what was expected of a Clan Mother, her lack of the Mohawk language and the implications of this lack on her understanding of her own culture, her concerns over the lack of a worthy, good-living successor, and, generally, citing specific instances, the disarray of the clan system itself at Six Nations. In being called into further service to our people, Sylvia was required to acquire more traditional knowledge. She tells about searching traditional people out to discover those things she was required to do. Having married into a "down below" family Sylvia was always open to learning more about her culture and the language. And Sylvia's in-laws seemed to be always ready and willing to provide her with their knowledge. Further service to our people brought Sylvia herself back to adopting traditional ways.

A direct question to Sylvia for information about the specific activities of a Clan Mother netted a direct explanation of the primary function of Clan Mothers—to ensure that only upright, worthy men occupy the Chiefs' chairs. A second direct question requesting further information resulted in Sylvia's explanation about the perspective in

which to regard a Clan Mother. In both responses, Sylvia relates, one directly and one indirectly, two elements of Haudenosaunee culture: responsibility to the community and women's behind-the-scenes contributions. Chief Jake Thomas speaks of community service. "To help somebody is a great thing.... That's why we have sympathy for each person in the Iroquois society. People can help one another. They're supposed to.... This is the way it should be—to help one another, for that's part of survival" (Barreiro 1990:85). Sylvia, in her second response, informed me that the identities of Clan Mothers are not generally known and not generally known from their lack of boldness about their carrying of this further responsibility of service to their people, rather than from a social imperative of secrecy.

Answers to my questions came from elsewhere, both in our conversations together and, unexpectedly, from one of the weekly newspapers shortly after our life story conversations. Sylvia told of a group of Clan Mothers being asked by an individual to be allowed to carry their collective voice (and authority) to a court case in Brantford about a property dispute on Six Nations Territory. Two letters to the editors, one signed a "4th generation Mohawk Wolf Clan Mother" and the other from a member of the Wolf Clan, Cayuga Nation give further insights. Warning against the dangers of acceptance of funds from the Rama Casino, the Clan Mother chides: "You have been so greedy for generous gifts of money and ready to take everything and there is no need for you to accept money from Rama, when others need it more than you do" (*Geejuhguh noh awana* 2000). The second letter questions the recent actions of an unnamed Clan Mother, condemning her for acting as an agent of the federal government rather than as a Clan Mother should according to the Haudenosaunee's own laws as set out by the Great Law. "I think this clan mother threw all of what she is supposed to be upholding and believing

in out the window. I don't think she or any of her daughters are worthy of the clan mother title" (Jamieson 2000).

From Sylvia's descriptions and information gleaned elsewhere, the definition of Clan Mother is a sort of Super Elder, entailing specific, specialized responsibilities that ensure societal harmony. Of the responsibilities of an Elder, Harriet Jock, a Mohawk Elder from Akwesasne, gives this explanation. The Elders are

the ones we look forward to, to teach us the wisdom and the knowledge and all the things that make us who we are today.... They sit out there ... and they wait for the young people to ... go to them to ask them the stories of what it was like when they were growing up. All the teachings, all the wisdom.... They are like a *Book of Knowledge*. And it is their responsibility to teach those young children because they have already grown. They have lived their life. And it is now time to pass that knowledge along.... (T)he Elders are here today. They are getting old and it is very important that those people that are out in the cities, that they come back and they follow their original path ... back to their Indian ways; back to their laws; back to their history ... their culture. They don't know where to turn and they are lost. They don't even know what it is to be a Human Being anymore.... (Jock 2000)

Of our Elders, Jake Thomas has advised his university students that they are *our* books, *our* professors. To their responsibilities of holders, conveyors and teachers of the culture, Harriet Jock alludes to an additional responsibility of Elders—bringing our people home. Jock, in stating the responsibilities of our Elders, also alludes to the responsibilities of both children and our urbanized people to seek out the Elders for the teachings of our laws, our history and our culture.

Many of our conversations were about our kin, both past and present. Asking me if I knew the whereabouts of one of our cousins whose parents, like my grandfather, had been assimilated into mainstream society in the 1920s, Sylvia requested that I contact him about attending the pending family picnic. She then said I was to "tell him he won't know

who he is if he don't come and see me." Alluding to our mutual cousin's responsibilities, Sylvia added "There's no excuse for him not coming to see me!" A few years ago I was told to bring my brother to Ohsweken, Sylvia "wanted to take a look at him." Several years after, Sylvia told me to bring my men down to see her. On the occasion of the nearing of another family reunion, Sylvia asked after my father's sister, saying that she should attend because she needed to know where she came from. I explained that my aunt's attendance was highly unlikely as she regarded everyone at Six Nations as being pagans. Sylvia laughed heartily at that explanation and impishly suggested that I should bring my father's sister here so she could see that "the pagans have doctors, lawyers and just everything." My position as Sylvia's partner in doing her life story, rather than stemming solely from a mutual interest in family history, is also, in part, Sylvia's bringing another person home.

### **Getting the Story**

I first met Sylvia when I was twelve years old. She came to see my grandfather, Claude (with whom we always made our home), and to take her first look at my brother, the latest James Jamieson. Her visit was memorable to me for two reasons. First, visits from our Six Nations kin were very rare indeed. I have the impression our Ohsweken relatives did not receive any encouragement to come. Second, during her several hours with us she took special, private time to talk with me. The only thing I remember about that conversation was Sylvia's telling about our family's descent from Mary Jemison, White Woman of the Genesee. Over the years, those seeds of interest in the family origins sprouted and grew with occasional and periodic tending from Sylvia.

Sylvia's story resonated with me. Over the next few years I read everything I

could find about our progenitor. Nothing I read, however, told how the Jamiesons of Six Nations were connected to Mary Jemison. When I decided to find the connection myself, I contacted Sylvia who sent me her reply in her 1977 Christmas card to us which I still have. In comparison to the amount of family history information Sylvia has in her museum, what she sent was sparse, but sufficient to give me a good start on my research. Through this genealogical connection with Sylvia our connections with our Six Nations kin were re-forged. Because of Sylvia's fueling my interest, my parents, brother, spouse and children attended our family reunions. Because of Sylvia's behind the scenes urging and encouragement, my genealogical research enabled my father, my brother, myself and my children to secure our status cards.

I remember the first time I visited Sylvia at Ohsweken. I had just discovered that Sylvia was a Clan Mother. I found Sylvia in front of her store sitting in a lawn chair reading her New Testament! We went inside, ate and talked about various topics to do with the family history. What I remember most about that visit was Sylvia's instructing me how to pray *properly*. Sylvia said I was to hold my arms slightly out to the side with palms up so the Creator could readily look into my heart and look the Creator full in the face. People who were ashamed and had things to hide are not able to look the Creator in the face. The next time I visited Sylvia, she closed up her store and took me on a whirlwind visit in and around Ohsweken that included paying our respects to a family member at Styre's Funeral Home, a visit to some of my McNaughton relatives and tea with some of our elderly Jamieson female relatives. Between the two visits, I do not know what astonished me more—a Clan Mother reading the New Testament (!) or Sylvia closing up her store in the middle of the day to take me visiting (!). Sylvia's tendings had introduced me to more than my inheritance of family history. Through Sylvia's tendings I

**became aware of our cultural inheritance.**

**The frequency of our visits increased after our family moved closer to Six Nations Territory. Having relocated to a university town, I was able to continue with my formal academic and cultural education at the university and at Six Nations Territory. I found Sylvia, still in her own home, feisty as ever (despite the fact that she was wheelchair-bound) and as glad to see me and as welcoming as ever, even though we had not seen one another for a few years. Greased by my bringing “goodies” to eat, our times together were filled with conversation, gossip, jokes, meeting other relatives who dropped by to visit Sylvia, bits of cultural and familial tradition and Sylvia’s hilarious stories and remembrances.**

**Between our initial re-connect visit and our decision to work together on her life story, something happened. Sylvia was my first experience with having a grandmother-age woman from the same family to spend time with and talk about where our family came from, what had happened within and outside of the family and the effects of those events. Sylvia, in recounting our common history in the place where it happened, added flesh to my bare bones, two-dimensional family charts. Sylvia, by speaking of these long gone people always in the present tense, made me aware of the profound power of orality. Sylvia, in sharing various vignettes of her life and the lives of other women relatives, made me conscious of the strength and tenacity of Haudenosaunee women. In hearing Sylvia’s own stories, I was made mindful of a tough woman, neither saint nor sinner, who survives not because she is extraordinary or superhuman but because she finds the strength and will to survive and make things better” (Damm 1993:111).**

**Prior to our project, Sylvia made me aware through her actions that she had begun to regard her relationship with me differently. To commemorate my receiving my**

undergraduate degree, she presented me with an arrowhead necklace she had commissioned from a jeweler. Besides telling me that the arrowhead had been found on the family farm, Sylvia said that the necklace was to be a reminder to me that we were the People of the Flint. Soon after that, she chided me on one of my visits about asking permission to make tea; I was home and I was to treat her house as my home. As her life story unfolded and my knowledge of happenings long before I was born was increased, I have been able to piece together a plausible explanation as to the changes in Sylvia's perception of our relationship.

My grandfather's mother died in 1908 at the age of thirty-six, leaving behind nine children between the ages of nineteen to two years. It was Sylvia's father who took in the eldest four boys to finish raising and help them to make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. My grandfather's sisters were placed in the Mohawk Institute and the youngest children—Albert, age four and Seymour, age two—were placed with other family members. Sylvia had always said to me that she considered my grandfather as her brother. I learned a great deal about my grandfather's early life and why, on the *rare* occasions he would talk about his early experiences, he would speak so highly of his Uncle Venus. Sylvia recounted how she and Wilson spent several days of their honeymoon visiting with my grandfather. It was on Sylvia's next visit ten years later that I first met her. As sporadic as Sylvia's visits were to see my grandfather, they were kinkeeping visits, intended to keep the kin ties alive and intact. As her brother's granddaughter, perhaps I had fallen heir to their sibling relationship. As a frequent visitor who was an avid, interested audience perhaps she saw a cultural orphan who needed a home and took me in as her father had taken in my orphaned grandfather long ago.

I do not recall when our life story project was first mentioned. I do remember that



Sylvia's interest and enthusiasm for the project matched mine when I first suggested that her life story would be an excellent subject for my thesis. Over the next year, each time I visited her, the subject of doing her life story would be brought up either by Sylvia herself or by me. Each time her life story entered into our conversations Sylvia assured me that she was both still eager and interested. Except for those discussions required by the university ethics committee, Sylvia and I did not engage in any deliberate planning discussions about the final form of her story. We found ourselves in agreement to record the story on audiotape for preservation purposes. Sylvia offered only one suggestion. With tongue-in-cheek, she said because she had lived such a long life, I was to be sure and bring "miles and miles and miles" of tape. We decided that our day each week was to be Tuesdays. Our tapings extended over a three-month period, from the first Tuesday in February to the last Tuesday of April, 2000. The taping was done between Sylvia's many visitors, amongst much eating lunch and snacks and drinking gallons of tea, ginger ale and coffee. The taping was done with much hilarity and exchanges that had nothing to do with Sylvia's life story. The pause button was used often to accommodate visitors, the telephone, our women's talk, Sylvia's tearing off in her wheelchair (and away from the microphone) to search for books or documents she thought I would find interesting.

Interviewing was our official process of obtaining Sylvia's story. What actually transpired was a series of conversations between two women of the same family who were both aware that all or parts of their conversations would be made public. Often Sylvia would repeat certain stories. Putting the repetitions together, the single story was fattened and enriched with detail. While some were repeated for emphasis, others popped up from several different contexts. These latter repetitions were smaller stories within bigger stories and, for me, provided several perspectives from which to think about the

same small story.

After our first session, as I was transcribing our day's work, I started to compile a list of questions which needed clarification during the next session. After the second session, I reviewed the list and found that all the questions had been answered during our conversations of that day without my having to pose any of them. Throughout the entire process, I continued to compile my weekly lists and consistently, without my ever having to ask for explanations, I found, in checking after, that they had all been answered.

Our taped exchanges were an extension of all our previous exchanges. It was from these previous occasions that the idea came to obtain, in a permanent form, Sylvia telling her many stories herself. Each time I returned from a visit, I always had another long ago story about the family, a story about Sylvia herself or a gem about our culture. As both a familial and cultural orphan, I would often ask questions about who these people Sylvia was talking about were and how they were connected to us, or *pourquoi* questions about this activity or that activity such as the reading of corn cobs or how corn mush was prepared. Often Sylvia would supply the familial connections during her narration, either aware that I may not know about whom she was speaking or to engage in a pre-emptive strike to ward off another intrusion.

Sylvia was tolerant of my interruptions—to a point. We came to a silent agreement that I could ask all the questions I wanted. Those that Sylvia decided were unnecessary or were to be answered later (and they usually were!), she ignored or treated as if they had not been asked and, never missing a beat, continued on with her spinnings. Always, talking with Sylvia was somehow familiar. Listening to Sylvia talk was like listening to my grandfather's stories. The same ways of telling were there. I reached back and brought forward conversational terms I had heard my grandfather use, replies like

**“well, that’s no good!”**

**All stories are told in their entirety, as one unit or entity. Like my grandfather, once started on a narration, nothing could halt the forward momentum. Questions were always saved until after the story juggernaut rolled to a stop. Usually, a question about the story asked after its telling is not answered until after the story is once again retold. Stories about events to which the storyteller was not present are told with the teller recounting the exact words of each actor. As an unappreciative teen, I would often deride my grandfather and heap scorn upon the veracity of his stories, asking how he could tell about events to which he was not present and report the exact words each participant said? Sylvia remained blessedly unaware that her audience was a more mature, better educated adolescent, very much appreciative of the richness of oral teachings and the opulent opportunity afforded her. I have included several of Sylvia’s twice-told tales to illustrate how her repetitions plump up and enrich the original story.**

**Stories are always told in the present tense. Sylvia several times started a story in the past tense, but switched to the present tense after a sentence or two. As a raconteur, Sylvia could be accused of being guilty of indefinite antecedent by a listener unaccustomed to listening. However, by relegating the recording of the story to the machine, I was able to devote my full attention to listening and rarely lost the threads of Sylvia’s telling. Only when reading what Sylvia said from our transcript does indefinite antecedent become problematic. As a good raconteur, Sylvia told her stories with enthusiasm, passion and with much humour. Sylvia repeated several stories. From repeat to repeat, the main events did not vary. With each repetition, the story was fattened with more details. An exchange between Sylvia and one of her teachers was enlarged in the repetitions to include other actors and their contributions as well as further comments**

from Sylvia about what she was thinking at the time.

In revisiting her stories in printed form, the true impact of the story becomes evident. When Sylvia talked about popping the body lice in their clothing with an iron at the Mohawk Institute, she told it as she experienced it—a child's game. Without her laughter, her miming the ironing action, the reality of the children at residential schools having lice makes its impact. My grandfather would use the same style to talk about his war experiences. I often wondered whether the humour was to make the story more palatable to the audience, remembered in that way as a defence mechanism to protect the rememberer, perhaps a combination of both, or a demonstration of the difference between a life experienced and a life told.

Our collaboration was a division of labours, a cooperative effort that kept us in separate togetherness. As Patricia Monture-Angus has observed about our people and the importance of reciprocity "(E)ach of us has at least one gift from the Creator which is meant to be shared with the people" (Monture-Angus 1995:78). Our partnership was an exercise of sharing and borrowing one another's gifts, a pooling of our respective resources to get this important project of education and preservation done. Sylvia had the story and was, as well, a good story-teller herself. I possessed story-telling and writing abilities. Sylvia provided the venue of the story telling that was our home, situated within the territory where the events actually took place. I provided the technological equipment to record permanently her tellings that allowed me to pour almost my total focus into being an eager-to-listen, hungry-to-learn, participatory and responsive audience. Technologically, Sylvia was provided with her own microphone to ensure that her stories were captured as she told them and in the order she chose to relate them. With the assistance of modern technology, it struck me several times that we were replicating the

**oral process that the women of our family had employed for generations as well as replicating borrowing, a mechanism that promoted cooperation and the equal distribution of gifts and abilities amongst the people.**

**The process of borrowing was first identified through Sylvia's talk about an unaccustomed meeting of Clan Mothers at her home several days hence. The reason for this unusual gathering was a forthcoming court case about property on Six Nations Territory. The woman involved had requested permission to borrow the voices of the Clan Mothers as part of her case. In being able to carry the voice of the Clan Mothers, this woman carried the authority of these women, thereby adding weight to and bolstering the legitimacy of her claim. In another instance, Sylvia told of a Clan Mother who was shy and did not like to speak in public. To decrease the Clan Mother's discomfort, she was able to borrow another woman to carry her voice and speak for her in public. Sylvia, when I requested further amplification of this process, said that borrowing was not an activity open or confined to Clan Mothers or Chiefs only. She reported that to be borrowed was considered to be an honour and the borrower would only ask someone with whom she or he had a long-time and close, trusting relationship. The borrowee, by being entrusted with the words of the borrower, carried the responsibility to give the words of the borrower exactly as they were spoken, with no omissions or personal additions. The borrowee also carried the authority of the borrower and was more of a duplicate of the borrower than a stand-in or proxy. What our project is, in many ways, is our borrowing of one another. Sylvia has borrowed my voice to tell her story and I have borrowed Sylvia's voice to have the agency to tell it.**

**"(T)he word is a sacred object, a vital force of man and woman and the natural world. Since it is an oral tradition right up to the present moment, the words are the**

carriers of the culture from past generations to the present, and on into the future.... (T)he word, if used respectfully, is invested with power.... The belief existed that 'the poem or story had a life of its own independent of its narrator'" (Niatum 1993:65-6). At times I was very aware of the enveloping force and strength of orality and the swirling and co-mingling of our, Sylvia's and my, separate energies. As with my questions from one session always being answered in the subsequent session without my having to ask, it seemed that something had taken over and was propelling us forward. Sylvia never offered any opinion on how we were to do her life story, nor commented on how her story was being taken. She was very comfortable with her being centre stage and having an interested listener. Sylvia was very pleased with and always enthused about the opportunity to tell her story. Promoted by an awareness of Sylvia's ninety-five years, care and concern about her stamina proved to be unnecessary and groundless. Sylvia looked forward to our Tuesdays with pleasure. The process, once initiated, seemed to be guiding Sylvia and I, rather than the other way around. Personally, I felt as if I were merely a conduit for Sylvia's story. This was a feeling that extended to the writing of the story.

### **Writing the Story**

The story of almost twenty hours of audiotape and almost three hundred and fifty pages of transcript and I sat and looked at one another for weeks. The long list of preconceived notions and intentions as to what the story was and was *not* to be was not at all suggestive of how to string together Sylvia's story so that they remained her stories as she told them and are presented to the audience in a coherent, friendly form. Preserving Sylvia's story necessitated each of our voices to be distinctly individual and separate

from one another. As conversations between two women of the same family, I was always aware that I had been made privy to information that was not for public consumption. To be carrying Sylvia's voice was heavy with responsibilities.

I investigated various models of life story presentations. The one with which Sylvia and I are most familiar was James Seaver's biography or "as-told-to" story of our ancestor Mary Jemison. Done in 1823, when Mary was about eighty years old, Seaver's treatment is more of a "how-not-to" than a "how to." Seaver portrays Mary as speaking English using proper syntax and grammar and having somehow acquired an extensive English vocabulary during her sixty-six years' sojourn with her adopted people, the Seneca Nation. A captive since the age of fourteen, it is known that Mary did retain her English, but certainly not to the extent that Seaver would have the reader believe.

Considered within its historical context, Mary's story is a typical white captive tale of the times, intended to provide thrilling entertainment of the frontier and to act as a morality story of redemption of the subject captive. Mary's story fails as a redemption tale as she refused to return to mainstream society. Mary's response, in 1824, to an individual who had advised her that he had read her story was "Ah yes, ... but I did not tell them who wrote it down half of what it was" (Seaver 1918:218).

The 1930s collaboration between Black Elk and John Neihardt to produce *Black Elk Speaks* is a presentation that most nearly resembles Sylvia's and my cooperative project, yet contains several differences about which scholars have been arguing for more than seventy years since its appearance. Neihardt and Black Elk planned for several years to record and preserve Black Elk's story. In a letter to Black Elk, Neihardt pledges that the story will be an "honest and loving book" (Neihardt 1995:279), while Black Elk states his purpose as "sav(ing) his Great Vision for men" (Ibid. xix). Neihardt's pledge to his

partner is my pledge to mine. As to Sylvia's purposes for joining in this project, she has been silent. In speculating on Sylvia's motivation, I would opine that she feels that she has lived a good, long, useful life, worthy of preservation and when she discovered that I also concurred with her unspoken opinion, she enthusiastically entered our partnership.

The main point of contention surrounding *Black Elk Speaks* is the inability of the reader to distinguish or discern which of the partners are speaking. Scholars are divided on this subject. On one hand, Black Elk's story is hailed as "a religious classic, a book that has become a North American bible of all tribes" (Ibid. xiii). On the other hand, the text is condemned to be "Indian religion for the white man obscur(ing) Lakota religion rather than explain(ing) it" (Krupat 1994:218). About his editing, Neihardt is labeled as an "absent editor," one who, like James Seaver, edits "in such a way as to create the fiction that the narrative is all the Indian's own" (Brumble 1998:75). While it is not my intent to pursue the *Black Elk Speaks* debate here, I concur with Paula Gunn Allen's words, "that the true significance of Black Elk's vision is yet to be discovered" (Gunn Allen 1992:108). Gunn Allen's comment is both adequate and ample to mitigate the two contentious views.

My intent has always been to present Sylvia's story in her own words separately, thereby affording the audience the opportunity to interact with her narration itself. Sylvia's words and stories were not intended for me alone. Besides hearing family stories that have personal interest for me, I also hear first-hand the stories of a woman who is determined not to be victimized either by being marginalized or through assimilation. Sylvia's words and stories will have other meanings, other implications and other teachings for other people. Each person is invited to form a personal relationship between themselves and the text.

An audience-friendly format necessitated my intervention and shaping. Sylvia's



life story is presented as her circle on the Jamieson family web. In Haudenosaunee tradition, “because of the(ir) ability to bring forth life ... the women are unique with the circle at each stage.... Upon this earth, you are to find the four directions: to know where you come from, what you are, who you are ... and where you are going, so that you can be all that you can be to complete your Circle of Life” (Jacobs 1994). Sylvia’s stories were taken from the order in which she presented them and reordered under each of the Four Questions. While the Circle of Life is continuous with no breaks, one stage flowing into the other, Sylvia’s story is, to facilitate the audience, divided into four artificial segments, an order which imposes breaks where none actually exist. The continuity of the Circle of Life is somewhat preserved. Many of Sylvia’s stories could have been placed under more than one of the four headings. It was often difficult to decide under which heading a particular story belonged. Those stories that belong in more than one place were situated where they best, if not exactly, fit. This not exact fit served to soften and blur the imposed breaks.

In stringing Sylvia’s stories together, I have added our genealogical background information as well as explanations of Haudenosaunee traditions and history, where necessary for the readers’ clarification and understanding of Sylvia’s tellings. In Sylvia’s story, Sylvia’s words, as she spoke them, appear in a different font than my intrusions. The audience should be in no doubt as to who is speaking. Of our almost twenty hours of conversations, over seventy-five percent of those things that Sylvia chose to tell me are included. Because we were speaking about our family, a certain discretion in censorship was exercised. I felt at times that Sylvia, in her comfort with and trust in me-as-audience, was perhaps too candid in her opinions and too forthcoming about living individuals or their antecedents. Such information has been kept confidential.

Several times Sylvia told stories in which either the other actors may still be alive, or their descendants would know the story. While those stories were included, the names of the other actors were omitted. In the case of our long-dead ancestors, those stories Sylvia told were replicated in their entirety. The omission of our gossiping, catching up on the news and women's talk is self-explanatory. Also omitted are sixteen pages of the transcript from an audio-tape of the life story of my grandfather's youngest brother, Seymour. Made in 1972, the interviewer and publication for which it was done are unidentified, the tape was given into Sylvia's keeping by Uncle Seymour's widow after his funeral. As an unanticipated voice, I included Uncle Seymour's solo with the chorus of the other voices speaking through Sylvia from the past. As another story coming from the exercise of Sylvia telling her story, the transcription was placed amongst our transcription for preservation purposes and to be held and heard another time.

Unlike Black Elk and Neihardt, Sylvia and I were working only in one language. We had, therefore, no need for interpreters. Our telling and listening were not mediated by the transfer of thoughts from one language to another and back again. Sylvia and I were also fortunate to reap the benefits of modern technology that recorded our conversations with little attention to or concern about our exact words recorded with exactness and precision. Our telling and listening were done without an intrusive, perhaps stultifying, audience of interpreters and stenographers and done more rapidly, without having to take the time necessary for the transfer of thoughts from one language to another and back again. Without such an audience, the environment in which we talked and listened was far more private, perhaps contributing to the atmosphere of comfort, coziness, and relaxation.

Much has been made of Black Elk's Christianity. His chosen religious beliefs

appear to be inconsistent with his cultural heritage and practices. In our conversations, Sylvia indicated that Christ and the Peacemaker are one and the same to her. She often identified the actor as “Christ” when she meant the Peacemaker, and vice versa. Sylvia has expressed regrets over the erosion of Haudenosaunee women’s power over the centuries and has declared herself unsympathetic to the teachings of Handsome Lake.<sup>3</sup> She does not appear to make a connection between the paternalism of Christianity, its intrusions into Haudenosaunee religious thought and the resulting male domination. Or, she has accepted the resolve unquestioned made by our previous generations as their response to outside influences. Or, more likely, it is the influence of the Haudenosaunee cultural cross-thread of a deep respect for individual autonomy at work.

To capture and examine Black Elk’s entire life, researchers have to consult three different works done in three separate times frames by three different individuals, the final work a posthumous by Steltenkamp in consultation with his daughter about the greater part of Black Elk’s life prior to his collaboration with Neihardt. Black Elk’s Christianity, seen as being incompatible with his “Indianness,” has always been regarded as an anomaly. Steltenkamp’s volume, by explaining this inconsistency, concludes that the apparent contradiction is, in actuality, a construct. No anomaly exists. Taken contextually, Black Elk’s conversion may be seen as an expected response to external changes and threats. Other Native visionaries in times of social chaos and upheaval, have responded similarly. The Peacemaker and Handsome Lake, both Haudenosaunee

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<sup>3</sup> Handsome Lake was the second great hero of Haudenosaunee history. A Confederacy Chief of the Seneca Nation, Handsome Lake, in the aftermath of the American Revolution, postulated a new religion—the Good Message—which came out of visions he claimed were sent to him by the Creator. Handsome Lake’s teachings spread south and west and have many adherents. Handsome Lake’s detractors point to his severe alcoholism as the source of his visions, not the Creator and to the heavy Christian influence and content of the Longhouse religion that tended to diminish the power of the Confederacy women.

Traditionalists, rose in the midst of times when our people were in danger of destruction and, by building upon existing religious institutions and conventions, enabled our people to respond to, recover and survive the reverberations of change echoing through the societal web. Black Elk “translated Christianity into the Dakota (sic) way of life’—interpreting it in terms of (his) previous religious experience” (Steltenkamp 1993:158, citing MacGregor 1946:102). Like Sylvia, Black Elk say “parallels between Christianity and traditional Lakota religion” (Ibid. 102). From Doxtator’s 1993 interviews<sup>4</sup> at Six Nations, Christ and the Peacemaker are considered to be either brothers or one and the same individual.

Sylvia and I have never discussed religion or our respective religious beliefs. Sylvia and I both subscribe to the many-candles-one-light viewpoint toward religion. Although Sylvia’s candle is different from mine, the warmth and comfort that we receive from our respective candles sustains and supports both of us. Like Black Elk, “the formalism of Christian religion’ was [is] not an issue” (Ibid. 20). “(T)he Indians themselves often seem ... to have been quite large enough to embrace contradiction” (Brumble 1988:37). Allen Gunn explains this seeming paradox of Christianized Native people as another collision between Native and non-Native value systems and the identification of this anomaly as a result of mainstream’s “nearly neurotic distress in the presence of secrets and mystery” (Allen Gunn 1992:59). The perceived contradiction may also result from mainstream dualistic thinking—the insistence that something (or someone such as Black Elk) be either/or, leaving no room for “bothness,” a fusion of two things which, although not seamless, produces a third body or entity about which all need not be known or explained.

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<sup>4</sup> Michael G. Doxtator, *The United Church Observer*, “The Faith,” “A gift from the peacemaker,” New Series, May, Volume 56, Number 10, 1993, pp. 43-44.

Our collaboration originated from our kinship and mutual interests. Black Elk's and Neihardt's collaboration originated from mutual interests and was capped off by the manufacturing of kinship ties when Neihardt was adopted by Black Elk as his son. This manufacturing of kinship ties signals a deepening in their relationship resulting from the act of telling and hearing Black Elk's story and confirms that storytelling has a transformative effect on both participants. The word is a sacred object. If used respectfully, words are invested with power. The story has a life of its own, independent of its narrator. Errante and others have attempted to describe this process. Errante identifies "interpersonal bridges" that are constructed from which the "flow" or "withness" originates. These interpersonal bridges are either pre-existing, as in Sylvia's and my case, or can be constructed during the narration, as in the Black Elk-Neihardt instance by the narrator being assured that her or his audience is "appreciative," "respectful" and merely human. The interpersonal bridge is defined as "an emotional bond that ties people together," involves "trust," "vulnerability" and "openness." It is the conduit by which "mutual understanding, growth and change" are assisted (Errante 1998: 20, citing Kaufman 1974:570).

The resulting energy produced results in "flow" or "withness," "the engagement with the world, with texts (and) with others" (Game 1997:396). What is being described is the might and intensity of oral tradition, one function of which is to "let people realize that individual experience is not isolated but is part of a coherent and timeless whole, providing them with a means of personal empowerment and giving shape and direction to their lives." It is "achronological," "ahistorical" and "simultaneously general and highly specific" (Gunn Allen 1992:100).

It seemed almost as if Sylvia's story and I sat and looked at one another for

weeks. No matter where I went or where I sat, the story would situate itself within my line of sight. Greg Sarris, in *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*, speaks of a similar experience. Sarris tells of his thrusting the story out his back door and, by the time he returned to his front room, he found the story peering in at him through his front window. Try as I might, I could not disengage myself and assume a separate existence from either the experience or the story. The main difficulty experienced was how to separate my history from Sylvia's history, from our history. The act of knowing, knowing Sylvia's story and having experienced Sylvia's telling included me as part of the Jamieson family story, of Sylvia's story, and our story. After our conversations, I felt that I was "more," having been enriched or increased in some way by both the experience and the acquired knowledge.

Our project contains two stories—Sylvia's, the subject of or the reason for our combining our efforts and the account of how we collaborated. As Goulet describes the process of our collaboration, Sylvia and I "collectively constitute(s) a sense of external and objective reality" (Goulet 1998, citing G. Watson 1991:75). Errante terms the emotional bonds between the teller and listener as a bridge. Much use has been made of the bridge metaphor. The purpose of a bridge is to connect two places that are separated by a barrier. As a metaphor, these separate places can refer to different cultures, generations, backgrounds and the past and the present. The presence of and necessity for the bridge emphasizes and perpetuates the barrier or separation and implies, if not the existence for maintaining the separation, then at least, an intention to do so. Sylvia and I came together and created our own place and our own time in which the stories—our story, her story, my story and the story of the story—were given life. I was neither separate from nor in a position of showing or guiding the way. I am as much a part of the

story in writing as I was in the hearing.

In looking back, my notion of the story and I sitting and looking at one another seems at times fanciful and the product of my over-active imagination. Other times, putting myself back into the experience, I can see the story which always managed to situate itself, no matter whether I was thinking about it or not, in my line of sight. Game describes this experience as “embodied writing,” an “emotional, generous, listening, to-and-fro relation with the text rather than a relation of distanced domination” (Game 1997:397). Embodied writing is “withness,” an intuitive, from the gut emotional type of knowing garnered from “*experiencing experience*” (Ibid. 396, author’s italics), not being disconnected, separated or sealed off from either the person, the interaction or the event.

Sylvia’s story is only one of 18,000 current stories at Six Nations Territory. Its focus is familial rather than cultural. Although two cultures do come into play and contribute, Sylvia and I and our stories are in our own place and our own time. My purpose in bringing Sylvia’s story out of Ohsweken and out of Six Nations Territory is to honour her, to make known the life story of a woman who would have life on her terms despite the confining strictures and structures of her context, and to acknowledge with *niawenkowa* (Mohawk for big “thank you”) that her plantings in me those many years ago did find fertile ground, did flourish and bloom, did make me want to come home and be brought home and to affirm that Sylvia is attending to her Elder responsibilities, even in her now ninety-fifth year. Meet my cousin Sylvia, one Haudenosaunee woman; one *tough* woman.

## THE FIRST QUESTION

### Where do I come from?

*The Four Questions—Where do I come from? What am I? Who am I? and Where am I going?—are also known as the Circle of Life and are based on the four cardinal directions. In Haudenosaunee cosmology, an individual is seen as entering life in the east (childhood) and progressing along the “good red road,” clock-wise, around the circle through the south (adolescence) to the west (adulthood), arriving in the north (elderhood). After death, the individual travels the “good blue road” from the north to the east to be born again.*

*According to my Haudenosaunee teachings, the Four Questions have been used as the means by which a Haudenosaunee individual is to cultivate “a good mind,” the basis of the Great Law of Peace brought by the Peacemaker. “Peace was not just the absence of war but a state of mind and a way of life” (Maracle 1996:163) based on “reason, law and peace” (Thomas 1978:15). Where an individual comes from determines not only what they are and who they are, but also how they will live their life. In asking Sylvia where she thought we should begin, she began with I had seven brothers and six sisters—seven-seven. We’re seven-seven. Phyllis; Eileen; Dora; me; Robert; Vincent; Marjorie; Wilma; Elgin Colborne; Wendell Oshawa; the twins, Ben and Mark; and Arnold and then James and Audrey. That’s the order they were born in, about two years apart all together. I was the fifth daughter. There was five girls. Phyllis was born 1898 and Kate was born in 1901. Eileen was born in nineteen-three. Dora was born nineteen-five and they put me down for nineteen-six, but I think it was nineteen-seven I was born really.<sup>5</sup> But they got me*

<sup>5</sup> The marker for Sylvia’s grandfather in the Jamieson cemetery records his birth and death dates as 1819-1905. Sylvia said her grandfather died in December. Sylvia was born the following February. If the dates on the stone are correct, her grandfather died in December of 1905 and she was born in 1906.



registered for nineteen-six. And Vince was born nineteen-eight. Elgin born nineteen-ten, I think. And Marge was born in about nineteen ... Marge claimed ... oh yeah, Marge is older than Vince. Marge is nineteen ... Elgin was nineteen ... Elgin was nineteen-twelve. Wendell was nineteen-fourteen and Ben and Mark was nineteen-seventeen, I think, or eighteen. Arnold was born nineteen-nineteen and Jimmy was born nineteen twenty-one. Audrey was born nineteen twenty-three. We all had nicknames. Everybody was called by their nickname. Phyllis was called B-G, 'cause when the baby called and saw her, he says B-G and they named him the same as me. When I was little, my one sister that died [*Eileen*], she says come, put Sibby in my bed, Momma. Put Sibby in my bed. That's where I got that Sibby. *Sylvia has a large portrait of her sister taken shortly before Eileen's death. Eileen was five years old. She's the only one who had blue eyes like Grampa Jamieson. She died from German measles.*

*Sylvia's grandparents were James and Julia Ann (Garlow) Jamieson. They were married at the Mohawk Chapel in Brantford 23 March 1851 when Julia was fifteen and James was thirty-two. They had thirteen children. Sylvia's father, Monica Venus, born in 1879, was their youngest child. Grampa died before I was born. But Julia lived about five months after. And Eileen lived about four months after—my sister Eileen—Jim, Grampa Jamieson, died. I think it was the day before Christmas in nineteen-six and my dad used to cry every Christmas Day for his father. Every Christmas Day he used to cry. Have a good cry for his dad.*

My grandfather was a hard-working man. He had a museum up in the grove, up in another part of his land up further. He made a museum up there. He had all kinds of relics. And he had a workshop. He used to fix birds, stuff birds and animals. He had little deer and he stuffed them and turkey and flamingos and all these things. And I remember

playing with them flamingos. We'd swing them around our heads. *[Sylvia demonstrates and laughs.]* Oh the stuff we used to, it was terrible. And he made cages like that one over there. *[The "cage" is a display box with a glass front.]* That's the only one left. All that's Grampa's work.

*A story I had heard several times about Sylvia's grandfather concerned some False Face Society<sup>4</sup> masks in his possession that he had stored in the basement. Sylvia's grandfather would never talk about them. Never told us anything about it. He had all of them. He used to have them hanging in that room that was in the cellar. It was like kind of a storage room that led down to the cellar. It had a trap door that they used to lift up on the floor. And that room was in there and there was a shelf there in that room. He used to hang them False Faces there. And Clara *[Sylvia's paternal aunt]* was a young girl and she had a lot of white friends. They, they always had white friends. We never had, associated with any Indians at all. And she was spitting on it and she started making fun of those faces and her face went crooked. And they had to False Face her to bring it back. Bring her back, back right. But she never made fun of them after that.*

*The specifics about the early days of the Jamieson family in Canada are lost to memory. It is known that one of Mary Jemison's grandsons *[Sylvia's great-grandfather, James]* came to Grand River with Brant after the American Revolution. Stories told to me over the years about the "first" James Jamieson vary in detail from teller to teller. The original homestead has been variously pinpointed at Paris, where the Nith River runs into*

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<sup>4</sup> False Face Society is one of the healing or medicine societies. "The ceremonies of the False Face Medicine Society had many purposes and there were a great number of variations in rituals and procedures performed from tribe to tribe. Still all of these (whether Mohawk or Oneida, Cayuga or Seneca, Onondaga or Tuscarora), had a common central theme—the healing or curing of the individual from sickness and the protection of the entire community from the evil which supernatural powers could inflict upon it. In the process, Iroquois religious heritage and tribal culture was further strengthened and perpetuated (Mogelon 1994:35).

*the Grand, and later south and east of Paris along the Grand. It is known that the Jamieson family was removed from their original place of settlement down to Onondaga Township where census records indicate they have been since around 1850.*

Right across the river [*from Five Oaks near Paris, Ontario*] there was my grand, my great-grandfather's farm. Hill's lived right across on the other side of the river. They owned Five Oaks. They owned all that land around there. And their house was just near the Five Oaks building, cross the, just cross the road. They tore it down now. It was a log house. I was in that log house. And they showed where they had made a little room they shut up. They got this man that, was really responsible for my [*great*] grandfather's death. You see he met this other white man and they went up river near the tributary of the Grand River and were fishing or something and, I don't know—they got, maybe talking. They got in a scuffle anyway and, I guess they were kind of fighting and [*great*] grampa got drowned. That's where he got drowned. They were fighting about something, anyway, and anyway [*great*] grampa got drowned. And afterwards they named that creek Whiteman's Creek 'cause [*great*] grampa was always called a Whiteman.

And each one, when they moved down here, they said they moved them from that there after they, after that drowning of [*great*] grampa. It was a disgrace for anybody to be killed like that. And that was considered a disgrace. They made it out that it was a very bad disgrace. So they took, they said let's change your farm. We'll put you down the river further. So they started at Little Buffalo and they gave David [*Sylvia's grandfather's brother*] a thousand acres right at the corner. And then, right next to David, they put [*the rest of David's siblings*] Jacob and then they came down and put John and George, Albert, Edward and they run out of place when they got to Edward. So that's why they put James across the river. That's how we got over there. And they gave Esther land too

up there. Up off that Seneca Road up there next to John, I think, John give them the space on the other concession.

*Other Jamieson family informants say that it was James Jamieson Sr. who drowned the individual known as the Whiteman. The Hill family maintains that the Whiteman is the progenitor of their family.<sup>7</sup> Sylvia, off tape, during a visit of Bill Aaron, a cousin descended from one of her grandfather's brother's told of the Hills imprisoning the culprit in a log cabin. And still others identify the Whiteman as John Camp or Kemp,<sup>8</sup> a white captive raised by the Haudenosaunee and a friend of Joseph Brant.*

*The Great Law contains prohibitions against murder, rape and theft. Such matters rarely came before the Great Council because of the infrequency of such crimes and these matters were considered to be "private," concerning only the families involved in the matter. The nearest relative to the offended party, by right of the law of private retaliation, exacted satisfaction or executed punishment on the guilty party. In the case of murder, one*

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<sup>7</sup> "Josiah Hill, farmer, Ohsweken P.O. was born October 22, 1843; he is a son of Abraham and Mary (Longlish) Hill, natives of the State of New York who were among the first settlers of Tuscarora Township. Abraham's father, after who Whiteman's Creek was named, took an active part in the Revolutionary War, and afterward located on Whiteman's Creek, in this county, where Abraham was born in 1805." Warner-Beers & Company, *History of Brant County, Ontario*, Toronto, 1883, p. 687.

"Abraham, David and Isaac Hill stated that they were descendants of one John Camp who at the time of the late Capt. Brant resided among the Six Nations Indians although of white origin and had accordingly the name of Whiteman given him by the Indians. "National Archives of Canada, RG-10, Volume 724, 21 June 1872, pp. 32-33.

James Jimison Senior (Sylvia's great-grandfather) and James Jimison (Sylvia's grandfather) appear on the Census Return of the Six Nations 1864 (National Archives of Canada, RG-10, Volume 851, pp. 653-5). James Senior was born c1784 and was approximately 80 years of age in 1864. As James Senior does not appear on the 1871 Census, it can be assumed that he died sometime between 1864 and 1871 in his eighties. Although the exact date of the removal is not known, the Jamieson family was established on the present homestead in 1851. Since James Senior is alive in 1864, it is highly probable that he was the perpetrator of the crime and not the victim.

<sup>8</sup> From the "Pay List of Indian Claimants for Losses (War of 1812) Number 8 — Upper Cayugas and Lower Cayugas," "John Camp, for the Whiteman, is listed as a claimant. Ontario Archives, *Journals of the Legislative Assembly Appendix*, Province of Canada, 2nd Part, First Session, Volume 4, Number 2, 1844-45.

*resolution open to the guilty party was the provision of a replacement of the deceased individual through adoption as restitution to the fireside family and clan. Another solution was a present of white wampum sent on behalf of the perpetrator to the family of the victim, which, if accepted, forever obliterated and wiped out the memory of the transgression. Prudence would advocate the removal of the Jamieson family to guard against a blood feud with the family of the Whiteman. The stories from other sources suggest that the Jamiesons were removed and situated down river as more of a punitive than protective measure.*

*In another telling of the story of her great-grandfather she says well these boys, their father had drowned in the creek. Not very far from their home. Him and the Whiteman went fishing or something and apparently they got in an argument over something and they had a scrabble. Anyway, grampa, by great-grandfather James, he got drowned. He got drowned there and so that creek where they were when they went fishing, they named it Whiteman's Creek. It's named after my, our grandfather. We used to call him the Whiteman. So they called that Whiteman's Creek. Not very far from Five Oaks. Just east of Paris. That's where all these boys were born up there. My grandfather and all them born up there.*

*They moved them down here. They said we got to leave, take you away from this place because you'll always be troubled. They'll always talk and call you names and everything about your father. So they brought them down here. Sylvia then enumerates all her grandfather's siblings in the order they were given land. And then they moved on to ah, from Esther to Edward and then they were the river there. Well, they still had James. So they put him across the river. That's how we got across the river. Whatever the truth of the incident, whether James Jamieson Sr. was victim or perpetrator, the Jamieson*

*family's move down river effectively isolated James' line from his siblings. The term "cross river," as explained by one of Sylvia's brothers, is synonymous with "being an apple—red on the outside and white on the inside." Sylvia herself says that her nuclear family members were strangers to our own relatives on the south side of the river and alludes to this isolation of her branch a generation earlier in the story about her Aunt Clara.*

*Sylvia's anticipated arrival in the world on the particular day that she did arrive had an air of the unexpected about it. About her birth day she says it was about a day like this, nice bright day and dad, dad wanted to go. He used to keep her [Sylvia's mother] in wild meat. He used to do a lot of hunting and he, so he thought, and his friends come down from Brantford and wanted to go hunting and he used to take them hunting with him and shot rabbit—little cottontails. So dad said to mother—I guess she started to get these birth pains. She says well, I'm going to have, going to have that baby she says today. So he waited around. It got after nine o'clock and he says well, I don't think you'll have it today, maybe tomorrow, he says. I'll go cross, across the river, he says, in the bush and I'll just go there and hunt. We're going to hunt for an hour or two, he says, but I'll be right back. So dad went and grandma stayed with mother. He had no more than got out of sight [laughter], I started to come. No doctor. The doctor hadn't got there and they, dad had called for the doctor to come but he hadn't got there yet. Doctor Munn from Caledonia. And grandma was there alone with her. Well, finally I really got here [laughter]. And my grandmother had to be the midwife. And she looked after me. She cut the cord on me and everything and took me and bathed me and washed me. Had me all fixed up when the doctor come. And she had mother all fixed up. Well, the doctor didn't have anything to do except to see that everything had been done all right. And everything*

was done all right. Well, then *[Sylvia's maternal grandmother]* made me a Clan Mother. She says this is the one that will follow me and she gave all the words to her Chief. She left my name and everything with her Chief. I didn't know anything about it. *In another telling of this story, Sylvia adds the following details. Speaking of her grandmother, she says* I was the first female she ever handled. She brought me into the world. She give me my name. She named me. She called me Sylvia because she was reading a story about Sylvia in a storybook and she named me.

*Sylvia told several stories about her maternal Grandmother Bennett.* Well, I swept the house and I always swept the dust in a pile right in front of the door. When I get a good pile, I'd open the door and I'd sweep the dust right out. And my grandmother was there one day when I did that. I worked hard and got all the dust piled up to there. Out I'd come, my broom and opened the door and swept that dust out. My grandmother said, she says now what you do that for? I says well, I don't want that dirt in the house I says. It's supposed to be outside. I don't want it in the house. But, she says, that's not what you're doing right. She says you're not doing that right. And I looked at her and thought well, I've always done it and it's always been all right. What's the matter with it? I says. I always do that and it's all right. No, she says. You're just making work for yourself. She says you're going to do all that work over again, she says. When you go outside that dirt sticks on the shoes and come right back and it just laughing at ya, she says.

See? See? You're doing the same thing over and over every say she says. You're not cleaning the house. I looked at her. Well, what should I do then? I says to her. She says when you pile up dirt, you take a dust pan and you put that dust on that dust pan and burn it. Throw it in the stove, she says, and let it go out with the ashes. Well, I always did that after that. And you know every time from this day to that—every time—

every time I do it I think of gramma telling me that. Talk about your best teacher! She knew how to teach ya. I never forgot it.

So gramma used to come and see us and she'd get after me every time she come to see me. She used to say, now I want you to marry an Indian. She said don't you marry anybody else except an Indian. And I said I won't marry them black Indians!<sup>9</sup> I won't! I said. I was sassy. No, no, she said. Don't laugh. She says I want you to marry an Indian. Every darn time she'd come to me—I'd keep house for her—she'd get after me to marry an Indian.

So this last time she comes, she says now I want you to marry an Indian. I spoke up. What you want me to marry an Indian for? I says. She says well, I don't want you to marry no white man 'cause the white man isn't very good to an Indian girl when he marries her. She says he's good to her at first, but then he get, I guess they get tired of their wives and he calls her a squaw. I don't want no white man to call you a squaw, she says. I don't want you named, get that name because that's not a nice name, she says. Squaw's an Indian word she says. And they shouldn't use that. The English has put it down as a squaw's an Indian woman—that's not right. Squaw's an Indian word she says and it has a meaning all its own.

And I says well, what's a squaw? She says a squaw means a person's privates. She says now you don't want to be called nobody's privates. So you don't let anybody call you squaw, she says. *Laughing, Sylvia goes on to say* so I never met any Indian boys. I always had white boy friends. Went to the village in Onondaga [*about a mile up the road from the Jamieson farm*] and I had a lot of white boy friends. The boys would be very nice to me and I, I never paid any attention, never got serious with any of them. They

<sup>9</sup> In using this term Sylvia refers to those Native people with darker skins, those who "look" Native.



were just friends. Just friends. But I didn't take to one of them. *On the subject of a serious boyfriend, Sylvia says* I never went to running around like that and playing with all kinds of men. I always had one boyfriend, that's all. My grandmother told me, she says, now I don't want you to ever have any more than one boy friend, she says. You know, it's wicked to have two, she says, and to have them fighting over you. I says nobody would fight over me. Yes they will, she says.

*From her parents, Sylvia relates the principles taught within her own nuclear family.* And the Fifth Commandment is thou shall not steal—don't take anything that don't belong to you. O-o-o-o-o-h that was a strict commandment when I was a child! My mother and dad told us you don't dare take, be taking a thing that don't belong to you. You see a pin, you don't take that if it don't belong to you. We used to get everything. *In talking about the Depression in the early 1930s, Sylvia observed that people practically lived with starvation.* They wouldn't dare give a person a meal. My mother and dad had all this children—fourteen children—and if they saw a beggar coming across the road—they used to have a lot of them go through at that time—they always brought them in and set them at the table, and, same as we, and eat.

*In 1908, my great-grandmother, Minnie (McNaughton) Jamieson died young, leaving a large family of nine children, the baby, Seymour, being only about two years old.* *Of her Uncle Jim's motherless family, Sylvia related that her parents took in the four eldest boys and finished raising them. The girls were placed in the Mohawk Institute and the two youngest boys, ages four and two, were located with their extended maternal family.* *Sylvia's father looked after all the children. He'd never allow them out of his sight unless they had a home. That's the difference. Anybody else'd driven them away; we don't want them kids; get them out of here!* *My grandfather, Claude, was raised as one of*

*Sylvia's brothers. Sylvia has always said she considered Claude as one of her brothers. Growing up, the information about my grandfather's family and early years was sparse. When he was inclined to reminisce, there were only stories about Sylvia's father, his Uncle Venus.*

*Talking about when my grandfather, Claude, was overseas during World War I, Sylvia says my mother used to work for Claude. She'd knit sweaters, knit socks for him and everything. She always sent him every month something. Oh, mother worked hard for Claude. She liked him like her boy. He was her boy. And dad was his father. I know mother and dad didn't want Claude to go. They told him not to go. But he went in spite of them. They felt sorry 'cause he went. They missed him. We all missed him. He was a good fellow, Claude was. He was good to us kids.*

*My grandfather returned home to Six Nations after the war. Yeah, he came home and at night he'd be fighting. O-o-o-o-h, he'd be fighting. Dad used to have to go in there and quiet him down and stay with him while he went to sleep. I told Sylvia how when I was a little girl—over thirty years after the end of World War I—I would be awakened at night by my grandfather's nightmares. As I say, I think myself what I would say, they should keep all them soldiers. They should keep every one of them soldiers and look after them because they're all so sick men over what they've been through and what they've seen. It's in their head and can never forget it. And nobody knows how they suffered. I know how Claude suffered. Claude suffered terrible.*

*Sylvia's nearest siblings were her sister Dora, a year older than Sylvia, and her brother Vince, a year younger. Sylvia's father, while preparing the fields for ploughing, first would have to use iron drags and then rollers. He got a roller. He'd roll on top of it with this long roller, a roller like that [indicates with her hands]. That's one thing—we*

were out in the field with dad rolling in the field. And he let us sit on the roller to have a ride. Our feet were *[too]* small to sit there. All the springs between the roller and anyway, I was hanging on. Now, hang on to that seat, he says. You hang on to that seat. So I'd hang on that seat. Dora was sitting there. She was hanging on that seat too. She took her hand off. She says I bet you can't do that *[laughter]*. And I says sure I can. And I do that *[Sylvia mimes a "look ma, no hands" gesture]* and down I went. Dad nearly run over me. She was always trying to do something to me that Dora *[laughter]*! Always. Oh I got more spankings over her than *[the rest of sentence is lost in Sylvia's laughter]*. Oh, I had things over her. Terrible.

*Another childhood adventure Sylvia told featured my grandfather. Claude was a good boy. He was good to us kids. He sure was good to us kids anyway. I asked Sylvia if my grandfather, Claude, would play games with them. Oh no. He never played. He'd just kinda look after us when he was a boy. From this question came the story of my grandfather having saved Sylvia's and her brother's lives. As one of the repeated stories the only variation, the first from the second, is the ending. Well, you don't know how many whippings we got going in, near that river. They kept us away from that river.<sup>10</sup> Ah, Vince and I got in that hole and Claude was there. Claude happened to come down hunting for us. And that's where he found us. We were halfway down, almost to our shoulders. And Claude run down there and he pulled. What are you kids doing here? he says. He pulled us out and pulled us out *[laughter]*. And we were just happy going*

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<sup>10</sup> The Grand River has two natures. In the spring, the Grand can be a raging torrent. During the summer, the Grand assumes a benign disposition and is very shallow in many places. Keeping the children away from the Grand River at all times is seen to be necessary to ensure their safety. During one of our visits to the family farm, Sylvia's brother Jim told my own children that the Grand is a living entity that sometimes gets hungry and will scoop up any children along its banks who are foolish enough to be there. I asked Sylvia if this was a belief or just a story to frighten the children to guarantee their compliance. Sylvia's answer was to tell another story about one of her brothers and his experience with the Grand River.

down. We were just about ready to go down our arms. And we were up to here [*Sylvia measures on her body*]. We'd have gone, the two of us. We were just so happy dancing, going down. We were just dancing. We were so happy. Claude come and what are you kids doing there? he says. He come and he pulled us out. Oh dear. We were all mud [*laughter*]. Oh! Oh! *I asked what Claude did next and if she and Vince got into trouble.* No, he just took us home. Mother cleaned us up. No. She didn't do anything. Glad to see us come home.

Vince and I would have been buried down in the flats if it wasn't for Claude. We got into quicksand down in the flats. And we were going down. And we'd jump down and we'd go down a little further and we'd just had a lot of fun going down. And we were down up to here [*measures to her waist*] and Claude come along. What are you kids doing? he says. Oh we're having fun. You're having fun all right, he says. You're going down. Yes, you're going down he says. We were happy. Claude come and pulled us out of there. He says that's quicksand, he says. You don't step on that. There was quicksand down our flats. I don't know where it is. Should be marked though.

*I asked Sylvia if Claude had given her and Vince "what for?"* No, he just got us, get us washed up. Put us in the river. Took us in the river and washed us up. Then, he sent us home. Oh dear. But we would have been buried alive if it wasn't for Claude. Yes sir, he saved us from going right down. 'Cause we were going down. We were down our waist. Down that far. We were going—happy! Happy! Wouldn't it have been terrible if we got out of sight? *I asked Sylvia how old she was when this happened.* Five or six I suppose. Didn't know any better. Yes, Claude saved our lives, Vince and I. Vincent was down farther than me 'cause I could just see his head here [*indicates with her hand*]. *Sylvia's first narration focused on the fun she and Vince were having going down in the*

*quicksand. In her second account, Sylvia's telling was concentrated on the elements of near tragedy.*

*One of my favourite stories is Sylvia's first paying job. Very few people ever saw me 'cause holiday time come I'd go to work. I'd get a job and go to work 'cause I used to like to work and I'd give my mother all the money to send me on to school. She'd buy me new clothes and everything. Send me back to school. And I'd go to school. But I always worked all summer. Never, they never, I never went around with our young people around the village. That's why nobody knew me [laughter]. I was working all the time, m-m-m-m-m, dear.*

So one day I was cleaning the yard. This was before I went to the Mohawk. I must have been around ten years old. I was playing on the yard and a horse and buggy come up the road and, and they had one little seat in front. But nobody was sitting on it. There was just a man and a woman in the buggy. And that buggy came near our house and I says where you going? And they says we're going to pick berries. I says can I go with ya? They says well, you'd better find out from your mother, then. So they stopped and waited and I run in the house and I, mother can I come and go pick some berries? I says. These women are going pick some berries. They're willing to take me. Can I go with her? I says. Sure, she says, you can go.

So I just went. I jumped in that buggy and sat on that free seat and they drove off to Hardy Howell's to pick strawberries. Well, I didn't have no lunch or nothin'. They had lunch and everything. This woman had nice bread and butter and everything and bowls and everything. She washed a box, box of berries. Washed the berries and cleaned them and everything and mashed them and put sugar on them and everything. And fixed a bowl for me and she give me a bowl of berries and that bread. O-o-o-o-h boy! Did I ever have

a good lunch *[laughter]*. Oh! I sat down under that tree and ate that. I never forget it. I can see setting under that tree with that nice bowl of berries and a piece of bread and butter. O-o-o-o-o-h dear. *When talking about her good lunch, Sylvia leaned back in her chair, with her eyes closed, and smiled.*

He let us have a box. Everybody took a box of berries home. Well, we all got our pay. I had picked 99 boxes. He give me 99 cents *[laughter]*. He put that money in my hand. I held that money. I wouldn't open my hand. I just held it in my hand. Went home. So they let me out at the house and with my box of berries and I had my money. And they went home—Levi John and his wife. I ran. I went to mother. I said here mom! Here! Here's my day's pay *[laughter]*. I give her that money and she counted it. Oh dear, she says, what kind of man do you work for? she says. Give you 99 cents! Why didn't he give you a dollar? I says well, I don't know. What's a dollar? She says well, you wouldn't have all this change. You'd have your paper money, she says. It would be easier to carry. Oh and I thought it's funny he didn't give me a dollar. Why didn't he give me a dollar *[laughter]*? But that was my first pay was ninety-nine cents *[laughter]*. Oh, but I pick a lot of them. It was only a cent a box, see? Good day you'd get almost twenty-five cents a box now. That's the first pay I got.

*Raised on the Jamieson family farm, Sylvia's formal education did not start until she was eleven years old. Until then, she played and worked with her family. When I asked about some of the games she played as a child she said we played different games. We used to play euchre, I know. We played euchre and use to play that what they called dingballs. In a sock, take a sock [Sylvia mimes the construction] and make two balls in a sock. Take that and throw it around. Something like lacrosse. We used to play ante-ante-over. See, you take this and throw some over the house. You had to run and get it—ante-*

over, who comes in the clover *[laughter]*? We used to play that. That was a lot of our games. That's about the games we played besides races. We used to race, race and do all kinds of races, you know. We'd do a lot of games like that.

*Of outside farm work, she remembers, in particular, the cream separator.* We had to wash all them cups. O-o-o-o-h dear! I hated that. *About inside the house,* well, I hated the dish pan and I hated the stove. I never liked those two things. But we all had to take part in everything. Every one of us had to work. When I was eight years old I used to have to hold a baby on my lap and I used to have to go stand and rock those babies to sleep *[laughter]*. I was so sick of babies *[laughter]*. I guess that's why I never had any.

I wouldn't eat supper so I wouldn't, wasn't to wash dishes. We each gotta wash the dishes and everything. And I wouldn't eat supper. I'd climb up stairs. I'd sit on one step. When nobody look, I'd jump up another one. And I'd get to the top. When I get to the top I used to holler "good night dishes" and I'd run and get in bed *[laughter]*. I did that about three nights and boy, my mother come up. Did she ever give me a darn good spanking and made me go down stairs and I had to wash every dish *[laughter]*. I never went upstairs again *[laughter]*. I had to do the darn dishes without any supper too *[laughter]*. I would have done without supper, but I had to get all the dishes done *[laughter]*. Oh what a time I used to have *[laughter]*!

Dad used to take us to church every Sunday. We all, all of us had to go to church, except one that, who cooked the meal. One of us, we had to take turns to cook the meal and have everything ready for Sunday. The boys would always have to come down dressed perfect for Sunday. 'Course, we did that 'cause we went to church too. They came dressed up for church. And we always had to have table manners taught to us at the table. Well, they taught us table manners and everything—the blessing and everything like

table. Well, they taught us table manners and everything—the blessing and everything like that. We were brought up like that.

And the others who went to church had to wash the dishes. They had to do the dishes. If you went to church, you had to do the dishes. And when that Dora'd stay home and cook, she'd dirty e-v-e-r-y pot and burn 'em and everything else and make it worse for us to wash them dishes *[laughter]*. Oh she was a rascal! One Sunday they left me home to cook the dinner. So I put the roast of beef in the oven. And Phyllis came down with her in-laws. She used to come home every Sunday and bring her in-laws. And they sat in the kitchen. I had to baste that meat. And I thought, why don't they go someplace? Why don't they go outside? What *[are]* they all sitting in the kitchen for? I got to get in there and baste that meat. And I hated to do anything 'cause I'm no, never any good at my arms and that and doing things. So finally I thought I gotta baste that meat right away. So they're all sitting there and I opened the oven door and pulled it out and, I pulled it out a little too far and down went the meat *[laughter]*. I picked up the meat and brushed it off and put it back in the stove *[laughter]*. *When I asked if the company objected to the way she had "prepared" the meat, Sylvia replied, no, they enjoyed it!*

And I had bread and I had to make biscuits, hot biscuits *[laughter]* and Vincent come home *[laughter]* and he, he set at the table right away and the biscuits were on the table and he picked up one and he *[said]* **Who made this? Who made this biscuit?** *[Sylvia mimes Vincent's pitching the biscuit on the floor and makes the sound that the biscuit made as it bounced.]* Dump, dump, dump, dump *[laughter]* and I was crying *[laughter]*. It was so hard. Such a hard biscuit *[laughter]*! *I asked about Sylvia's bread making. Oh yes [laughter]. You could use my bread. You couldn't use my biscuits! Oh*



dishpan. There were two things that were out of my sight—stove and dishpan. *Sylvia's mother's thoughts about Sylvia's domestic abilities were reflected in the advice that she gave to Sylvia.* She always told me I was lazy. She says oh you're lazy. You've got to go to school, she says. You're too lazy to work [*laughter*]. So I went to school. Don't ever think I was glad to go to school [*laughter*]. Oh dear!

*Sylvia's formal schooling began when she was eleven years old.* That's when they, I was in the Mush Hole<sup>11</sup> [*laughter*]. I was put in the Mush Hole. And the reason they sent me to the Mush Hole, us girls all had to go to the Mush Hole—Phyllis, Kathleen, Dora and me—we all had to go to the Mush Hole because they wouldn't allow us to go to school in Onondaga. There was a public school and everything a mile away from our home [*in Onondaga*] but because we were Natives, they wouldn't allow us to go and sit with these foreigners. One mile away from us and they stopped us from going to school there and that's why they put us in the Mohawk, to be educated. Now they taught them this—this is what I heard when I first got there. Now remember you're here, you're here to learn to live a better life. You will be taught religion and how to keep yourself clean and how to dress and everything and how to be mannerly and taught all this so you're far better than what you come from. What you come from are nothing but thieves, dirty and steal and killing each other and everything else. Everything but what we were. And I thought what are you talking about? I never seen nothing like that....

Perfect, perfect, I had a perfect life. I had good parents, good to us. Fed us good and kept us clean and everything. So I thought, what the heck? They said you've got

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<sup>11</sup> "In one week in 1895 oatmeal porridge was on the menu for breakfast everyday, and cornmeal porridge for five suppers. Generations of children fed on mush 'n' milk used the nickname *mush hole* for The Mohawk Institute and Mount Elgin." Elizabeth Graham, *The Mush Hole. Life at Two Indian Residential Schools*, Heffle Publishing, Waterloo, Ontario, 1997, back cover.

nothing but bed bugs down there and a lot of lice and it's no good. It's no good to be living like that. I never knew what a bed bug was or lice 'till I got to the Mohawk *[laughter]*. That's when I found out how bad they were. My dad, when I got, when we got, we got lice and told dad. Right away he took us to the drug store and got some stuff to kill lice. And something to kill lice with—sabodilla. They says you use sabodilla, powder you put on your head. So pa bought that. Made each of us have a can of sabodilla *[laughter]*. We never got lice. No sir, but we even got, we even got body lice.

They were white and then you know, little white things that and we used to wash, wash the clothes—and you can't kill them. All the underwear we had to iron. Iron under that steam and they'd go crack! crack! crack! crack! and we used to just like to hear that *[laughter]*. Oh we had to iron everybody's underwear. We had to iron it to kill the lice—squash them and burn them. Oh we'd just iron and go close. Crack! crack! crack! crack! crack! and we'd just laugh *[laughter]*. Oh kids! Oh dear! What we didn't ever do!

The first day that I went, that they took me in and they made me do work in the kitchen. I was just this small *[indicated height with hand]*. And they come with a 75-pound bag of potatoes and says here, you peel these. I had to peel a seventy-five pound bag of potatoes, sit there. And then I heard thump! thump! thump! thump! I says what's going on? They says oh, they're bringing all the boys in, they says. The boys have all got to come and watch the boys being birched. I says what's a birch? They says you'll know. So all at once there was silence. And then a scream. Oh!!!! That poor kid! And I thought then what's the matter with them kids all standing and looking at him? That old man whipped that kid like that? Why don't they get up and take that whip away from him *[laughter]*? They killed a boy. Russell Bennett. I guess they licked him and killed him. Oh the boys used to have it hard. Oh they had it hard! And they were so hungry.

They used to come and eat off the swill barrel. They'd look *[and]* watch what was put in the swill barrel and they'd come and eat out of the swill barrel.<sup>12</sup> You *[would]* see them, see them kids standing there taking stuff out of the swill barrel and eating it. They were hungry. The boys were hungry.

*I asked Sylvia if she ever had to witness a beating. O-o-o-o-h, beaten! They got birchened. They'd undress ya and switch you across the bench and whip you with rawhide. In front of everybody. They had to look on. Dora, they strapped her once. I don't know what she done. Oh, I know. She was the scullery girl in the kitchen. And she had to do, [there] was these big knives, these big knives, you know. And big, big spoons and that kitchen women used to spank us with those big spoons. If we didn't do it right she'd used those big spoons and spank us. I'll spank you with a spoon! I'll spank you with a spoon, she'd say, that Miss Bonehill, her name was. She was always spanking them with a big iron, this big spoon that they stirred the soup with, 'cause they're great big pots you know.*

Oh yeah, they were metal. They were metal and she used to use that on us. And, I don't know. Dora, her and a girl were washing dishes and they laughed out loud and she'd *[say]* stop that laughing there! Stop that laughing! And they'd work. They'd quiet a little while and then they'd laugh out loud again. And she'd come up there to give them a spanking with a spoon. And Dora was washing the dishes and she was washing a knife—this big knife. So this woman come with that big spoon and Dora had this knife in her hand. And she lift that knife up and that woman thought she'd *[laughter]* going to get after her. So she put the spoon away and she reported Dora. She said she was going to attack her. So then they took us all up in the senior room. Everybody. Had to take them.

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<sup>12</sup> Vegetable refuse saved to feed pigs.

Took Dora up and strapped her. And she was black and blue from here [*Sylvia indicates the extent on her own arm*]. Yeah she was black and blue right up there. They just strapped her and she just had her mouth like that [*Sylvia mimes clamped lips*] and just, she never shed a tear. And I was just screaming [*laughter*]. And every time they strapped her I'd holler louder [*laughter*].

*I asked Sylvia if she was punished for yelling. No, no I didn't. But I, I cried for her [laughter]. She never shed a tear [laughter]. But her arm was just terrible. I then asked if they told their parents about the strapping when they came to visit, and, if they told their parents, did anything happen? Nothing happened. That old bugger got away with a lot of spanking us with a spoon. They had no right to do that to us. Sylvia's use of profanity is rare. During our work on her life story, I heard profanity from her on perhaps four occasions. Sylvia's use of profanity is how she indicates her outrage and indignation.*

*I asked Sylvia what they taught her at the Mohawk besides the 3 Rs. Well they made you do all kinds of work. They made you go look after the chickens, made you go in the greenhouse, made you do, take part in everything. Made you do the laundry. You had to take your turn at everything. I observed that, from my understanding, their education was totally funded by the Department of Indian Affairs. Yes, it was paid. I then asked why the children had to work. Well, they told us we could only go to school half days. We had to work half days. They said it was for our keep and everything we worked at, they sold. They sold all the eggs. They sold all the butter and milk. Sold everything! We didn't dare touch an apple. We had to go and look after the apples and everything but we didn't dare eat one.*

*I was there all the time. They didn't let you come home in the summer time or anything? No! We had to work at the gardens then. We had to keep the gardens going*

'cause they had to go to market every week to sell the stuff. Oh we worked! Don't ever think we didn't. They drove us to work and we worked hard. O-o-o-o-h, one day I went to the table and I couldn't eat their breakfast. I never ate their breakfast. I couldn't eat. There was this bread that the children had made with syrup on it. I couldn't eat it. It was, look like bugs [laughter]. *Worse than your biscuits [laughter]? Yeah worse than my biscuits [laughter].* And I couldn't eat it and one little girl was sitting next to me. She says Sylvia! Sylvia! she says. Give me your bread. And I took my bread and I [gave it to her] and they saw me do it. I got a report for giving her that bread! I had to work all Saturday. *Why would they care?* There was a report. I wasn't supposed to give it to juniors. That was the seniors' dish [laughter]. It was terrible!

*I asked Sylvia what kind of meals they were served and if she was ever hungry at the Mohawk.* Well, in the morning they had usually porridge and it was porridge from wooden bins, you know. And there was worms used to get in the porridge. And we'd come down and the porridge would be in the dish and you could see the cooked worms all in there. And you're supposed to eat that! And the milk was just blue—separated milk. No cream. Well there was for lunch, we used to get maybe a sandwich of some kind, maybe soup. Nothing else. *I asked what lunch was like.* Well it wasn't extra good when the kids made it [laughter]. *The children had to do all the cooking?* Oh yeah, they had to do all the work. That, that's what we lived on. They didn't buy stuff for us. We had to do the work.

O-o-o-o-o-h was I ever [hungry]! One Monday we went to the meal and we couldn't eat. None of us. Not one person. Everybody just looked at the dinner and they couldn't eat it. It wasn't cooked right! It wasn't cooked right! And everything was cooked so terrible. So all of us walked away without eating. So when we got out there we

said well, we're hungry. I says I know we're hungry. I'm hungry too, I says. I says to him why don't we take our money together? We got money, I says. We got a little bit of money. Can't we put our money together and get something to eat? So that's what we did. We got those that had the money, got the money and we went and got some bread, baloney. Well, it was who was going after it. Well, I said, I'd go after it.

We weren't allowed to go out, to leave the yard *[laughter]*. Two other girls went with me. They says oh, we'll go with ya. They went. We sneaked along that lower driveway. Sneaked along and went up to the store on the side. The little store there. We went over to that little store. We bought bread. We bought baloney. We bought jam. We bought pop, I think. We had enough money to buy pop. We bought a fairly good lot, load, anyway. And we come back. And of course, all those that handed in their money came and eat with us. We hid in a little room with all our stuff and we all had our stuff to eat. What we didn't eat we give to the rest. They were hungry too. So, somebody went and told on us. Somebody scoffed on us.

So they brought us in about fifteen minutes earlier before school. They lined us up and we wondered why they brought us in so early. And they brought us in. We all lined all up. Got us in there and officers came down. The officers says we hear that some of us run away to the store. Step forward any of those that run away to the store. I walked right up, stepped *[up]* right away *[laughter]*. And they says did you go alone? I says I don't think so. There's anybody else? Step forward, they says, who went to the store. But they had to tell on those other two girls. They had to tell on them who went. So they stepped up too. All right, they says, you work Saturday. You don't have no holidays on Saturday 'cause you got to work. You have to work for going to the store. You got a report. And that was a report. Anytime you got a report you had to work. Holiday was

taken away from you. And you couldn't go uptown if your parents come. You couldn't go uptown. Couldn't go with them. You had to stay home and work [laughter]. So, they put me up in the principal's flat. They said now look you, you're gonna work. You're gonna go and clean the principal's flat. And you do all the work there, they says. We give you that easier job, they says, than the rest of them. The rest had to scrub the senior room. Get on their hands and knees and scrub the floor. Scrub the whole school room. And they had to really do it good, too. Didn't even dare to leave a mark around it. It had to be just all white. So I got out of that. But I had to go to the principal's flat. Well, they just had lunch. So they had lunch. Now, you clear up the table, but if there's anything you want to eat, you can eat it [laughter]. So, first of all, I had a good feed and ate what they left over. *In response to my question about the staff not being fed the same as the students, Sylvia said* Oh no! They gave them the very best of everything. Very best of meat and cream and everything else. O-o-o-o-o-h, it was good! I had a good meal [laughter]. So I had a good meal and I cleaned up the dishes and everything. I cleaned up the kitchen and cleaned their dining room and everything and then I had to do the bedrooms, the hall and everything. Oh I had a lot of work to do, but I got it all done.

*I asked Sylvia what kind of bed she was given to sleep at the Mohawk Institute. Sylvia's description of her bed led to a discussion of other night time matters. We had just a mattress, just a mattress set on [the bed frame]. We never had any tick.<sup>13</sup> I had a mattress and feather ticks at my home. I always slept with a feather tick and good warm blankets. There I had just a bare mattress and cotton sheets and cotton, that and not too warm. So you were cold at night? Yeah, it wasn't, it wasn't no life. I wouldn't give*

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<sup>13</sup> A "tick" is the outer covering for a mattress or a pillow. What Sylvia describes as a "tick" appears to be what is known today as a comforter. Without central heating, a tick insulated with feathers was undoubtedly necessary, in addition to blankets, for warmth.

anybody that life. Yeah, and you never knew when that old principal was going to come in and walk and sneak in bed with you, too. They had several babies from there too, you know *[Sylvia recounts the Mohawk-babies histories of several people]*. Oh yeah, there were several babies born up there, from there, from that damned old principal, dirty principal! *I asked if she ever got "bothered"?* NO!!!! No! I never got, they never bothered me!

*Both Sylvia and I have read Elizabeth Graham's The Mush Hole. Ms. Graham requested an interview from Sylvia for the book and Sylvia refused. In our past conversations, Sylvia never spoke of any of her residential school experiences. I was surprised when Sylvia spoke freely of so many of her experiences there. Off tape, when we were discussing The Mush Hole, I observed to Sylvia that, based on Graham's writings, things appeared to be much better for her at the Mohawk than in previous generations, while allowing that conditions were certainly cruel and grim. Sylvia agreed. On tape, I asked her if, aside from being hungry, did she get along all right? With a sly puckish grin, she confided well, yes, I got along good 'cause I, I looked sickly. I was lighter, fairer than all of them and they thought I was sick. I wasn't sick *[laughter]*! I just wasn't naturally the right colour. And one woman come to me the other day—therapist come down here and she looks at me, she says you're awfully fair. I says oh, I don't know how fair I am *[laughter]*. I'm not brown, anyway *[laughter]*. She couldn't get over it that I was so fair.*

Yeah, I had that excuse. Of course, I was small. I was always small. Yeah, really small. I was small. But then I got through that. And after that I was glad to get out of that Mohawk. Oh was I glad to get out of there. So glad to get back to our table where we had everything. Our table was just loaded all the time. *I asked Sylvia if her parents knew she was hungry.* Yes, we told them. My dad used to bring stuff down and supply the school.



So my dad ordered them to take an order for us. Take cakes and stuff like that for us. Biscuits and stuff. *When asked if she actually got those subsidies provided by her parents, she responded yeah, oh yes, they let us have them. We had what they left for us, so we were lucky like that again. If it wasn't for mother and dad, oh! It was terrible!*

*Over seventy years after leaving the Mohawk Institute Sylvia says it was a rotten life. It wasn't no bed of roses. We lived under a fear all the time. And I don't think that's very good for anybody's brain to be living under a fear all the time. You don't know what's going to happen to you. About the quality of education Sylvia received at the Mush Hole she says no one encouraged you to go on. We used to encourage them to teach up to Grade VI. And you taught them up to Grade VI. That was good enough. Well, that wasn't good enough for me when I come in there.*

*As a method to "civilize" the Aboriginal children, "the schools were a vital component in this process (Graham 1997:5, citing Peter Jones, Missionary Bulletin, Vol. XVI, No. 1, April-June, 1920:169). Open to both sexes, boys were given "a common English Education" and were taught trades. Girls were instructed in the 3 Rs and domestic duties "so as to qualify them to be good wives and mothers." The "most promising boys and girls" were to be given "superior advantages, so as to qualify them for missionaries and school teachers among their brethren" (Ibid.). Generally about the Mohawk, Sylvia says it should have been burned down long ago. It should never, ever been allowed to be put up. Dirty old school! And them officers were so dirty, abusing like they did. Terrible!*

*I asked what the Mohawk Institute teachers were like. I was good in arithmetic. Always get all the questions right. One night I sat and I was doing three long questions. And I was in the study room and I thought I'm going to get this. And I worked at that*

question, one question. I worked at it in every way. Upside down, inside out, every way. I studied that and I mastered it. Finally I got the answer. And just as I got the answer, it was ten o'clock and then the officer had gotten out and saw me studying. They saw the light on in the study room. And she come in and she said what are you doing here? You're supposed to be in bed nine o'clock, she says. Well, I says, I got a question, I says. I've been fighting this question all evening. But I got it now, I says. So I'll go to bed and, I says, I'll get after the rest of them in the morning. So next morning I got up early and went down and tackled them other two and I got them other two right. From that day on, no question ever stuck me. I mastered arithmetic. I mastered *[it]* myself.

I really made a master of myself in arithmetic. Well, our teacher used to come in. She'd put three questions on the board every day. And then she'd give us that for us to do and she'd leave the room. And she'd come in and she'd say who had the questions done right and I'd put up my hand. And she used to send me to the board to put it on. And she'd got so every morning she'd kept coming in and right away sent me to the board to do that, that question. And this one morning I thought I'm not going to do that. That's your work. And I didn't do them. I just set there and set there. I didn't do them. So she come in and she looked at the papers and come to me and I didn't have them done and, and *[laughter]* she couldn't send me up to the board 'cause I never had any done.

And she says why haven't you got that done? And she hit me on the back. I says what's you hitting me for? She says 'cause you haven't got your work done. Well, I says that's your work, I says. You go ahead and do your own work. You're always sending me there. I says I'm not, I'm not the only one who can go up there and *[do]* that. Send somebody else, I said. Why send me all the time? I just told her right off there and George Van Every was sitting back *[and]* across *[from]* me and there was a big butcher knife in

his desk. And he *[whispers]* Sylvia! Sylvia! I looked. He says you want this? I says to him you crazy *[laughter]*??!?? Well, I told that teacher off and I just told her off.

Well, that was about two months before my entrance *[Sylvia had to write entrance exams to be able to continue her education from the Mohawk Institute]*. I was in the entrance class. She wouldn't have nothing to do with me from then on. She just turned her head against me. Wouldn't do a thing. Wouldn't correct none of my work or nothing. Never asked me to do anything. Never. She just forgot I was there. Well, when we went to try the entrance, she wouldn't even go near me. Two others were there. She'd take them up by the arms and hold them and bring them chocolate bars and everything. She wouldn't give me nothing.

*I asked Sylvia the identity of this teacher. It was Susan Hardy/Hardie. She was the longest teacher there. But she was just as bad. She was of our own kind, you know. She, she and my mother were first cousins. That's my mother's first cousin. So why was she so mean?* I don't know. She was just mean, that's all. She didn't take our relation at all. An old maid. She never, ever got married. *Did she teach at the Mohawk Institute until she retired?* Uh-huh. And then Rogers, principal, and he got let out from being principal and they made him jail keeper and he had an apartment at the jail. Well then, when Susan Hardie retired, he told her to come and stay with him 'cause she didn't have no home to go to. So she went and lived with him. He took her in so he had somebody to help and live with him. She had mother. She had mother and Aunt Sarah and all of them. She didn't recognize them. Judge Hardie was her father. Judge Hardie from Brantford. He was a judge and that was her father.

*From my readings from The Mush Hole I learned that Sylvia had originally intended to be a nurse. Oh yeah, I always [wanted to be] a nurse. I was always wanted to*

be a nurse from the time I was small. I liked that white uniform! And I wanted to be a nurse. I thought they *[had]* so *[a]* nice job. But my dad got sick. *The tape ran out at this point and Sylvia kept on talking. Sylvia's father was hospitalized around this time and, during his stay, he concluded that nursing was a dirty job.* I don't want one of my girls to be a nurse! I went on to high school and I didn't know what I was going to be. I was disappointed 'cause I wasn't going to be *[a nurse]*. I even used to tell them what hospital I was going to train in. I says I'm going to train in Victoria Hospital in Montreal. I even picked out my hospital *[laughter]*. I was determined to be a nurse. But dad wouldn't let us be a nurse. No sir, he says, not one of my girls will ever be a nurse he says. I was kind of hurt by it, but I never let on about it. And I got through high school and I thought, well, what will I do? I guess I'll go to Normal School and be a teacher. So that's when I went to Normal School and be a teacher. *Before attending Normal School [Teacher's College], Sylvia was required to attend the Continuation School at Onondaga to qualify her to attend Brantford Collegiate, after which she was able to gain admittance to Hamilton Normal School.*

## THE SECOND QUESTION

### What Am I?

*In reference to the Second Question, I've drawn upon what Sylvia tells about herself as student, teacher, daughter, wife and community member. The Second Question ends with her story about her attendance at summer school in Ottawa where Sylvia puts into action all that she has learned about how both of her worlds work and her place in those worlds.*

*At the Continuation School, I learned the regular high school work. I did the first two years of high school work. I got along very good over there and then I got passed to Brantford. That's how I got in the Brantford Collegiate there. Then I lived in Brantford. I rent a room and board myself and go to school. That's what I did. I'd do my own cooking and everything. Where I got the room the woman used to let me use the stove and cook for myself. So I was lucky like that.*

*Well, I came home every weekend. Oh yes, I was out of that Mohawk completely, you see. They had no control over me! I was much better. I used to ride the train [that] come down our way. I get off at Onondaga, see? It went right through our property. I'd get off there. I used to go up on the train and I'd go to school Monday morning and I'd come back on a Friday night. I'd come home for the summer and when I got old enough, I got a job right away 'cause I had to work. I wanted to make money to give my mother to send me to school.*

*Sylvia's first summer job was with a family who had a summer home at Port Dover. They advertised for a girl and I went and I got it. I got the job and I went with them. They own that store in Brantford. Ogilvy's, Ogilvy's store. And they were nice people. They were good to me. I did all their housework and cooking—I could cook—and*

everything like that. *Sylvia's aversion to the sink, the stove and rocking babies was diminished when it became the means by which she was able to subsidize obtaining an education.* And ah, I got homesick. O-o-o-o-h, did you ever get homesick? *Yeah.* O-o-o-o-h, was that ever terrible. This one time I got homesick. My brother, my Jimmy, was a baby and I could just see Jimmy. All I could see is Jimmy. I got so lonesome for that baby. I could just see him no matter where I looked. He was just like he was sitting on a thing outside, just sitting there. And I could just see him. Oh, I cried *[laughter]*. And I got *[so]* I couldn't stop crying. And they gave me books to read. They gave me chocolates and everything. They did everything so I couldn't cry. And then they sent me to the show. They says you go to the show this afternoon. So they give me money and I went to the show. And I cried in the show *[laughter]*. I sat in that show and cried all afternoon. O-o-o-o-h, that homesickness is awful. But I didn't go home. I think if I went home I'd have never got over it. But I stayed it out and then afterwards I never, ever got homesick again. But a good job I stayed and fought it out because, I thought, if I went home, I'd never got over it.

*The next summer job story came from my asking Sylvia when she learned to drive. She had been employed by a well-to-do American family at their summer home on Lake St. Clair, near Windsor. In her last year working for them, having just completed her studies at Hamilton Normal School, Sylvia was employed as a tutor to their children. I was working for Cronin's. They owned a coal dock in Detroit. And this was summer time when I was on my holidays. I used to always go and work on my holidays so I could make money to go back to school. I'd work and I'd make my money and I'd give it all to my mother and then that was the way she sent me to school.*

So they had a coloured chauffeur. And they said to me, Sylvia, can you drive a

car? And I said no. They says well, everybody in this house has got to learn to drive a car. Then they says, we'll have—I forget what his name was—we'll have the chauffeur take you and teach you how to drive a car. I must have been about seventeen or eighteen. And so one night he came in. He says well, Miss Sylvia, he says, I'm ready to take you out to drive that car. Oh was I ever scared to go with him! So he took me out and he showed me how to start it and everything. He went over how to start it, what to do. He said [*you have to*] turn it over. He did that about three times. Now, he says, you do it. So I did it.

All right, we go on the road. We went on the road. He drove and he showed me how to drive and how to handle the car and everything going. We had to go as far as Belle River. He took me down and kept telling me what to do. And then he stop and he put on the brake and pulled over and everything like that. And when I got back there, got to Belle River, all right, he says, you take over. He turned the car around. He says now you get home. Get home or we stay here, he says. O-o-o-h I was scared! I thought what will I do? So I started the car. I got it going. And I was going mighty slow. Well, he says, you go a little faster. So I go a little faster. Stop he says. And I stopped. All right, he says, take everything out. Now start over again. Start your car, he says. And I started my car. He says, all right, go ahead. I kept driving—a little faster, he says, a little faster. I'd go a little faster every time he said that. I was never so glad when we got back to Cronin's. I remember that coloured man. He's the one that taught me how to drive.

*When asked what make of car she learned to drive on,* I think it was one of the bigger Cadillacs. They drove big cars. They were millionaires, you see. And they lived right across the road from that golf course at Windsor there. That's where I used to go every summer and work for them. They requested me every summer after they had me

one summer. They didn't want to be there without me. They said it wasn't home unless I was there. I was there about three or four, must be four—three summers anyway. I went there even the last year I became a teacher. It was in nineteen twenty-nine. I went to, they had me come out. I'd just finished Normal School and they had me go there just to tutor their children. So I tutored their children all summer. I helped their children. Some of them were kind of backward in school. They wanted them tutored. So that's what my job *[was]*. I was tutor.

*Sylvia did her practice teaching at Strathcona School in Hamilton. And there's five professors come out and watch me teach a Grade III at Strathcona School. Five professors watched me teach. Dr. Amos was one of them. So they watched me teach this lesson in Grade III and everything. And of course, when you teach you start by your introductory. You have to give a perfect introduction to what you're going to teach. You got to put that in. And then you go ahead, explain things and then you bring on what you're teaching about. You have to go through certain steps.*

Well, I went through every step perfect. So they left Dr. Amos to tell me. So he came and told me. And I was shaking *[laughter]*. I thought this is it! Well, he says, you done very good, he says. Your mark is ninety-seven. I was so surprised! Ninety-seven for teaching class *[laughter]* from five professors. So I was satisfied. So he re-classified all his teachers. And there were five of us picked as special teachers—that was four nuns and me. And I worked with the nuns. The nuns used to be there at noon hour and we used to work together. I guess that's why I come up so high. So that's the best teaching: four nuns and me *[laughter]*.

And we had to take religion. We took religion too. We had a minister come and teach us religion. And this minister come and taught us religion. Every question he asked I



could answer. I put up my hand and he kept asking me. I thought what's the matter with the rest of them? Why should he ask me all the time? So he asked a question and I knew the answer and I look around. Nobody had their hand up. So I put my hand up again and he asked me and I told him. I got five red seals in religion—the big certificate. I got that certificate yet. I got five red seals on that from the Normal School. Well, then we had to get our picture taken for the class. And they called us in and put me right next to the principal. I sat right beside the principal in this picture *[laughter]*. I didn't get right beside the principal for nothing, that's for sure. They only put the best teachers beside him. That's who got beside the principal. O-o-o-o-o-h dear *[laughter]*.

After I got through, they gave me Number Eight School—23 pupils, all grades. Well, I did very well at that school and I put on a Christmas tree for them and everything. Put on a nice Christmas tree for the kids and everything. And I boarded with a minister up there at that time. He was the minister next door, so I boarded with him. So I told him what I was doing. I says I want to do *[something]* for Christmas I says. For our concert, I says. And I used to make angel wings and everything in there and things like that. And *[laughter]* the one day I was teaching school and the Smith boy was looking out the window—Harry Smith.<sup>14</sup> He says oh teacher, there's them bushes moving, he says. Look at that, he says. The bush is moving *[laughter]*! I says what bushes moving? I went and looked and here was the minister coming with all these branches *[laughter]*. He had all these branches and he was coming and he *[Harry]* says the bush is moving.

*After Number Eight School*, they picked out a bad school, Number Three School. Terrible bad. Seventy-four pupils and the teacher had no control over it. The kids jump

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<sup>14</sup> Harry Smith later became Jay Silverheels, a Native actor whose most famous role was that of Tonto in the television series, *The Lone Ranger*.

out of the window and she'd jump out after them. No control at all! And I had taught at Number Eight School, and I had a good school. In January, and I only had four months teaching, *[the school board]* put me over to Number Three School. It was down off of Sour Springs Road. And Number Three was a concession over *[from]* the other corner. And they told me to take that school. And I says no, I says. I'm only a new teacher, I says. It's a bad school, I says. Kids are over topping the teachers and everything. Are you going to be there? I fought not to go there.

My salary was eighty dollars a month and they only taught for ten months. They never got any pay for July and August. That's what I got. Eight hundred dollars a year. Well, I argues not to go there. I says I don't see why you got to send *[me]* up against somebody there, I says. You know teachers. There's man teachers and they've been teaching for years down there, I says. Why don't you send one of them? A man would be better. So anyway, they says, well if you go, we'll give you a hundred dollars a year more. Bring your eighty dollars up to hundred, they says. And you'll get a thousand dollars a year.

I thought, well I want that thousand dollars, 'cause twenty dollars meant so much at that time. So I says, well, I says I don't want, I says I still think you should send another teacher, I says. I says another teacher would be glad to get that. So, well you think about it. You go up there, you'll get a hundred dollars a month. I thought well, it's hard work to get any money out at all from them. Well, I says, on one condition, I says. Well I'll take it on one condition, I says. If I go up there one month, I says, I'll go up there for one month. No longer if I can't handle it. I says if I can't handle that in one month, you get me out of there and give me another school. Give me my school back, I says. And I says get somebody else in there. Well, they says, yes, we'll do that all right.

**So that's how I went to Number Three School.**

*How bad was Number Three School?* O-o-o-o-h, little monkeys. O-o-o-o-h gee. They were, they were seventy-four pupils there. A lot of teenagers and ten years old. There was hardly any wee little fellows, babies there. You couldn't start school unless you were eight years old. They were all eight years old. I didn't have no five or six coming to me. So I went to school. I was just like a mouse. Shaky, oh I was shaky to go to that school that morning. I thought well, how am I going to even go in that school?

So I went a little bit earlier—about fifteen minutes earlier and I sat at the desk and children started to come. I just let them come. I never said nothing to them. Just sat at the desk. I just worked at my desk getting the daybooks ready. And I watched them. I just sat there and they didn't know I was watching them. I made out I was working awful hard *[laughter]*. They come and they do. I thought to myself, I've got to get the ones that are mischief. I got to pick out the ones that are bad. And I see some of them come and they're jumping around. Make two, three noises, run around, run out. Somebody else come in and holler and then run out. They're running in and out just like pests. So it's come nine o'clock. I sat up. I didn't ring the bell or nothing and I just watched them come in and they all sat down. And I let them sit there for a while. And they were watching me like a hawk. So I stood up. I says good morning boys and girls. Nobody set up and said good morning. So I sat down for a minute and I looked at them. And some of them were snickering and laughing 'cause they didn't say good morning to me. So I let that go for a few minutes and I said it again. I says good morning boys and girls. I think it was about three stood up and said good morning.

So I said now you children I says, I think you've learned something all ready. I says you know my rule—and the rule of this school's going to be—that you've got to

know something more before you go out of this door than what you did when you came in. I want you to learn something more, I says. That's what you're here for, I says. You're here to learn. I says I'm here to work 'cause I've got to sit down here and work 'til four o'clock. I says we've got to stay here and we might as well make use of it. I says times goes fast. I says so [*Sylvia pounds the table with her finger to punctuate her statement*], what do you intend to do? I says I want to know if you've learned anything already. I sat down again.

And then I stood up. I says good morning boys and girls. They nearly all stood up—but the bad ones didn't. I got the sign. The bad ones right there [*laughter*]. I says thank you. I says good morning. Thank you, I says. Well, we'd better get to work. And I handed the out their work. Just like three questions everything [*miming on the table*] of all the classes. I just give them to the first ones and says pass them down, pass them down, pass them down. Comes time—are you finished? All those finished, come up here. Bring your work. I marked that work right straight. And I give them, I had another paper ready and I'd hand it to them. Another, another. I says next row are you finished? Just a few were finished. Some of them never finished from the first grade to that. And I gave most of them first grade work and they couldn't do it!

O-o-o-h, you have no idea how I straightened them out. Oh I had to just watch. I had to use psychology. I had to use psychology [*laughter*]. Well, they all kept working. They couldn't understand why everybody's working so well. They had to get their work done. Now, I said these people make mistakes. I'd sent them up to a bigger one, bigger class. I says now you go and help that one. And I sent them back so they could. They liked that, thinking they were a little smarter, see? And I just kept [*laughter*] class by class. Well I got through to them like nothing.

*One story about her difficulties in teaching that was told very often is the "cat" or tacos (Mohawk for "cat," pronounced dah-gos with emphasis on the last syllable which sounds like "ghost" without the "t") story. Sylvia has said in subsequent conversations that she had children of all ages whose first language was not English. She taught basic English using drawings and sign language. Of this particular school term, she said that by Christmas the children had acquired sufficient English to do the schoolwork. And it was hard to teach in those days. We had a lot of little children come to school that couldn't speak a word of English. Boy, did I ever used to have to do a lot of drawing! I'd draw a cat. I'd say to them now what's that? Tacos. Yes, that's right, tacos, I says. Tacos. I was learning their Indian and they were learning my English. I says what's that? Tacos. Well, let's say it another way. Say it my way. Say cat. That's cat. Tacos is cat. I used to have to teach like that to get them to know my English word. Aw-w-w-w-h ten teachers today can't teach what I taught. I had every grade from the very beginning to the entrance class. Oh that darn seat work!<sup>15</sup> It was something else and then I'd take one class at a time and I'd correct that class and then I'd had them sometimes, when I'd get too busy, I'd had my seniors correct them. I'd give them Grade I work to seniors to correct. It was review work for them. They were reviewing, doing review work for Grade I and they didn't know it [laughter].*

*Sylvia's own attitudes toward and experiences with children directed her pedagogic methodologies. Although she did use corporal punishment, she preferred to use it sparingly and only as a last resort. Speaking of her viewpoint of children and how they ought to be treated, Sylvia says there's no use me trying to strap them. It would hurt me*

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<sup>15</sup> Seat work was paper-and-pencil work given to one grade to do at their desks while Sylvia was teaching another grade.

more than them. It's better to do that. I used to do that when I taught school. That's how I had such good conduct in school. You could hear a pin drop in my school. You can't put anything by those kids. They're the best judges in the world. You want anything to be judged, you use a child. They can tell ya. To me, they're the best judges in the world.

Well, I can't stand to see them downing people! Now I taught school and *[another]* of the teachers wrote on their *[one of her nephew's report cards]* "failure" at the end of the year. Complete failure! And he come to me just crying and he says look what I got, w-a-a-a-ah! Don't you cry, I says. Who did that? He says my teacher. I says she's the failure. You're not the failure, I says. Anybody who'd do a thing like that is a failure!!!!, I says. The idea that teacher writing things like that about you! I says you're no failure. I never *[punctuating her words with her finger on the table]* let one person fail in my school. There was "A," "B," "C," OK. I used to write them how they were. "A," "B," "C." Well, if they failed, they know *[why]* they got the "C" or they got the "D" or whatever it is. I'd put down and put it on like that. But I never, ever called anybody a failure. They're not a complete failure. Everybody's got something. Everybody's gifted with something and it's up to them *[the teachers]* to develop that gift. And go and get help to develop that. I had children around me all the time. I just lived with children all the time. Never had none of my own. *I commented that I thought, as a teacher Sylvia was a mother many, many, many times over.* Oh yeah. Why the children used to call me "momma" sometimes. They'd call me momma. And I'd say why do you call me momma *[laughter]*? Momma, they called me momma. They'd say momma. I used to laugh. I used to tell them, well I guess I can be momma to you too.

*Sylvia recounts stories to illustrate her use of psychology. Kid would be sitting there. Sometimes they would be sitting there going [she taps on the table with a pencil].*

I'd come along. I'd take the pencil from him. I'd hand him another one. And I'd take the pencil up to my desk like that—his pencil. I gave him one. And I went on and taught and he'd look at me. He'd be looking at me and he'd go on working. My pencil didn't do that, you see. And he used that pencil that was quiet. Come four o'clock, I'd say now you stay in. He'd stay in. I said I've got a job for you to do. I says here's your pencil. I want *[you]* to go and play with that the way you played in school. Just go there and set there and do that, I says. As long as you like. Set there and do it. And he set there. He went back to do it. *[Sylvia taps, taps, taps on the table]*. And he kind of stopped. He stopped. I looked at him. He'd start again *[Sylvia taps more]*. I says how come you're stopping? He says well, how long do I have to do that? I says just as long as you like, I says. You like that noise, don't you? I says do it as long as you like. When you get tired let me know, I says. So he kept doing it again for a while. He says I'm tired. All right, I says. I want you to stay tired. I never want to hear that again *[laughter]*. I never heard it again.

Yeah, I just let them do what they wanted to do. But I gave them time. And that was the best thing that ever happened. Then another day I come and two little girls were running around the room, running around the room. They shouldn't run around the school. So I looked at them. I says all right, you girls, I says. Just stay after four for a little while. I made them do the same thing. They never run again. That's the best medicine I ever found.

I had one little girl that used to play with men. Oh, she like to play with men all the time. And one day these guys got a hold of her and they, they were trying to put her in the cupboard. And I happened to go down stairs and saw them trying to put this girl in the cupboard. So I had to strap every one of them. I don't know what they were doing it for, but they were trying to stick her in a cupboard. So I thought you're not going to do

that to my girls. I got after them for that. I gave them one good strap. I'd just give them one. I wouldn't give them any more than one. Just to really let them know I could hit them *[laughter]*. I asked Sylvia if she ever found it necessary to strap the girls. She allowed as she had, for talking back to her and they would do mischief stuff around the school. A lot of things they'd do. Nope they never, ever talked back to me *[presumably a second time]*. They never talked back to me. If they would talk back to me, I'd let them keep talking all day. I'd just say, all right you can just talk all day. And I'd let them talk all day. Well, you have to get after little kids. You have to be smarter than they are.

Oh, another boy, he was playing with a boy. He brought a sharp knife, really sharp knife *[to school]*. And the boy in front of him, he was touching him with the point of that knife. And that fellow would *[mimes slapping the back of her neck]* Oh! Don't! Ouch! Ah! Oh! Ah! I says what's the matter with you? I don't know he says. Something's wrong with my neck. So I went back and stood back there. Walked around and sure enough, I saw that boy with that sharp knife. He was touching him. It was sharp as a razor! I walked up to him and I says give me that. Give you what? he says. I says give me what you got there in your hand. I haven't got anything in my hand. Oh yes you have! I says. Give me that. No he says. No. And I thought oh-oh, what's *[he]* going to do? So I thought, I'll get you. So I moved over near that hand on this side. I says you're not going to give me that hand, what you've got in your hand? No!! No, I got nothing in my hand he says. And he kind of turned. He looked that way and I grabbed his hand and squeezed it and he dropped it. And I picked it up and I says you know nothing about what you've got in your hand? I says I'm keeping this and your parents come and want to know why you don't learn, I'm showing them what you do. Now, I said after, if you want it, you've got to bring them here to show them and what you want *[laughter]*. He



never brought them there to show them what he wanted. And I tell you, he never got that knife back! *I asked Sylvia if his parents ever found out about his bringing a knife to school.* No, but he never, ever brought anything more to school.

*Sylvia's employment of psychology has been known to come back and "haunt" her many years later. Jerry Johnson, when he visits Sylvia, reminds her of his most vivid memory of her. Jerry and his cousin were constantly scrapping. To remedy their persistent fisticuffs, Sylvia made them make up. I made them kiss each other. They got busy and kissed each other. That's what they had to do. I'm telling you [laughter], he doesn't forget that either [when] he comes to see me, every time he comes around.*

*Perhaps remembering her hungry days at the Mohawk, Sylvia tells about herself-as-momma. And then some of them come in and you'd know they never had no breakfast. They were poor people. Never had no breakfast. Never had no, hardly slept at night, I guess. Parents don't look after them. They put their head on the desk and go right to sleep. And I'd say don't touch them. Let them sleep. And I knew they couldn't learn anything anyways, they were so darn sleepy. And I thought well, something's got to be done. And I was janitor as well as teacher. That was supposed to be for my rent. So I got busy. I thought I got to do something for these kids. I used to make a pot of soup every morning. I'd get up at eight o'clock and get a pot of soup going. I'd make bean soup, potato soup, pea soup, vegetable soup. Every day I have a different kind of soup. I'd make a whole big pot of it and I'd leave it on the stove at eight o'clock. Get it on there at eight o'clock. And ah, let them have it. They all had them white mugs, you know. I'd say well get your mug and I had a soup ladle and used to fill their cup and they used to just sit down and o-o-o-o-h, it was pitiful. It was pitiful to see what that is, just pitiful. And when I taught at Number Six School, I says well, it's Friday afternoon. We had sort of a*

break. I says we're going to take a break today. We'll take our soup and everything and go down on the ice. They had ice down, back of the school, not too far from the school. It was like a pond. It had all frozen over. I says we'll go down there and have our lunch and spend our noon hour down there. So we took our pot of soup and went down there. And I put on my skates. They didn't think I could skate *[laughter]*. Put on my skates and I skated all on them. But they were so surprised at me. I could skate better than they could. Oh, we had fun down there for an hour and then we come back. We had our lunch down there. M-m-m-m-m-m. I used to do that. I used to purposefully feed them kids. I'd see them come to school. They looked so hungry. They looked so hungry and so poorly dressed. And such cold weather and so poorly dressed. Some of them barely had a sweater to put on. I used to pity them. I used to hunt for clothes and everything to give them. Clothes, dress them up before they left. And I used to give them hot soup for dinner. I used to make all the soup myself. I fed all those children. I think that made my attendance a lot better *[laughter]*. I had good, attendance. Well, they were so tired looking as if they never had a night's rest. Oh they were poor kids.

*Sylvia made many efforts to teach her students as she had not been taught and to explain things to them so they understood rather than have them store incomprehensible information learned by rote.* When I got teaching school I says look, we're going to learn something here. I says you see now I put there and put nothing there. I never, ever knew where that "zero" come from. Until I got to ten and I saw that "zero," and I thought where did that come from? I never knew *[why]* it was up there. Well, I thought that's an awful wrong this to do. Teach me all them things and not let me know where that come from 'till I get here. And I ask where that come from and they wouldn't be able to tell me. So when I taught, I taught one times nothing was nothing. One times one is one. One

times two is two and I used to make them get some stones and bricks and everything and show me that picture. They had to see it. Yeah, let them find out themselves in lots of things. Same as them tables. Did I ever make them go over them tables. My tables, when I went to school, I had to just two times two; two times, two, two, two, two back and forth. I had to go up and down just as fast like that. Backwards and frontwards and I didn't know a thing about what I was doing. Just all I had to go like that. They didn't mean a thing to me.

Well when I taught them, I says look, we're going to go over things. I got stones and bricks and everything. Stones a little first. Put two there—that's two times one. And I'd put one there. Now I says I got two there and I want to put the answer right there. And I says there's one there. And I says there's two there. Now how are we going to get that answer over here? I says you know that tells you something I says. They talk. They're talking to you. It's two times one is two. I says you got to put another there to make the same as that. I says there you go. And it's the same for three, four and right straight down. Every one. Anyway all at once they knew it. They knew it forever. And when they come to an exam, they can figure it out themselves if they remembered. They could see it. That's what I used to make them do. That's the way I taught. I made them see things themselves. And I thought that's the way you should teach. And they didn't have to remember nothing. They looked at how it worked, how it worked. *I asked Sylvia if she remembered any student or students in particular.* I remember nearly all of them. They still come to me. Come to me and show me their babies now. They were never going to get married. I used to tease them once in a while—well, when you get married. **I'm not going to get married! I'm not going to get married!** Now they come bringing their babies. I says oh, you were never going to get married [*laughter*]. They remember me yet.

It's quite a lot of them come to me every year when they come home. They're working away out in the States. And when they come home they see me. They, they still remember their school days *[laughter]*.

*Sylvia was forced to retire from teaching in nineteen sixty-four because of ill health. Over her teaching career, Sylvia specialized in the primary classes and in teaching the mentally challenged. And so when I retired I gave a speech. And Bob Nixon was at my retirement, my retirement dinner. And his wife was there—both high school teachers. They asked me to speak. So I spoke. And I says I'm going to tell you first of all, I says, [what] I've learned to teach from the first teacher that was ever here, I says. Taught me how to teach [laughter]. I told them exactly everything and I told them Jesus Christ was a first man that taught us different things and told us things. I says He's the best teacher that I ever learned to teach from. And when I finished my speech, I had them say the Lord's Prayer. Bob Nixon was so surprised. He didn't know what to say. He came up. He says Sylvia, where do you get that knowledge? I says I don't get it no place. It's common sense, I says. I just use common sense, I says. I don't get no knowledge no place [laughter]. From then on every time he says you want to know anything about the Indians, just go to Sylvia. I don't know how many people he sent to me.*

*About her very private life, Sylvia tells of her first serious beau, the one with whom she went for eight years. And he, he stepped out on me and that was it. And I told him, I says well, there's only one thing for us to say. I says I'm not going to say anything, I says. But there's one word we've got to say. He says what's that? I says goodbye. I asked had there been any discussion over their eight-year relationship of marriage. He did want me to get married when I was in school. But I didn't have a job and he didn't have a home. And I says to him that's a fine time for ask me to marry you. I says no. I*

says I can't marry you at this time, I says. What are we going to do? What are we going to marry for? I says I haven't got a job. I don't make a dollar. I says what have you got? I says. You can't move in with your people, I says. I don't want you moving in with mine either. I says think about it. It's not time to talk that stuff to me, I says. Well, just forget that *[laughter]*.

*On April eighth, nineteen forty-four, after two years of courtship, Sylvia married Wilson Sandy in the Mohawk Chapel in Brantford. I'm the only one dad gave away. He didn't give none of his other daughters, just me. Oh, I had a good wedding. A big wedding. I did it purposely because I told Phyllis I was going to get married and, and she says who are you marrying? I told her. And she says what?!?!?! A Longhouse man? You gonna marry a Longhouse man? What are you going to marry a Longhouse man for? she says. With all your education, you gonna marry a Longhouse man *[laughter]*? Sylvia, coming from an "up above family" [Christian and educated] was marrying a man from a "down below" family [Traditional and not strong proponents of mainstream education]. While Sylvia's choice of a marriage partner was not scandalous, it was astounding.*

*Sylvia confided to me later that she had a big wedding so that everyone could get a good look at her new husband. About Wilson, Sylvia says he stayed Longhouse. We got married in a church *[laughter]*. Well when we come back, none of his people came to our wedding; his uncles and aunts, they didn't come. They didn't believe in it. Wilson's family had a gathering after they returned from their honeymoon. And so an old man said to me, you didn't marry. He says you're not married. So he says we've got to perform a service here. So he, they married us there *[laughter]*. So I *[got]* doubly married. Yeah, I was doubly married. Yup, really married. We had a good life for twenty-four years. We were*

planning for our twenty-fifty wedding anniversary and he died one month away from our twenty-fifth anniversary.

*Sylvia has her wedding photo sitting out in the living room. I brought it over to the table and commented on her dress and her bouquet of red roses. I got that in Robertson's in Hamilton. It was white satin. It had panels of lace down on the [front] and tipped sleeves and everything. Beautiful. I asked Sylvia if it was a double-ring ceremony. She laughed and said no, I never bought him no ring. Never tied him up. I let him go loose. About Wilson's people she said Pat's [Wilson's father] mother was Emma Lickers. She was a Lickers. Emma flickers. And she married a Dave Longfish. A Dave Longfish was a Frenchman what come here on a boat and got off his boat [on] the river there and walked in and called himself Dave Longfish. Well, there was a Dave Longfish already. And I guess he heard the name, so he called himself Dave Longfish. He was a Frenchman. And he married this Emma Lickers. And that was Pat's mother and dad. Well that, the Indian fellow who was [the original] Dave Longfish stole a horse. And they went down and they found out it was Longfish who stole the horse. So they took this Dave Longfish that was Pat's father for taking the horse. And they had a court in Willow Grove. Court case was held there. And the fellow that was the judge was Sandy Stewart. Sandy Stewart was the judge. So they had the court case and they found out that they had the wrong man. So, ending the court, the judge says well, it's never [to] happen again. He said I'll fix it so it won't happen again, he says. I'm going to give you my first name. Your name, it'll be Dave Sandy. That's how that happened and they called them Sandys. Them Sandys aren't Indian at all. They're French people. That's what happened to them. That's where they came from. They're not Native at all. Sylvia's proclaiming the Sandy family's origins to not be of our people and ignoring their maternal Native origins, is another indication of*

*how the mainstream patrilineal kinship system has supplanted the Haudenosaunee matrilineal system. Yet, at least in Pat's and Wilson's generations, the Cayuga language was retained. Sylvia claims Wilson could speak all six of the Confederacy languages. Today, the surname Sandy is recognized as a typical Six Nations Territory name. I queried Sylvia as to the real name of Pat's father. They never, ever knew what his name was. Always called him Dave Longfish. Pat used to call me jin-oot-toota. He says you should be named jin-oot-toota [probably Cayuga]—means fish. He says you should be called jin-oot-toota. Well from what you've said, Wilson's father had a good sense of humour and always teasing. Sounds like he really liked you, Sylvia. Oh he used to call me, he says I was his "good stuff." And I says yes, anybody's got to be good stuff to marry your man [laughter]. I got to be good stuff. He'd always call me Good Stuff.<sup>16</sup>*

*About her father-in-law, Sylvia has only the highest praise. He was a good farmer. Oh, he was a good farmer! Did he ever look after his little pigs. The little pigs you know, when they come, they got black teeth and when they [are] sucking the old sow, them black teeth used to hurt the old sow. And he used to cut them black teeth off. He cut them all off. And he used to build shelter for where the pigs lived. He'd build an elevator, like a step up. He used to put in an elevator up there and he used to put straw all on there, good straw. And he says the pig is the cleanest animal they got, he says. All them pigs would go up there and sleep. They'd never step in mud and that's where they were. But he says it's because people neglected them and don't fix anything. But he says they'd always go up in that platform and sleep on there. He used to say that animal is the cleanest thing, cleanest animal there are. And he had a pet pig. One of them pigs was his*

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<sup>16</sup> From my understanding the expression "good stuff" is a term of endearment, signifying strong approval. "Good stuff," in today's vernacular, is synonymous with "having the right stuff." Sylvia has called me her "good stuff" on occasion.

friend. And they had to get rid of it because it got, he got so he'd *[the pig]* just fight if anybody just touched him *[Pat]*. Oh, that pig defended him. Yeah, they had to get rid of it. Oh he missed his pig. Oh, he liked his pig. He cried when they got rid of his pig.

*Sylvia told several stories featuring Pat Sandy's sense of humour. We moved a stove over from the old place in there where Wilson and I lived, when we moved into that house. And so his father and I had to carry that stove back through this field. And we're [laughter] going through the field and every little while I'd say [Sylvia whispers] Damn! Damn! Damn! Damn! I'd get so tired lifting that stove. All right, he says, all right. A few more "damns" and we'll soon be there [laughter].*

Now there was a neighbour of ours, he was very much against illegitimate children. Anybody who had an illegitimate child he thought was a terrible thing. And ah, *[laughter]*, he wouldn't put them on the list. He wouldn't put them on our list. He used to fight everything if anybody come in with an illegitimate child. he wouldn't put them on the list.<sup>17</sup> So one day the fair was on here in Ohsweken and they went to the fair. I didn't go. I stayed home and I did my housework and they went to the fair. Well, next morning I got up and I said to him *[her father-in-law]*, well how did you like the fair? Very good he says. He says I saw our neighbour and he says he was carrying his grandchild around, he says. Oh he come and showed me his nice little girl, his grandchild. He's so proud of his grandchild. I says, why I says, he's the one who fights, I says. That's an illegitimate kid he's got. What's he carrying it around for? I says. He's always fighting about illegitimate kids. What's he carrying it around for? I says. Well he says, Pat says, he can't help himself. I says why? he says because she's Jesus, he said. I said Jesus? I says how come

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<sup>17</sup> Births, deaths and marriages had to be registered on the appropriate band list with the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa. An unregistered birth denied that individual his or her Indian status.



you call her Jesus? He says he never had no father *[laughter]*.

*About Wilson's mother, Sylvia said Wilson's mother was Lenora Hill. He [Pat Sandy, Wilson's father] married a Hill here and she died at his [Wilson's] birth. And then his father went to work and married again to a Libby Longboat and then she had a baby and it was stillborn. And he says we'll go see if I can't get my son, he says. I'll find you a baby. He come up and he asks Mrs. Hill [Lenora's mother, the baby's maternal grandmother] could he take his boy?<sup>18</sup> And he [Pat, Wilson's father] took his boy, the baby. And he took him back. He says here. Here's your baby. And he never, ever told him [Wilson] that that wasn't his mother. He grew up and always thinking that that's his mother all the time. And she was good to him. Oh she liked him. She never had no more children herself. She just had him. He was an only child.*

*I inquired if Wilson ever discovered the identity of his birth mother. Yes, after we were married. He had to go in the hospital. He had a double hernia. Well, he laid in the hospital there for a while and one day a woman came in—that was Mildred Hunter's mother. She come in and she happened to go and see somebody in the hospital. And then she asked who was in that next bed there. And they told her that was Wilson Sandy. O-o-o-o-h, she says, that's my nephew. I must go and talk to him. That's the first time he ever met her. That was his aunt, his Aunt Beatrice and ah, she told him who he was. She says you never see your mother? He says no. She says I got a picture. I'll bring it to you, she says. You'll see your mother. So in a couple of days she come back and she gave*

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<sup>18</sup> In the traditional Haudenosaunee kinship system, paternity is a secondary consideration. An individual's maternal relations (*ohwachira*) take precedence over paternal relatives (*agadoni*). An individual's father was regarded as the husband of her or his mother. Usually, when a mother died, her family assumed responsibility for her children. Upon the death of my grandfather's mother, Sylvia's father took responsibility for most of his brother's children. The two youngest—Albert, age four and Seymour, age two—were taken in by the McNaughtons, my grandfather's *ohwachira* relatives.

him this picture. So when he came out of the hospital one day, he says to me I got something, he says. I says what have you got? He says I'll show ya. He says that's my mother—showed me a picture. He says I'm going to take it and put it in my pocket and tomorrow morning I'm going to ask dad who that is. After we had breakfast he says, I'll ask him who that is. After [we] had breakfast, they were setting there talking and all at once he pulled out the picture. He says dad, I want you to tell me who this is. His dad looked at him, looked at the picture—kinda, kinda, tears came to eye. He says that's your mother. First time he knew his mother. He was about twenty-eight, twenty-nine years old. You know, he felt so bad. He didn't know his mother. And he didn't know how to take it. To think he had this one for his mother and there's another. His mother's not there. And he says I don't know. Well, I says, you just leave things as they are, I says. She's always been a mother to you. Leave her as your mother. I says you don't know no other mother, I says. Just keep calling her mother just as you always did. I says you had a good mother and I says you were lucky you got a good mother to look after you, I says. And she's been very good to you. And she [Wilson's step-mother], she owned the farm next to Pat. And she give him [Wilson] that farm. *She willed Wilson her farm.*

Oh she [Wilson's step-mother] was stingy of him. O-o-o-o-h! [Wilson] went away to work in the States, you know, after he got married. And when he went away to work, she just cried and cried and she'd wipe her eyes—she was black and blue on both sides of her eyes, wiping her eyes from crying. And Pat says to me, you'd better bring him home! He says Libby can't stop crying, he says. I says I can't bring him home. He's a man. I didn't put him over there. And he [Pat] says well, he must have went out on account of you. Well, I says, he'll come back. Don't be like that, I says. He's got to make a living, I says. And he'll be home this weekend. So [Wilson] came home and he got a

talking to. *[Wilson's father]* says you, you gotta stay at home, he says. I can't put up with this, he says. Libby won't stop crying. So he came back and he didn't go to the States<sup>19</sup> anywhere. But if I would have said to him, come on, let's go to the States, he would have gone in a minute. But I didn't like the States. I didn't like it. I didn't like it over there at all. Never, never did. I wouldn't go. So he stayed here and worked. *Then, as now, economic conditions within the Native territories are insufficient to allow its citizens to remain at home and find employment. Many residents, while living in the territory, work outside. Others simply move elsewhere, following the employment opportunities and make periodic visits "home." At any one time up to one third of the population of Six Nations Territory is elsewhere.*

*Sylvia told me the story of how she and Wilson met.* Well, I used to drive down to see Marge *[one of Sylvia's sisters]* every day. And this fellow used to be at the corner. Everyday this fellow was at the corner with his bicycle. And I'd go by and he ah *[Sylvia waves]*. And I'd drive right on by. There was another fellow on number fifty-four highway. He was another one that was out every day. He'd come just when I was going

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<sup>19</sup> Jay Treaty, 1794, was originally known as the Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation between Great Britain and the United States of America. Its purpose was to settle disputes between the two countries which arose in the aftermath of the American Revolution, 1776-1783. By the Treaty of Versailles, 1783, which concluded the hostilities, Britain was to surrender control of posts in the US interior, as well as the area in the north-west which included Detroit, Niagara and Michilimachinac. With the surrender of these posts, Six Nations sovereignty over these lands was also forfeit. Britain, citing the failure of the Americans to pay reparations to the Loyalists for losses sustained in the Revolution, refused to abandon these territories. The purpose of the Jay Treaty is stated as "to terminate their differences in such a manner, as without reference to the Merits of Their respective Complaints and Pretensions, may be the best calculated to produce mutual satisfaction and good understanding" (Hawley 1990:19). The provisions of the treaty provided for a commission to formalize the international border between the two parties and to regulate trade. Article 3, specific to the international boundary line, agrees that "it shall at all Times be free to His Majesty's Subject, and to the Citizens of the United States, *and also to the Indians dwelling on either side of the said Boundary Line...*" (Ibid., italics added). While guaranteeing individuals liberty to pass back and forth freely across the border, any non-personal goods carried by individuals were subject to duties.

out. And I had these two guys when I was on my way home. And I thought who in the dickens are they waving to me? I don't know them. And I'd go on there. So one day I said to Marge, I said, you know, I think I've got a boyfriend. She says what do you mean? I says well, every day when I come by that bridge, I says, there's a guy down there waves at me every time. Every time I come by there. She says it wouldn't be Wilson Sandy? I don't know who it is, I says, but boy, I got a regular boyfriend. And same as cross the river *[on the north side of the Grand]*. I says I got another there. Every, every time *[I go]* these guys *[wave]*. They were all alone, always all alone too. The fellow over the river, he had a truck. Just before I come out, he gets on the road. I guess he was a nowhere ride. He'd meet me on the road and he's always *[Sylvia waves her hand]*. And I thought ... that was one of the Douglas boys. I didn't know who it was or anything, either. Didn't know his name, same as this fellow. I didn't know his name.

*I observed that it sounded as if Sylvia had all kinds of men sweet on her. Yeah.* And I never used to pay no attention to them. So one day, we had a banquet there. The teachers had a banquet. And I was the president of the teachers' organization, so I got this ticket to go to the banquet. Banquet and dance. So I went to the banquet and I met Dr. Tom up there—Dr. Tom Jamieson, my cousin. He's a medical doctor. So I says oh, I'm glad to see you. He says I'm glad to see you. Now I've got somebody to be with, he says. He says I got to go away early, he says. I says I got to go early, too, I says. I got a bridge party waiting for me. I says I'm going to a bridge party, I says. But I sent my partner on, my boyfriend that's *[who]* I'm supposed to go with tonight. I told him to go ahead and be there and I'll come later. So I told Dr. Tom, I says I got to get out of here before eight o'clock, I says. I got *[to]* be at a bridge party by eight o'clock. He says well, I've got to get out of here too. Well, I says I'll play sick and you take me out *[laughter]*.

They called our dinner early, about a half hour earlier. So they got finished half an hour earlier. So they said now, we'll get ready for the dance. So him and I got out that way. But they were getting ready for the dance. Well then, I had a brand-new coat, green coat—spring you know. And I had my ticket in my pocket. And when I was going across, just across the field there from the hall over to my car, I put my hand in my pocket and I says o-o-o-h, this darn ticket, I says. Gee whiz, I says. I didn't hand it in. I says well, if I see somebody I'll give it to them and tell them to go in and enjoy the dance. I says I've had the supper, they can enjoy the dance. I give them free admission into the hall.

I never met a soul! I went right out to my car and never met a soul. And I thought now isn't that funny? It wouldn't matter if it was a girl or boy. I'd have given it to them. I got in the car and I thought, oh gee! I wished I'd see somebody. Just then a car pulled up. There was two fellows and two girls in that car. And the fellow, one fellow got out and went around and talked to the fellow that was driving. And I hollered at him. I said hey you, come here. And he didn't come. And I put my hand down. I said why can't he come? And I'd give him this ticket. And I hollered, hey you, come here, I says. One fellow said to him I guess that somebody's calling you. Why don't you go and see what she wants? he says. So he come over to see what I want. I says are you going to the dance? He says yes. I says here's a ticket. I says now you can get in free with this ticket and you have a good time. Go ahead, I says. So he took the ticket. He went. I didn't know who he was [*laughter*]. I didn't know that he was the guy that was waving.

And I gave him the ticket. Well, come Monday night at the school at four o'clock, a knock came at the door and I went to the door and there was this fellow. And I says oh, how'd you do? I says. I says you're the fellow I give the ticket to. I thought maybe he

had trouble over that ticket. And I didn't like it *[the thought of any trouble over the ticket]* so, I says you're the fellow I give the ticket to. Yes he says. I says did you have a good time? I says did you have any trouble with it? He says oh no, no, no, he says. I had a good time, he says. I had a real good time. I says that's good, I'm glad you did. And that was all. He thanked me and I thought my, he's a nice fellow to come and thank me. Thank me again for the ticket. The next night or two, there he was again. I thought oh-oh. I thought this is no thank you again *[laughter]*. I commented to Sylvia that he must have had a really good time to have come and thanked her again. He sure must have danced hard. So I never said nothing anyway. I saw him again and then he'd just, well, he'd started to visit me.

*Some time later during her school's baseball game with another school, Sylvia remembers* the young fellows come to the school to watch the kids play. And this fellow came to school too to watch them play. And they were all stretched out, laying on the ground, you know, near the team. The boys were all laying down there. So the guy umpired the game and then he got tired so I, he called me. I went behind and I umpired a couple games. So we won the game, anyway. We won out. We beat Number Nine School. So the children, they were ready to go home after that, 'cause this was after four, see? So I had to go home too. So I got in a hurry. So I was in a hurry and I left right away and went across like that ways. And when I come across that way, all these young fellows there, this one fellow lift up his head, almost sat right up and I looked at him. I just glanced at him and I went on. I never bothered. And I went on home. It was this fellow that was always meeting me at the bridge.

*Wilson's courtship of Sylvia began sometime in nineteen forty-two, during the Second World War.* So they gave out these papers that they all had to fill in for their boys

there—anybody. They were trying to conscript the boys to go to war. And they sent them to all the schools for us to give out to the families that had a young man. They wanted to get their names and everything, see? So I gave out mine on Friday night. And he [Wilson] was one that he had to give to his dad, see? He had to sign up who he was and everything for his dad. And so they all went home with those papers. And I says you bring these back Monday morning, I says. I've got to hand them back in, I says. They've got to go back where they came from. So, I says you make sure you bring those papers back. I don't want one missing. So, all the kids brought their paper back. And one was missing. And I says where's this one that's missing? Oh they says, he [Wilson] says he's bringing it up. He hadn't filled it out yet. He'll bring it up after while. So after while, sure enough, he did bring that paper filled out. And I read it over and I says that's all right.

And he had a car and he says well, I'm in a hurry. I have to go to Hagersville, he says. And I needed some milk. I needed butter and I needed something else. I asked him, well, if you're going to Hagersville, would you mind buying this and that? I says. I haven't got them here. And I said my car isn't working like it should. So he thought. Well, he says, I think it would be better if you put on your coat and hat and you go and get it. Come with me and you can go and get what you want yourself, he says, 'cause I'm in a hurry. I got to get back. My dad has got to have the car, he says. He's working in Hamilton, he says. He works at the ammunition factory. He's got to go to work at the ammunition factory. He's got to be down there, he says. I got to get right back. So, he says, I don't have much time to get around any more than what I have to get for us. All right, I says. He says well, you get your coat and hat and you might as well come and get what you want and I'll bring you back. I'll drop you off he says. So I thought that was all right. So I went with him. And I got what I wanted and he got what he wanted and we

come right back, right straight. And we got back to the school. I got my stuff ready to go out. He says why can't I come and see you? I says well, I don't know, I says. I don't think I care to have anybody come and see me. Well, he says, that's no reason why we shouldn't be friends. Well, I says, I don't see anything wrong about that either. He says can't I come and see you one of these nights? I says well, if you have time, I says. I'm pretty busy all the time, I says. I got a lot of work to do. A lot of homework I've got to do all the time, I says. Got to get all this school work ready for the next day and I'm really busy. Well, he says, well, that's all right, he says. I won't stay long. I says all right. So that was it. He went. The next night he come. He only stayed about ten minutes, then away he went. Next time he come, he stayed a little longer, a little longer, a little longer—that's why I couldn't get rid of him *[laughter]*. Ah, dear. And then he asked me to go out with him to Hamilton and I went to Hamilton with him.

*By my calculations, there was at least a decade difference in their ages. I questioned Sylvia about the age difference.* Well, that's what he said when he asked me to be his friend. I showed him my birth certificate. I says look, I'm too old for you, I says. Oh that makes no difference, he says. That don't make any difference he said. No harm in us being friends. Well, I don't see nothing wrong with that either, but that's about it. That's about all I want it to be. *Sylvia's sister Marge and Marge's mother-in-law* got after him. One day he went—her mother-in-law kept a store. And he happened to come in the store when Marge was there. And they said to him, what are you doing with that old woman for? What you want to see *[her]*, so old for you? What you want to go with her? They got after him for going, coming to see me. And *[laughter]* when Marge got after him, he let them talk and talk and then he, he looked at them. Well, he says, she's got her own teeth anyway. And he walked out. She's still got her own teeth *[laughter]*. They had



**false teeth. And he walked out the door. But he wouldn't stop coming to see me.**

**And then I want him to meet my dad. I says you come over and have supper with us and you meet my dad, I says. I want you to meet my dad. I told dad. I says, dad, I got a boyfriend. I want your opinion about him. Bring him over, he says. I'll tell you. So I brought him over. And he had supper with us. After supper, after he'd gone home I said, well dad, what you think of him? He says if it suits the wearer, never mind the starrer. Whatever suits the wearer, he says, never mind the starrer [laughter]. Well, I thought, well dad approved of you all right. Dad liked him. Dad liked him right from the start. He liked him. He really took to Wilson. He took him as his own son. Wilson come there afterwards when we got married. He'd says dad, let's go here. And pa right away put on his coat and hat and go with him. He always did that. And he'd always take dad out for a ride or something whenever we got there. And I liked that, I tell you. He looked after pa too.**

*So Sylvia and Wilson were married despite their respective families' misgivings and objections. As the wearer, Sylvia had a big wedding and she confides that since everybody was talking, grumbling about me going to marry a Longhouse guy and they were all [talking], as if he were some funny object. And I thought gee whiz, I'm going to let them see him right from the beginning and Sylvia cackled and snorted with glee. On their honeymoon, Sylvia and Wilson visited my grandfather, Claude, in Sarnia and spent several days with him.*

*About their religiously mixed marriage, I asked Sylvia if there were any problems about religion. I received a resounding NO! And I never went to Longhouse though. I went with him once, though, the Longhouse and that was enough. I didn't go no more. When I asked why, she explained well, I don't know. I didn't believe. I didn't like the way I saw what was going on in the Longhouse. They went on dancing, dance, dance, dancing.*

I thought what goes on? What kind of religion is that? I couldn't go there no more. I thought *[if]* that's what they do, I don't want to see them *[laughter]*. And I don't go and I never went.

*Physically, Wilson was not robust. He died at age forty-nine of spinal meningitis, one month short of celebrating their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. Sylvia told many side-splitting, roll-on-the-floor-and-gasp-for-air stories about her life with Wilson. Like his father, Pat, Wilson could be termed as "being a card." Wilson built their house in Ohsweken. Yeah, him and Emerson Green. He did all the work. Everything. I designed it. This is my design. I designed everything and he did all the work. He did excellent. The windows are just perfect. He sealed them all really good and the door *[is]* hung good. It's hard work to hang a door. He did all the work. He did a lot of good work. His dad had taught him to do carpenter work. He was exacting and perfect. He's built this house just perfect. It's about four boards thick. Four boards thick, the walls. That's why it's so solid.*

And I had a General<sup>20</sup> boy make my cupboards. I had him make the cupboards. They're custom-made. I didn't like it at home. We always had every door, every room was closed up with a door. And I used to think why can't I go all over? I thought when I get a house, I'm going to go all over. Everybody's surprised when they come in here. They think this house is little. They get in here, there's lots of room. *Sylvia's ideas of an open concept design accommodate her wheelchair. She is able to be self-sufficient and this self-efficacy enables her to remain in her own home despite pressures from her family and the health authorities to relocate to the Iroquois Lodge, the Elders' home at Ohsweken.*

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<sup>20</sup> General is a common surname on Six Nations Territory. Many community leaders have come from the General family, the best known being Levi General (*Deskaheh*), who is also a descendant of Mary Jemison.

*During the construction of her house was the only time in her life that Sylvia saw the inside of a beer store. I was in town getting my stuff. I says I'll take them a case of beer home 'cause they're working so hard. So I could have gone out to Erie Avenue [in Brantford]. I could have gone in there and get the beer there. And I didn't want to go in there because a lot of our people go back and forth and go in there. And I thought I don't want nobody to see me, so I went 'way over on Grey Street to get a case of beer. I went in there. I pulled up in there and I went in. I just opened the door and he says HELLO, MRS. SANDY [laughter]!!!! One of our teachers that was teaching down here [on Six Nations Territory] was working in there [Brantford] during the summer [laughter] and it was him that said that. I got caught. I nearly fell through that door! O-o-o-o-h dear. I, I still had a hold of the handle. HELLO, MRS. SANDY [laughter]!!!!*

Well, I didn't know him too well, anyways. He was one of the teachers from here—Bill Taylor. Well, I went in and he says what can I do for you? Well, I says, I got a couple of boys working awful hard building me a house, I says. And they're so tired. I thought I'd better get them a cold drink. So he says what would you like? I says well, what's a good cold drink? I forget what he told me, what beer he told me. I says all right, give me that one. I took the one he said anyway. And he put it in my car. I didn't know what to buy, no [laughter]. Ask[ed] him what kind. He knows. So that's the kind. I bought that. I never saw Wilson and Emerson so glad to see anybody in their life [laughter]. When I got home I told them here, have a cold drink [laughter]. And they sure did enjoy that. Oh did they! Oh, I had to get them something.

*Sylvia did not "speak Indian," but Wilson did. He [knew] all the languages. Oh yeah, he could speak every one of them—Cayuga, Mohawk and Onondaga, Seneca,*

Oneida, he could speak all the languages [*of the Six Nations Confederacy*]. But not Tuscarora? Yes, he spoke all the languages. He was very fluent in the native languages. Really fluent. *Speaking about her teaching days and having to deal with little- or non-English speaking students*, yeah, I sure learned from them then. They taught me a lot, a lot of the words that I wouldn't know otherwise. Now Wilson used to, he and one other fellow used to, every time they met one another, they'd says ... ah ... what's it now? What the word they used to say? ... M-m-m-m, m-m-m-m. I have to think what ... Ge-nen-ee-oot ... Hai! Gen-nen-ee-oot. They used to say hai gen-nen-ee-oot. Well, "hai" in Cayuga is like "hello," see? And so they, they [*Wilson and this particular friend*] always raced to see each to say that. And they'd be greeting [*one another*]. Every time they'd meet, they'd say that. So I just left it. When I was keeping store one day and this fellow came in and Wilson wasn't there. But his Uncle Charlie was there helping me. And this fellow came in and, before he, as soon as he opened the door, I hollered Hai! Gen-nen-ee-oot! [*Sylvia cackles delightedly*]. And Charlie looked at me. Charlie just said [*Sylvia mimes a surprised and horror-filled look*] and held his breath and that fellow come in and never said "hi." He never said that after. He just got what he wanted and went out. And I look at Charlie. I thought what's he cool for? I says what's the matter with you? He says you'd better not talk Indian no more.

He says do you know what you said? Well, I said, I guess I greeted him like Wilson does, I says. Like Wilson does. He says do you know the meaning of it? Well, I says, it's "hello," isn't it? I says hello to him. That's his name. That must be his Indian name. He says Ho! Ho! Ho! [*Sylvia imitates Santa holding his belly and laughing*]. He went just like that I [*laughter*]. And, and that fellow didn't know which way to turn. He looked at [*rest of sentence is lost in Sylvia's laughter*]. He says you know what you said?

I says well, I said hello, I says. Yes, he says, you said hello all right. He says you said hello big dick. He says you'd better stop talking *[another sentence is lost in in Sylvia's laughter]*. That kept me quiet for a long time.

*Several weeks later, I asked Sylvia what her Indian name was. She was able to write it out for me. Gee juh guh noh awana. That means Floating Flower. Sylvia's maternal grandmother gave her that name. That means the water draws me. I, I can't look at water. If I look at water, I want to put my head right under. Yeah, water draws me terrible. I'm not a water lily. You pick a flower and you throw it in the water and that floats. That's me [laughter]. It's got to stay up. I guess that's why I want to go under. Sylvia starts to give the Indian names of her brothers and sisters. I ask if my grandfather ever had an Indian name. I don't think so. I don't think he ever got a name. Wilson's name was Dun-won-hine-doh. I asked what Wilson's name meant and Sylvia said she didn't know. I offered up "Big Joker" as its meaning and we laughed. I guess that what it means, all right. That bugger of mine [laughter]! I thought I was doing a good thing. I thought that I was doing something smart. Why Wilson and that young Harrison used to always meet each other. And they'd always race to see who could say it first [we are still laughing]. And naturally, I thought they were trying to say "hello" in a nice way, you know [we explode into more laughter].*

They'd, they, they'd go to meet they'd and one person would holler Hai, Gen-ee-oot, you know. And I'd, they, the guy would holler at him sometimes, Hai! Gen-ee-oot and then, then I'd just laugh and never said nothing. I never asked Wilson what it meant or anything. He wouldn't have told me right, anyway. And this guy come into the store and Wilson wasn't there, but his Uncle Charlie was with me. And Charlie could understand Indian and everything. And this fellow come *[in]*. I thought oh, going to beat him this

time. I'm going to beat him. He got into the store and I—Hai! Gen-ee-oot! Charlie was *[Sylvia mimes being breathless from shock]*. He was *[laughter]* and he was. Harrison came in—I'll have a pack of cigarettes, he says and I give him his pack of cigarettes and then he went right out. And I looked at Charlie. What's the matter? And Charlie burst out laughing. He says I'd run back *[out]*, he says. I wouldn't even have gotten a pack of cigarettes, he says. I would have run out.

I says why? He says do you know what you said to him? I says I just answered him like Wilson answers him, I says. When you meet each other, I says, isn't that hello? And Charlie just laughed out loud. He just laughed out loud. He was just doubled *[over]*, doubled *[over]* laugh*[ing]*. You don't know what you said? I says no. He says you says "hello big dick" *[and Sylvia cackles]*. Charlie nearly died. He says you'd better not talk Indian, he says. Now you see why I can't talk Indian. He didn't tell me right. Poor Harrison! He got out of that store so fast. And I wondered why he went so fast out of the store and didn't buy anything else. He just says I'll have a pack of cigarettes, he says. He didn't even, he didn't even repeat what I says *[another explosion of laughter]*.

Oh that Wilson! He had a big time teaching me Indian. And one morning I said to his mother, his step-mother. You know, that's all she knew was Indian. She could hardly talk English. And so I says I know quite a bit of Indian, you know. And she says oh? And I started telling her what Wilson would tell me. Ah! Everything I said anything she'd go Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! And I looked at her and I says now what do I mean? She says you'd better stop. Don't you talk like that no more she says *[and we start to laugh uproariously again]*. And she scolded Wilson. She got after him. Well then, I was afraid to listen to anything he told me after that. I was afraid for him to tell me anything. I wouldn't listen to him anything he wanted to tell me Indian.

*Wilson died* a month away from his fiftieth birthday. He always said an Indian doesn't have to do anything. An Indian can do as he likes, he says until *[he or she is]* fifty. Until he's fifty years old, he says. That's when he *[is]* grown up, he says. Oh he was funny! Grown up? I says. I often says to him why don't you grow up? Wait 'til I'm fifty, he'd say. Wait 'til I'm fifty.

My husband was working at Cox's in Brantford and they'd only get started and they'd lay off. And he was laid off more than working. So I says to him what kind of job you got? I says you're laid off more than work, I says. I'll get you a job and you won't never get laid off. So *[after]* that we went and rented that store down below at that corner. Mrs. Longboat had that store. She couldn't run it 'cause she was all alone. So I went and asked her would she rent her store to us. So she did. She rented us the store anyway. And I put him in there. And he made a very good storekeeper. And one weekend we took in over a thousand dollars and that went to his head. And of course, I let him handle a lot of the money, you know. And then he went to Brantford and I kept store and everything. And he got in touch with the Brantford guys who worked in that factory. Worked in a factory there, made iron. Did work on iron stuff and he got friends there and after work the friend invited him out to go to the hotel.

*I offered that I thought Wilson was Longhouse and that he didn't drink alcohol.* It didn't make any difference when he got with these guys. He went and drank. And that's what happened. He started to drink. And it went to his head. Well, I never bothered him and his money and he never bothered me and my money. We both ran our own business. So that was the way we got on. And he got so he didn't come home. Wouldn't come home 'til midnight sometimes and finally he didn't come home all night. That was no good at all. But I never complained. I let him go ahead. I just let him do as he wanted. I didn't

disturb him. And so I told him, I told him one day, I says look here, I says, this is no good what you're doing, I says. I know all about what you're doing, I says. And so from now on, we're not husband and wife, I says. We're living together, but you go your way and I'll go mine. *I asked Sylvia if he was stepping out on her. Yeah, he was doing that too. Yeah. So I let him go. But I went too. I went to the horse races every day. I'd walk to the highway, get on the bus and go. Go to Hamilton and get on the other bus and go to Toronto. I spent all my time at the horse races. And did I ever make money [laughter]!*

*I asked Sylvia if she ever regretted not accepting her first marriage proposal instead of marrying Wilson. I'm glad I would not accept that. I'm glad I [didn't]. He's got the woman who's just like himself. He got the woman he's supposed to get. Oh no! I said goodbye to him and that was it. Ah dear, I had no desire for another friend. Two was enough. I got two jerks [laughter]. Two jerkers. I wasn't going to take a third one. Ah well, they're all the same. I figure they're all the same. I never bother. I never bothered anybody. Some of my old boyfriends kept coming back after Wilson died, but there, I wouldn't go with them no more.*

*Sylvia, off tape, stated with pride that, unlike the women of today, she did not go running home to her family when her marriage took a negative turn. She stayed and made the best of the situation. Sylvia and two of her sisters married Indian. The others married "out" or "off." When my parents died the farm came to me. But the boys all went to the white people. Vincent married a Swede. Elgin married an Italian. Wendell married an Irish girl. And Ben married an Irish girl—supposed to married. I don't think, I never heard of his wedding, but he was supposed to have been married to this Irish one. And ah, Jimmy married a French. Arnold never married. Arnold was a bachelor. So there they are. So one day dad says to me Sylvia, what's the matter with the Indians? They don't seem to be*



getting along good. I says pa, I says, set there. He sat there. I says put your own family all around the table. You'll see what's the matter with the Indians, I said. And he sat there and looked. He said I guess you're right.

*The Indian Act<sup>21</sup> and all such legislation attempted to encourage and then hasten the assimilation of the Native population into mainstream society. Assimilation was regarded as a humane solution to the problem of the backward Indigenous inhabitants who, it was felt, faced inevitable extinction. The inhumanity of the process has been acknowledged by the federal authorities and remains unforgotten by those reaping the "benefits" of assimilation. One of these "rewards" made confetti of the Haudenosaunee kinship system. Sylvia explains the problems of marrying "off," how marrying "off" affected own family and the conflict between matrilineal Haudenosaunee and patrilineal mainstream cultures. Well, our law is this. You see, the white woman has no clanship and*

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<sup>21</sup> *The Act of Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes in the Canadas, 1857*, offered enfranchisement or British citizenship. As subjects of the British Crown, Native peoples were given the benefits of British citizenship. As subjects of the Crown they were allowed to vote, purchase alcohol, own land and, in return be able to lay aside the burdens of their cultural identity and rights for themselves as well as their descendants. A decade later, the *British North America Act, 1867* (later renamed the *Constitution Act, 1867*) relegated to the Canadian Parliament responsibility for the Dominion's Aboriginal population and conferred exclusive authority in "all matters" concerned with "Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians" (*Constitution Act, 1867, Section 91, Subsection 24*). In 1876, *The Indian Act* was passed, providing the establishment of a separate government department for the exclusive purpose of handling all Indian matters. Sheila Jordan in her documentary, *The Forgotten Peoples*, a project of the Aboriginal People's Education and Economic Advancement Foundation, labels the *Indian Act* as "legalized genocide" in its "provisions for reserves, residential schools, loss of language, and the imposition of Christianity" (Jordan 1992). In fact, the *Indian Act* did not make provision for either residential schools or the imposition of the Christian religion. The *Indian Act* reflected the dominant culture's belief system and social structure that were incompatible to Native Culture. Residential schools and the ensuing loss of Native language and the imposition of Christianity were by-products of the Canadian government's total regulation of its Native population. In particular, the *Indian Act* was discriminatory to Native women. In 1985, the Canadian parliament enacted Bill C-31 that redressed the discrimination against Native women—in particular restoration of loss of status for those who had married non-registered or non-Native individuals and returned status to the children born of those unions. For those approximately three hundred Native individuals who had accepted enfranchisement (such as my grandfather), status was restored to their descendants.

so her children can't go on the *[band or membership]* list and she's supposed to take that man and keep him—that's her job! *When I likened her family around her father's table to a meeting of the United Nations, Sylvia laughingly agreed that it was indeed like a United Nations gathering.*

*Sylvia's stories about her and her siblings in adulthood stand in sharp contrast to her stories about their adolescence and her continuing-to-adulthood close connections to her parents. Dad, every Friday night, dad used to get the sleigh ready. Put a lot of straw in the sleigh and put blankets on top of that. Nice big straw bed. Put us in. Dump us all in there and we'd go to dances. We had house dances. Every Friday night we used to go to a dance. We'd look forward to that. And they made us dance and everything. At the dance, dad would holler at us. We would put our head down. He'd say get your head up *[laughter]*. Don't dance with your head down, he says. Lift your head up. Hold your head up. He was a good step dancer. Oh he could step dance good! And we looked to go with mother and dad. When we got older we wouldn't go alone. We didn't want to go alone. We would want them to be with us. They took us with them all the time. Oh we used to have good times! We used to have a party. Our party night was New Year's Eve. Every New Year's Eve we used to have an oyster supper and dance. That was how we spent New Year's Eve—oyster supper and then we danced. Everybody came and we had *[an]* oyster supper and then we danced. One, two o'clock *[laughter]*. We used to have fun. Responding to my comment about them being "party animals," Sylvia says oh, we were party animals. And we'd come to Dr. Davis' and he'd have a party. And we'd go to Fred Johnson's and they'd have a party. We'd go up to George Smith—dad's niece, have a party 'way up there. We'd go to Martin's. We had certain places to go every night. We'd just go and have a party.*

Sometimes mother and dad would go out alone. And we'd keep house. Us kids would keep house. And dad always had a hound dog. He had that cushion, that bed that you spread out, you know. There's two sections to it. You spread it out. And make a big bed there and us girls would have to lie at the top and the boys at the bottom and the hound dog in between. We'd all get in there and go to sleep. We'd all be sleeping. All at once we W-a-a-h! Wuff! Wuff! Wuff! Wuff! The dog would wake us up. We'd all sit up. What's the matter, Jim? Wuff! Wuff! Wuff! Wuff! He's back. And we'd be all, the boys be looking at the girls and the girls be looking at the boys *[laughter]*. We'd be sitting there and the hound dog between us. *So the hound dog was your babysitter?* Oh yeah. He looked after us. O-o-o-o-h no sir! Nobody's dare lay a hand on us. We always called him Old Jim. And then we'd everything and he'd stop barking and we'd all lay back down. Go right to sleep. Be sound asleep again. Wah! Wah! Wah! He'd get us up *[laughter]*. Mother and dad would come in four or five o'clock in the morning, come back from the dance. We used to have a lot of fun. But we enjoyed our mother and dad. O-o-o-o-h we enjoyed our mother and dad. And when we got older we didn't want to go to the parties without them. It just didn't seem to be the same. Didn't seem to be the same at all without our mother and dad.

*Sylvia was the child who remained the most connected to her parents and the farm. In the early thirties dad said to me, now you go hunt for [Jimmy]. Jimmy's [Sylvia's youngest brother, born in nineteen twenty-one] talking about how he owned the place and everything. And dad said to him, now look! You don't own this place right away, he says. All you own is that road, he says. Sixty-six feet wide and no end to it, he says. That's what you own. And Jimmy looked at him. Well, the next morning Jimmy got up early before any of us. The milkman come and got to put cream and everything. So he*

waited for the milkman. And when the milkman come he says will you give me a ride to town? Sure, he says. Hop in. So he hopped in and went to town. And he left home. He was going to go over where mother was. And the cream man took him to Caledonia. Past Caledonia. He got out in Caledonia. And he went to the Jones' bakeshop. He bought some buns. And he went down the highway. He was going to go where mother went.

And um *[Sylvia chuckles]* she was gone to Jordan *[between Beamsville and St. Catharines]*, see? And he was going to go to Jordan to hunt for her before he thought, no I better try and get a job. So he went down the highway. He went to a farmhouse. This one asked them if they wanted to hire anybody. We went *[to]* everyone. First that one, this one and that one, and this one and that one. He got about seven down the road to Whalley's. And he went in there and asked them do you want to hire a man? And they says, sure. Can you farm? You know how to farm? Oh sure, he says, I know how to farm. What do you do? He says I milk cows and do chores and everything. Oh, you good? I can do it, he says. We sell cream, he says. We sell about two cans of cream every week, he says. I help with all that, he says.

Well Mr. Whalley needed *[someone]*. He *[Jimmy]* says that's good, he says. Well looks like he'll hire me. So he had this bag of buns. And so the man said to him well, you go and see if the woman wants any help to help around the house or something. Maybe, maybe we can find a job for you, he says. So, he went in to talk to the woman and they says, yes, we need somebody to cut grass. We need somebody to hoe the garden and everything and look after vegetables, they said. Yes, sure, we can use you. So he went and told Mr. Whalley, yes he says, they can use me. Well, can you help milk cows, too? He says yes, I'll help milk the cows. I can milk he says *[Sylvia starts to chuckle again]*. Well, they hired him anyway.

Well, dad had sent me to hunt for Jimmy anyway—before mother come home. He was worried 'cause mother was going to come home on Saturday and no Jimmy. And he was worried. Jimmy went away because he [*their father, Venus*] told him all he owned was the road [*Sylvia chuckles again*]. So I hunted for him. I says I can't find him. I don't know where he is. So mother came home. No Jimmy. She says to dad where's my boy? Where's my baby? I don't know he says. He says he's got smart, shooting his mouth off telling Art and Jimmy how much he owned the farm and everything. He says I told him all he owned was the road. So I says, I guess he took the road, he says. I don't know where he is. O-o-o-o-h my mother was worried! So she says to me, Sylvia, you come on. Drive me, she says. I'm going to the fortuneteller. So I took her over. She went to a Mr. Hill and he asked what she wanted to know.

So we went to the fortuneteller, a Mr. Hill. And mother told him what she wanted. So he went out and got a pan of water—boiling water. It was boiling. And he come back and he sprinkled Indian tobacco on top. And he took some kind of root like this way and made it round [*Sylvia rubs the palms of her hands together in a circular motion*]. He put it in that pan. And it went. And that root just went [*she moves her right hand to demonstrate the path of the root ball over the surface of the water*]. And it went down the road, down far as Caledonia, which showed that he stopped and got out at the corner and went that way. But turned around and went back and went down the highway. And he says well, he's found. He did that what the root was doing, he says. Well, he says he's down there some place. He says you'll come a place where there's a big barn, he says. And there's something on top of that big barn, he says. It looks like a windmill or something, he says. Just, something anyway, he says. He says it's on top of that big barn he says. He says quite a good driveway in, he says, from the highway and that's where

you'll find your boy.

So mother come out and she says, well, let's go, she says. Let's go to Caledonia. So we went to Caledonia. And she says turn right here and she says turn around and go back and go on down the highway, she says. So we went on down the highway. I was driving. Finally, we saw that barn with that something on top. She says this must be the place. So we, I says let me go in and ask, anyway. So we went in and asked there and I got out and left mother in the car. I says I'll go in and ask.

So I got around to the house and I asked them. I says do you see a little boy here, a young man? I says. I says did he ever come around? His name is James Jamieson. Woman says yes. She says he came. She says he come hunting for a job. She says my husband gave him a job, she says, and he had a bag of buns. And she says when he hired him, he says here, we'd better have this bag of buns. Might as well eat them up, he says. I was going to eat them until I found my job.

So he, she says, it's milking time, she says. He's in the barn. And go in that door, she says and the cattle are right there where he's milking. So I went out there and went out and did as she told me. And was more than milking [*Sylvia chuckles again*]. Finally he looked up. He says what are you doing? Well, I says, I come to see how smart you are. Oh, I says, you're doing a good job, I says. I brought somebody to see you. My mother was right behind me. My mother came. He saw his mother [*again, another chuckle*]. We watched him milk and everything and she, my mother asked him how he like that place. She says do you like it here? Yes, he says. They're good to me, he says. Real good to me, he says. My mother says you can stay. She says I just want to know where you are, she says. I just want to know where you are. So we left him there. Let him stay.

*Sylvia's brother Jimmy did ultimately farm the Jamieson family homestead. He and*

*his wife built a new home on the site of the original house. As a measure of continuity with the past, a corner of the original foundation of the original house was retained and incorporated in the foundation of the new building. To the left of the driveway of the new house is the Jamieson Family cemetery. Originally, the burial ground belonged to the Tuscarora Mission of St. John's Anglican Church.*

That was the cemetery to the church that was there. He *[Sylvia's grandfather]* left it, he left a whole section for the public. But grampa, reserved that front part at the front for his family. And he put all his family there and when anyone died he put up a marble, marble monument for them made out of marble. But he's got four. Well, nobody put up a monument for him *[Sylvia's grandfather]* when he went. Nobody put up a monument for gramma *[Julia Ann (Garlow) Jamieson, Sylvia's paternal grandmother]* or Minnie or James *[my grandfather Claude's parents]*. They're all in there.

Well, dad had bought a cross, a big cross he ordered in Kitchener. He says, I'm putting up something. And I knew he was putting up a lot of them. He says one big one is enough, he says, for the whole family right through, he says. And the names can be all down on there. They're all buried there. That land is for them, he says. They're all buried there. Anyone that's a Jamieson he said, can be buried there. So that's the way it is right today. That land is for us for burial ground. It was a cross and so he made, he did his share. He did the footing. And one day when I was over there, he pulled out this blueprint. He had a blueprint made of that what he had ordered. He says, so I want you to see this Sylvia, he says. Look at it. I want to see what you think of it. Oh, I said, dad, that's nice. He says well that's what, that's the one I'm gonna have. There was reflectors on that cross and everything. He wanted all our names on these in reflectors. What a big, a big, huge thing and ah, well he got the bottom done.

But the top he never got done because someone went to work and told them at that Superior Monument place, he said don't you deal with any Indian, he says. You'll never get your pay. So when dad went up to get, get his cross that's what they told him. He said, we can't deal with you. Why? He says 'cause you're an Indian. We'll never get our pay, he says. Who told you that? He says your son-in-law. What right has he got, he says, interfering in my business? Oh he was mad about that. He was really mad.

So when he showed me that cross, I thought isn't that awful. Dad's got all everything prepared for us and everything and to think that someone went to work and messed up his business. So anyway, he died [*Sylvia's father*] and it wasn't done. Well, after he died, I could nothing else but see that cross all the time. Every time I'd go to that cross, that blueprint he showed me. And I thought I've gotta fix that. I've gotta get that cross up. So that's when I started to find out about putting down on names of all that are buried there since grampa died. And all those. And I was in the store one day and I was working at that and I was lining them up, and putting names down and finding out when they were born and when they died. And I just put the name. I thought, well, I'll just put footmarkers up 'cause dad said nothing's to be put up there. He says 'cause we got to keep the grass down.

So I thought, well, I was busy working at that. One of my sisters came in. She says what are you doing? Oh, I says. I'm just finding out all the names of ones since grampa died. I says I know grampa died in nineteen-six, I says 'cause he was dead before I was born. I says he died in nineteen-six and I says he was born in eighteen-something. He was quite old anyways. He was about eighty-five years old when he died. *Sylvia has the plaques from her grandparents' caskets that are engraved with both their birth and death dates. I remind her that he was born in eighteen-nineteen.* Oh yeah. He lived a good life. I



think he was eighty-five or eighty-six when he died. He was old. And I says I'm getting them on.

My sister says **what's wrong with you? Leave them dead! Are you going crazy [laughter]?** I says no. I says I'm just finishing up what dad started, I says. Dad wants that graveyard marked and he wants us to put that down there. That's our graveyard, I says. That's our private graveyard. Well, she says, I don't think I'll ever be buried there, she says. Well, I says, maybe you won't but maybe your grandchildren will. I says you're the one that's got the biggest family, I says. You don't know who's going to be buried there. So, I says, I'm going to see if I can't put that cross up. I says I'm going to put these markers up anyway to let them know where the people's born, where the people's put when they died, I says. They're supposed to know, I says. You can't just leave the ground there and nobody knows nothing. So, I felt kinda bad. I was kinda crying when she left. I thought isn't that awful. Her with the biggest family and cares less. And me with nobody.

*By chance, one of Sylvia's friends asked her for a ride to Brantford to choose a marker for her husband's grave. So I closed the store up and took her to Brantford to get this marker for her husband. I was sitting out [in the car waiting for her friend] and that, there was a cross he had setting outside already made. And it was a big cross. Not as big as what dad had. Dad had a bigger one, 'cause dad had three tiers and this had two. And I thought well, that looks like something what daddy wanted. And while she was working, I stood there and looked at that cross. I was studying it, comparing it to that blueprint. So that man come to me. He says is there anything over there, outside, you like? I said no, but I'm interested in the price of that cross, I says. How much is that cross out there? That cross, he says, is a thousand dollars. A thousand dollars! I thought a thousand*

dollars for a cross!?!?! I just kinda shook my head. I had anything but a thousand dollars [laughter]. So I, he went out. Well, I'll keep looking. I'll come back. So he went on, finish with Mrs. Johnson. And I was still looking at that cross. And I was wondering. That looks there much like the one pa wanted. So he came back to me. Well, have you made up your mind? I says yes. He says what? Well, I says, I haven't got a thousand dollars. Well, he says, if you want it, I'll let you have it for seven hundred. Ah well, I says, I haven't got no seven hundred dollars. How much you got? he says. Well, I says, I got a little over fifty dollars with me. Well, you could put the fifty dollars down he says. He says, I'll fix that cross all up for you and everything. Just what you want he says, for seven hundred dollars.

*The monument man located the footing put in by Sylvia's father. Oh it was two weeks after he called me up. He says you're right, there is a footing there. I found it. And he says I measured it. I says does it fit that cross? He says it's a really perfect fitting and now, if you want, he says, you can have it. Just come and pay me fifty dollars every chance [you get] or however much you're going to pay, he says. And then we'll get it paid up. Well, he says, I'll put it up for you so it will really stay. I'll set it right down for you. Get it all set so it will never move. All right, I says. Go ahead, then, I says. Get rid of your cross and I'll, I'll hunt for money for you. I was teaching of course, and I knew that I'd have fifty dollars. So every month I used to go up and pay him fifty dollars. Every month 'til I got it paid up. Sometime during the last decade Sylvia fenced in the Jamieson burial ground which, she says, cost her seven thousand dollars.*

*The Jamieson family considers St. John's Anglican Church to be our church. Sylvia's grandfather's son Ben was going training for an Anglican minister and ah, the clergy reserve was just down, down this end. When you go across the bridge here today*

that land, that property on the left-hand side was known as the clergy reserve. And they had built the parsonage, that house that Elmo Powless lived in. They built the parsonage for the minister there and the church was supposed to be put in there. The church was supposed to be built some place near there on that corner.

And they never got it built and I don't know. There was something going on anyway. I guess they made a land up [*set aside land*] around Onondaga. They must have made that a part of the clergy reserve<sup>22</sup> too because the Methodist church was built there. The town hall was built there and right near there was the Methodist church and the, it was, instead of building an Anglican church down where grampa's farm was, they built it up on that lot. They used to call it Holy Trinity. That was built on that land up in Onondaga and that's why there was no church built down on grampa's farm. Well, grampa didn't like it anyway. And then he built this church. That's the St. John's Church today. That, that church was over there from the time he built it until in eighteen eighty-five *when it was moved to the south side of the river to the corner of Fourth Line and Tuscarora Road because of the flooding of the Grand River in the spring. In nineteen ninety-five Sylvia started looking into this St. John's Church because grampa built that church and it's all his lumber in there. It's the original building and that's why I want it recognized. So I'm thinking about putting something there. At least a plaque. Put a plaque up there to say, for the recognition of it. A commemorative plaque was installed in the interior of the church in a dedication ceremony at the Jamieson Family Reunion in June of two thousand and one.*

*Sylvia terms her house as a museum. Well, it's a museum here. Yeah, my*

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<sup>22</sup> As each new section of land was surveyed for settlement, a certain percentage was set aside for religious use.

*museum. I have held Joseph Brant's cradleboard, studied Sylvia's grandfather's glass box of birds, held the shoulder flash of the one hundred and fourteenth Battalion [two crossed tomahawks surmounted by an Indian head] that was on my grandfather's World War I uniform and held an original copy of The Redman's Appeal for Justice. At her own expense, Sylvia has had republished The Redman's Appeal for Justice, the nineteen twenty-four position paper of the Six Nations contending that they constitute an independent state and its companion text, History of the Six Nations Indian Settlement on the Banks of the Grand River which she hands out to interested people.*

*These two volumes were in direct response to the imposition of the elected council system on the Six Nations. Of the nineteen twenty-four takeover when the RCMP took possession of the Six Nations Council House,<sup>23</sup> Sylvia says no, nobody died. No. But they, when they fought, over the fair grounds, this Colonel Morgan pointed a gun at a woman. He didn't shoot, but he pointed a gun at her. It scared 'em. he got a fine of ten dollars that Colonel Morgan. Sylvia has photographs of the first elected council and no*

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<sup>23</sup> On October seventh, nineteen twenty-four the RCMP surged into the Ohsweken Council House and read the declaration that disbanded the Six Nations' parliament. Supported by a minor but vociferous group opposed to the traditional government at Six Nations, "a more progressive form of government," the elected council, was imposed. The petition 'signed' by those Six Nations soldiers during the First World War was cited as evidence of legitimation of this act. An election was called and, from a population of four thousand, five hundred, approximately two dozen people voted. Previously, in nineteen nineteen, Deskaheh [Levi General] headed a status committee appointed by the Grand River Council to examine the steps necessary to have Six Nations declared as a self-governing British protectorate. Deskaheh and his American lawyer, George Decker prepared *The Redman's Appeal for Justice: The position of the Six Nations that they Constitute an Independent State* and appealed unsuccessfully to the world court in Geneva. When the takeover occurred, Deskaheh was still in Europe. He again appealed to Geneva and was again turned away. Deskaheh became gravely ill and returned to New York State to remain beyond the jurisdiction of the Canadian government. At age fifty-two, on twenty-seven of June nineteen twenty-five, he died alone, members of his family from Six Nations having been prevented from visiting him. "To make life difficult for future Deskaheh, Canada passed a law to deny Indians access to the law. In nineteen twenty-seven it became illegal for 'any person' to raise money for Indian claims" [Section 141 of Indian Act]. This remained in effect until nineteen fifty-one ...[Wright 1993:327].

*good words about the “dehorners,” especially that Colonel Morgan, and for the series of elected councils since. Sylvia was in her late teens when this occurred. Although she did not talk often or directly about this, her existing anger and opposition to imposed assimilation and her frequent observation of all our good fighting men are dead leads me to believe this event had a profound, shaping and lasting effect on her and Sylvia assumed Deskaheh's battle. Sylvia's struggle was on two fronts: to fight assimilation and to serve her people.*

*Sylvia opened a store in Ohsweken because the people were walking so far to get, get their groceries. Walking miles and miles. In response to my questions about her being the reserve bank before the chartered banks located in Ohsweken, Sylvia explains well, they couldn't go the bank to get any money. And they needed houses. They needed houses, roofs and everything—upkeep. And some of them were half starving. What could I do? And I loaned them money. I got thousands out. I've got more than ten thousand dollars out right today. I asked Sylvia if she still lent money. No. Not, not since they put the banks here. I send them to the bank. No use me, 'cause they never give me back. I lent thousands out, just thousands. Some of them [paid me back], not very many. I thought I'd better stop and that and that's what I do. Instead of lending out any money, I just buy government bonds. I don't want to keep a lot of money on hand, so that's what I do.*

*Sylvia is a Clan Mother of the Wolf Clan, Mohawk Nation. The clan system is eroding away. Sylvia says with regretful anger in her voice that nobody knows their clan! When I requested specifics about being a Clan Mother, an exchange between Sylvia and I resulted in an agreement that this was a subject we would not discuss. She did, however, enlarge on certain aspects of the position. I'm never bold about being Clan Mother. I'm never bold. A Clan Mother's not recognized as [a Clan Mother]. She [is] not supposed to*

be. Everybody's not supposed to really know who the Clan Mother is. *Is it a secret?*  
Yeah, more or less a secret. Well, there, there's no elevation to, no big deal. Service.  
You're a servant to the people. And that's exactly what you are. You got no right busting  
on, telling everything about it and what you hold or nothing. **It's nobody's business!** It's  
not to be talked about. *Does a Clan Mother have to have children to be a Clan Mother?*  
No. No. You don't have to have children. You're a mother to all.

*The main purpose of a Clan Mother is to ensure when your Chief's chair becomes empty, that it is filled with a man that lives upright, honest and truthful—those are the main things. You've got to make sure and you got to pick the right one. Sylvia's idea of an honourable man is one that's never committed any crime, never had anything against him in the way of doing harm and a teetotaler and everything like that. He can't be anything like that. You got to try and pick out the purest man you can find. That's the trouble. Answering my next two questions—can a man be Chief who married out? And are there any age restrictions? Sylvia describes her Chief. He married a Native and he had a wonderful wife and they had wonderful children and everything and he carried out from the day I made him a Chief like he's supposed to. He's lived honourable and he values, he values his chieftainship. He honours it. It doesn't matter [his age]. As long as he's an honourable man and able to carry out and do for his people. He's got to promise he'll do the best he can for the benefit of his people.*

*I asked about "borrowing" a Clan Mother's voice, commenting that a Clan Mother's voice must be strong. Oh yes! It means a law. We stand back of the Chief and we hold the laws. The only government we have in here today are the Clan Mothers. Speaking about the current elected system, that's not our government. That's not our government. That's not a government. The only ones that are the government here are the*

**Clan Mothers. Since the clans weren't replacing their Clan Mothers, it seems to me that there is no government here at Six Nations. No government at all. It's got to be made right, somehow. Somebody's got to see that it's made right. I suggested that any action to make it right had to come from within Six Nations Territory, not from without. Yeah. That's what I feel too. But who have we got now? All our good men that are fighting all the time are all gone. Well, that's it. Well, I find that there's nobody else in business but me [laughter]. I'm left with that now. I'm I've got to do something. We got boys in that elective system. Their mothers were Clan Mothers and look at them sitting in there. And they know they're doing wrong. They know it!**

**I didn't know I was a Clan Mother until just a few years back. 'Til about nineteen-seventy I was told I was a Clan Mother [after her husband Wilson died]. Yeah, he died in sixty-eight. Well, that's when I started to study about this clanship and everything. I got busy and studied it. And I was two years before I could make a Chief. I couldn't find a Chief. They don't know their clans. Now he didn't even know his clan when I went to him and asked him would he be Chief 'cause his grandfather was the Chief. His grandfather was the one who came and told me that I was the Clan Mother.**

**He says my name was left with him by my grandmother. He came and told me. He wanted me to lift his horns.<sup>24</sup> And I says I got nothing. I don't know nothing about horns, I says. I can't lift no horns. He says yes, you can, he says. You're my Clan Mother. I'm your Clan Mother? He says yes. I says no I'm not. Yes you are, he says. You're, you're Sylvia Jamieson, aren't you? And I says yes, that's who I am. He says that's the name I got. That was your Clan Mother. She left your name with me. He says you're one of the Clan Mothers. I thought o-o-h, o-o-h, I'm no Clan Mother, I thought**

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<sup>24</sup> Deer horns are the symbol of chieftainship.

*[laughter]*. That's when I started to work, to find out more about it. Well, I went to some old woman, I think it was one of the old ladies up at, on First Line. I went to her and told her. That was a Mrs. Jamieson, Oss Jamieson's mother. I went to her and told her about it. And she says well, that, she says, if he told you that, it's right. She says you got work to do. Well, then I studied it. And I studied it hard before I got everything. I found out how it should be done and everything. I got all the material I could find on it. And then I carried out the way it should be done.

Then I heard I was a Clan Mother and I didn't make myself a Clan Mother. My grandmother's Chief came to me one day and told me that my name was left with him. He came and he said to me I want you to lift my horns. What horns? I says. I got nothing to do with horns. I don't know nothing about horns. Yes you have. I got your horns. Your horns, I have them. 'Cause the Chief holds them, you see. And he says, *because of his advanced age and ill health*, I was willing to give you this back, he says, and you take me off the chair. I says I'm sorry I can't take you off the chair. I says I hear such things about the *[elected]* council, about the Chiefs and everything and I says I can't do it, I says. I don't know whether I can make another Chief or not. I says how can I make another Chief the way things are? I says you set there whether you hear, see or blind or anything. Set there on that chair as long as you can breathe. *At the death of the Chief, Sylvia had to search for another honourable man to sit in the Chief's chair.* It took me about two years. I was two years hunting for a Chief. They don't know their clanship! They don't know who they are! *[All I heard was]* I didn't know who my father was. I don't know. Well, I went, I asked different ones to be Chief and they didn't know their clan. They got no clan or they had no note or what. And I kept asking, kept asking and kept asking 'til one day this fellow, one fellow came in my store and he give me a paper.



And he says here, this is for you. And it was a paper on all of this stuff, making fun of it. How they *[the federal government]* promise everything and they never, ever kept their promise. And I kept that paper. Put it at the back of the shelf in my store. I thought well, I'll keep that. I used to keep everything anyway *[a Jamieson family trait]*.

And I couldn't understand who that fellow was. I didn't know him at all. And I thought why did he come to me and give me that paper? So, when I had to hunt for a Chief, *she spoke to one man*, and I ask him, I says what clan are you? He says I don't know, he says. Why? Well, I says, I'm looking for a Wolf. Well, he came to me afterwards. He says ah, I don't do it anyway he says. I'm not well. I am too sick to be taking that kind of work. So I forgot him. Well, I looked over all my brothers and where are they? They're all gone. All of them, gone. Nobody knows their clan! The clan died out and I had to get a Wolf. I had to hunt for a Wolf and when I spoke to him *[the subsequent candidate]* he didn't know his clan. Well, I says, you go to find out what your clan is. So he did. He went to the oldest man around and asking about his clan. 'Cause I knew his *[maternal]* father was Wolf. That's why my grandmother made him a Chief. And I thought well, that's what I thought he was with a Wolf. Then he told me and I then of course, I condoled him and made him a Chief.

*I raised the matter of Clan Mother legitimacy with Sylvia, reminding her that it was she, herself, who had mentioned to me several years ago that one of her nephews had said to her there were people around who denied her claim to the clanship. I also asked after the significance of the deer. Well, I suppose that was the first animal that saved the humans. But the horns they give the Clan Mother is a wampum. It's a wampum made like that [Sylvia make a circle with her right hand] and there along there, two strings that come to a circle. That was, that's what they give Clan Mothers. The Clan Mother holds*

that. That's known as the horns. It's the Clan Mother's horns. *I asked if the circle was representative of a deer's head and the two strings of its antlers.* Uh-huh. That's what it stands for. And that's why the Clan Mother carries that. Now if you're a **real** Clan Mother, that's what you have. 'Cause if you're not a real Clan Mother, you'll never get it. And one day I went to Longhouse. They had all the Clan Mothers to go. So they went and I went down. And what those I got, *[the]* Clan Mother things, *[others]* got nothing to show. They can't show. They got no good horns. They got no anything.

*Describing the Clan Mother horns again, Sylvia says they have a little row of wampum and you have what they call the horns. It's wampum beads. Two rows of wampum beads like this and it's got a top on it like that. They call that the horns. Supposed to represent a deer horns. It's a little bigger than a key ring. And you have that and you got your wampum and other things as well. Well, that's what you're supposed to have. Things you can show. That's the proof [of] your clanship. I got my string of real wampum though, and I got my horns. They can't say that I'm not a Clan Mother.*

*Sylvia told two stories which illustrate the disarray of the clan system about a man whose father was white and whose parents were not married. Well, her sister had this illegitimate kid. He's just a little baby. He was so small you could put him on the palm of your hand. He laid [Sylvia cups her hands]. That was like a cradle for him, he was that tiny. And she took him to her sister down here and she showed her baby. And she says I can't keep him, she says. I need somebody to help me. So she asked her sister would she take him and help her? So her sister says sure. So she took him and helped her. She said when she took that baby or laid him on her hand like that, she had to feed him with an eyedropper, he was that small. Just about the size of a kitten. And she says she worked on him and worked on him and fed him. And he grew up with them. And he grew up to a*

**fine-looking young man.**

***This fine-looking young man married "out."* I was her bridesmaid. Well, he was supposed to be a Chief. He had nothing to show that he was a Chief. And they wanted to make him a Chief. So one day, they came here. I didn't know anything about this, but I know what happened afterwards. They came and said well, we're going to see your Aunt Sarah [*Sylvia's maternal aunt*]. Wouldn't you like to come? They thought my Aunt Sarah was the Clan Mother. So I says sure, I'd be glad to go and see my Aunt Sarah. So I went with them to see my Aunt Sarah.**

**We got to see my Aunt Sarah and she was really senile. She didn't know anybody. All she had was a doll and she kept playing with the doll and dressing that doll all the time. There and after a while she'd put it down for a while and then hold it. She'd just sit quiet. And she never even knew we were there! Not a word was spoke. Well, this man's wife heard that and she thought that was the Clan Mother. Aunt Sarah was a Clan Mother. So she told somebody. She says we went to visit the Clan Mother and we couldn't get a way with her.**

**Aunt Sarah was never made a Clan Mother because she married an Oneida and she turned to be an Oneida instead of a Mohawk! Well, my grandmother never gave any one of them the Clan Mother, that ship, she didn't. Yes she did. She left the purse, she left her purse with my mother and all her stuff was in that purse. She left everything to mother. Well, mother never bothered. She just left the purse. She just held it. Left it. She put it away. She left it. She never looked in it.**

**And a couple of weeks after they were going to the States to see about it. Get the wampum. And ah, they went to see a Geraldine. She was a Clan Mother. And I guess they found out she was a Clan Mother. So they wanted to go and see her. So they went**

to see her. And I went with them. They come ask me to go with them again. And I went with them again, not knowing what they were trying to get. And they got there. They asked her for their mother's beads. And she says I don't know where they are, she says. She says I think some kids played with them and just threw them away. She says I haven't got them. So she wouldn't give them to her. *Did Geraldine know where the beads were?* Sure she did. But she wasn't letting them know. She wouldn't give them up. And I didn't know. I never thought anything. I never thought anything after or anything. Here they wanted to make him Chief. But he could never be a Chief because he was an illegitimate child and his aunt's husband raised him.

His aunt's husband had always worked for the Natives. He always was, he was, he was considered a Chief—one of the Native Chiefs. And this man thought he should follow his uncle. He thought because his uncle acted as his father, he should be a Chief too. But he could never be a Chief on account of who he was. However, they made him a Chief anyway. And he went and got a Clan Mother. He went and got his aunt's daughter, cousin, it was a cousin. He got her to be his Clan Mother. That's who he got for his Clan Mother.

*I asked Sylvia about another woman of whom it was said that she was not a bona fide Clan Mother.* Well, the right Clan Mother that was there was kind of a shy woman. Couldn't talk very good. So she borrowed this woman's mother to take her place. This mother was a borrowed Clan Mother for the bona fide Clan Mother. She was a borrowed Clan Mother. She died and they never returned that clanship back. And the current "holder" took it. And she took it to the Longhouse and the Longhouse made her a Clan Mother. And they made her Clan Mother one year. The next year they debarred her. They turned her out [*laughter*]. She got put out. I got the letter.

Well I told her about that. I says you know this isn't this isn't right what's going on. I told her exactly what I know. She got as mad at me as she could be. She's just hated my guts. Well, she's might as well know the truth. But, I says, I'm not going to say anybody that you're not a Clan Mother, I says because I know you're not afraid to speak up, I says. You can stay there as far as I'm concerned, but I says that *[what it]* is. And that's what it is.

*Talking about the Clan Mother's position after she vacates it, Sylvia says a Clan Mother is supposed to leave somebody to take her place if she's got one able. If not, the clan picks it. The clan has to pick it. Well, with my nieces, I don't know who to take. I go over my nieces and everything and I look at them and half of them's married off—what can I do? Most of them are divorced—what can I do? Not the way they've been living. They're all divorced and everything else and married on the outside and stuff like that. 'Course I could pass it along to my Aunt Sarah's girls. They're all gone. And there's none of her children left. My Aunt Sarah [another maternal aunt], same thing. None of her children left. It's a hard situation to think about. I asked Sylvia if she thought about it a lot. I do. Yes, I do. I study it out. I'm studying it out all the time. Trying to see which one would be the best one to have. I've got to hand it to the one that I think is most capable for it. If not, I just leave it open. Let them pick out who they want. But I really can't name which one I want today. I don't know which one. I don't know which one to take.*

*Sylvia has lived her entire life at Six Nations. She vows she never wanted to live anywhere else. In Sylvia's chosen profession of teaching within Six Nations Territory, she had to go outside for both her education and upgrading. Sylvia's story about her experiences in Ottawa at summer school is suggestive of her decision to remain in the Territory. This story came after I related a story about my grandfather's retirement. His*

*photo was in our local newspaper with a brief biography that stated he was from Six Nations and he was angry. I observed that Sylvia, in all our conversations, appears to have never told anyone when she was outside that she was Indian and I asked why. Well they looked down on you. And they wouldn't want to really talk to you or go with you or anything. And they were like that with all the Natives. They wouldn't have nothing to do with the Natives. And I never, ever told anyone that I was an Indian. Would that be why Claude never told anybody? Yeah, most likely. They had better friends and everything. They don't know what you, what they're going with. I was more or less a blondie. When I was born I had light hair. I didn't get blue eyes, though.*

Well, I was in summer school. I drove up there myself. I drove to Ottawa. It was after my mother died and the family was s-o-o-o-o.... Oh, they were so mad at dad 'cause he had a girlfriend. And there was jangling towards, jangling and jangling towards dad. And I got sick of it. I thought what's wrong with him having a girlfriend? I had no problem with him having a girlfriend. So I got in my car and I had made arrangements to go to summer school in Ottawa. And I got in my car and I drove up to Ottawa. And I got to go to some school. Well, it was strange. I drove up there and stopped in Peterborough and had my dinner and I went on to Ottawa. It was four o'clock when I got there. And all these circles, you have to do—circles, circles. Go right. Go right. Ottawa should never be doing anything wrong, 'cause when you go there everybody'd told to go right, go right *[laughter]*. That's it, go right. Go right. I thought I never say anywhere tell people to go right so often. So I stopped. I thought I'd better ask, stop somebody. I went right around the circle.

And I stopped. There's people sitting out on the porch. So I went and I asked them. I says I'm a stranger here in your city, I says. I'd like to know where I am. And I

says I got to go to school. I says I'm up here to go to school for the summer. They were very nice to me. They say your school is right there across the road. Yeah, right there, she say. O-o-o-h is that where I have to go? They says yes. Well, I says, would you know any place where I could stay? I says I'd like to find a place to stay before it gets dark, I said. So one woman says yes, I know people that I know [*rent out rooms*]. I got a friend, she says, that takes people in by the night she says. I'll call her and see if she'll take you in. So she called, made arrangements for me. And I think they even sent somebody up to guide me down there. So I went and stayed all night there.

Next morning I got up and I had to figure my way back to that school. And I got to school and I was early, so I sat in the front seat. And the other teachers come in from all over, you know. Teacher come and sat next to me, cross from me so I thought, and I says to her, I thought to myself, I says to her where do you come from? I says. She says I'm here from Ottawa, right here in the city, she says. She says I live here. I says you lucky one, I says. You're lucky. You're all set. I've got to find a place and everything else I says. I says I'm a long way from home. But, I says, I got, I found a place last night, I says. A friend took me in for the night. And I says, but I got to get a place to live, I says.

Well, she says, we have an apartment me and my two sisters, she says. She says we can make room for you if you'd want to come with us. Well, I says, that would be fine, if you don't mind, I says. I appreciate that, I says. I'll pay you. I'm going to pay anybody anyways and, I says, I'd be glad to go meet your sisters. Well, she says, right where my car is, follow me she says after we were out, she says. I'll take out out. So I went with her. And I stayed there.

And my mother had bought me for Christmas that year a French coat—a French dressing coat like you gave me. Gee, this was beautiful—kind of bluish-grey. Just shiny.

Mother got me that for Christmas. And I said you shouldn't have got me that, I says. That's not right. It cost too much I says. The rest of them are all kind of mad 'cause I got me this, this coat, I says. So I wouldn't wear it. I didn't wear it, but when I went to Ottawa, I took it with me. And of course, in the morning when I come out, I put on my coat and everything and had breakfast with them.

I went to school, her and I went to school. I told *[them]* well, it's good we can study together. We did. We used to study together and everything. And she was a teacher in Ottawa. She taught school in Ottawa. And I taught school on the reserve here. So that was it. So, they notice I was, you know, I was polite and everything because I always had top manners and everything. They notice that. I guess I surprised them. I never told them I was an Indian. I didn't dare *[laughter]*. They'd probably would have kicked me out *[laughter]*. I never used to tell anybody. And of course, I was fair and nobody would know the difference. So that was all right. So one day, I went to school and this note *[was]* on the desk—Sylvia, come and have lunch with me at noon. Come to the parliament building and have lunch with me at noon. *This was a note from George Wood, Sylvia's neighbour for whom she had worked during his political campaign.*

He invited me in 'cause I was from Onondaga. His dad's from Onondaga. And I had a nice suit—fawn and the inside was lined with wine coloured. Oh it was beautiful! I got that from the people *[from Detroit]* I worked for in the summer time. I used to go to Detroit every summer and work for these people. They were from Detroit. And they gave me that suit. It was a really nice one. They bought it. It was expensive. They gave me that suit 'cause I was going to school. They says it would be nice for you to wear. And I appreciated that suit. So that's the suit I wore.

I was all dressed up and, of course, the girls noticed that my clothes was different



than others, you know. And that that was extra special. So I went and got all dressed up. And, of course, that note was on my desk. And when I come home they said Sylvia, who are you? I says I'm Sylvia Jamieson. You're not nobody else? Nothing else? they said. Aren't you, [*haven't you*] got any kind of a position or anything? I says no. I says I'm just going through for a teacher. I says I'm teaching school and I says I have to teach in order to get a raise I says. We have to work during the summer and then if we spend it at work they give us a few dollars raise I says. I says that's the only way we can get a raise, a raise in our pay. Oh, they says. Well, we were born here in Ottawa. We've never gone up to the parliament building for anything, for lunch or anything.

And, of course, at that time you had to have a card to go in the parliament building. Well, and they couldn't understand why I was to be, why I should be picked to go to parliament building to eat dinner. And they says how come you got there? Well, I says, this member is a, he's a neighbour of ours. I says that's my neighbour at my home. Oh, they says, so you're going to parliament. Well, we've never been up there, they says. We were born here.

So he told me he'd meet me at the gate. So the girls got the car up. They took me up to the parliament building. Sure enough, when I got there, he was there. And he says come on, we'll go up on the elevator, he says. So he's standing by the elevator and there was one western man coming—a member of parliament. I don't know what his name was. He [*Sylvia's member of parliament*] says, ah, Sylvia, put on your best. He says you speak right up on your best. That's what my parliament member said to me. He says 'cause here comes a man down here, he says. Oh he hates Indians! Oh, he says, he's got such a hatred for Indians, he says. Nobody can do anything with him. So, he says, put on your best.

So he come and he introduced me to him and oh, he was nice to me. Nice. Polite and everything. Spoke very nice. And, just before the elevator come, he says to him, Mr. So-and-so, Miss Jamieson is one of our Natives, he says. She's a Native, he says. He says a Native? You know, he wouldn't ride up on the elevator with us. He run, he walked away. George said to me, you never mind that, he says. And he says that's the way he is. So I went up on the elevator. I had my dinner.

And, of course, there were rations<sup>25</sup> at that time too. You couldn't have everything. And I used to be so busy saving that stuff and wouldn't buy this and wouldn't buy that and wouldn't eat so much of everything and my family was like that too. All of us were. When I went to the parliament building and I saw the table all spread with roast beef, roast chicken, roast anything you want on that table. What, it was mammoth, just a mammoth table. And I thought the nerve of them having, all of us just scratching and look what they got in here. And then there was blah, blah, blah—ALL KINDS OF FOREIGNERS! And I thought what goes on—they're not even talking our language. Oh, just everything was there. If you didn't have a good meal, it was your fault. Beautiful. Go up and help yourself. All you want. Well that, that done me. I throwed those old things away, them stamps. No! If they can live like that, I can live like that. Why they don't care whether I live or die. I says what the heck, they're living like that, why shouldn't I? I never bought, I never saved a darn stamp after that! *As she surveyed the lavish and conspicuous display of plenty available to the federal government during wartime and compared it to the want and rationing at home, Sylvia's sense of fairness was*

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<sup>25</sup> Sylvia's visit with her member of parliament occurred during the Second World War when food rationing was instituted. The civilian population was issued ration books and stamps to ensure an equitable distribution of the available food and to prevent hoarding and the formation of a "black market."

*outraged. Her subsequent actions of refusing to participate in rationing was another way for her to fight back.*

## THE THIRD QUESTION

### Who Am I?

*In addressing the Third Question, from Sylvia's story I have gleaned instances that illustrate not only her opinions, but also the reasons and shapings behind them. Sylvia's forays off Six Nations Territory and the intrusions of mainstream society in the far distant and distant past combine to effect and shape her knowledge of the world and how, for her and her people, the world works and, in particular, her world with all its strictures and structures. I have been most curious about our family's being Christian. My grandfather was raised Baptist and, although I never asked him anything about Haudenosaunee culture, he never mentioned or volunteered any cultural information. I never heard my grandfather say anything about religion, nor was I aware of him ever having attended any church service or even having an affiliation with any church or religion. Sylvia has stated that our family has been Christian from 'way 'way 'way back. Oh yeah, my grandfather's grandparents, all of them, were church people. Our family states and appears to have all the trappings of Christianity. In reality, it is a different brand of Christianity.*

The way I was told—this has never been recorded as I know of—was told to me by my grandmother and it was told to me by my father-in-law. Both of them—they didn't know each other at all and yet they told me the same story. This is the story that they told, my grandma told me. She says now you got to, you got to follow things, she says. You've got to follow our old teachings, she says. There was two messengers sent to our people. One was sent to the East, that was Jesus Christ. One was sent to the West and that was Deganawidah, she says. And they brought the message to everybody because the people were living so badly. They were cannibals and punishment for killing

people and doing other things. They were treating people bad. That's why God sent these two messengers.

And they were both born by virgin women. Christ was born in Bethlehem. His mother was Mary and he got a man to look after Mary—Joseph. Well, Deganawidah was born in Desoronto. I don't know what his mother's name was but she lived with her [*her mother*]. I never, ever heard who his father was either. She lived with her mother. So her mother and her raised this Deganawidah. And as a little child there was a mound near their home with a pine tree on top of it and that's where he played all the time on this mound and around this pine tree. He grew up playing around there just like an ordinary child.

And three times they tried to kill the Christ Child.<sup>26</sup> There was three times they tried to kill him. And the last time they tried to kill him was when they all had the oldest boys of every family die one night. They, all the oldest boys of every family in Christ's [*town*]*—where they lived—died. They were hunting for this Christ child. They thought for sure they'd get him 'cause they were about the same age as he was. And they never got him 'cause Mary and Joseph were warned beforehand to go, to leave that place right away. Take that child and go. And they went. Well he got saved. They, all the others, there was terrible weeping and everything. Every home that lost their boy at that time. A terrible time.*

And my grandmother told me that Deganawidah was born in Desoronto and that he played around this pine tree. And he used to pick up white stones. He'd go near the water there—the Bay of Quinte—and hunt for white stones. Well, he used to find white stones and he'd brought these stones up and put them around the tree. And his grandmother says what are you doing, putting those stones up? He says grandma, I got to

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<sup>26</sup> Sylvia slides from the life of the Peacemaker to the life of Christ.

make a boat. She says, what do you have to make a white stone boat for? Well, he says, see that lake? He says, I got a big lake to cross. I got to cross that lake in my white stone boat.

Anyway, he grew up to be a man. Both he and Christ were given thirty years to live a natural life. They were thirty years old when they had to start their work—the teaching and the way it should be taught. The way people should live. So he was thirty years old when he started. And that's where, the beginning of his life was to start with his boat and that he had to go. And of course, where he went, he was guided by Christ. Christ followed them wherever they went. That's what Christ did.

But there's another thing. With Christ, he picked out right away, he picked out different men to carry on his work—his disciples. But Deganawidah didn't do that. Deganawidah found the worst man that was causing so much trouble—a cannibal. And that's where he started. He started with one man that was doing very wrong and he had him to help him overcome the rest and find a good man. They worked differently, see?

And Deganawidah, he got them to see the right way and to keep passing it on to one another. He didn't make just certain men to do the preaching and everything. But these men had to live to conquer the other people, to have them stop living the way they were living. That was his job. That's what he did about it.

*I asked about the Peacemaker's first "convert," a woman.* She was the first one he met, and he went. And she said, you're not to go beyond where I am, she says. Because of the bad man in there, she says. He'll kill you, she says. You can't pass me. Deganawidah looked at her and says well, I have to go. I have to see this bad man that you're talking about. And that's what he did. He went away from her to see this bad man.

And he found out where he lives. He saw his shack. And he crawled upon the roof

of the shack. When he got there, nobody was home. He went all around and then finally he crawled up and sat on the roof. And they all had that open space on the roof for the smoke to get out. And their fire was below that. And so Deganawidah crawled around there and he looked in. Sure enough, he saw that big black pot on the stove. And the fire was underneath it. But nobody was home. So he stayed on the roof. And finally he [*the cannibal*] come home carrying a human on his back and he went in.

He went in his house and he put the human on the table. And then he went to see, look at the fire. Look at this, see how the, see how the pot was. And Deganawidah looked and he [*the cannibal*] saw him and the reflection of Deganawidah's face come in the pot. Well now that's the first time he [*the cannibal*] got ahold of fear. He got kind of scared. So Deganawidah still laid there and he came on. He looked. Again he saw that face—a nice-looking face. And Deganawidah knew to approach him then. So he came down and approached him then. And that was the first time he [*the cannibal*] stood to talk to another person.

And then he talked to Deganawidah. Deganawidah told him, he says you shouldn't eat what you're going to eat, he says. That's wrong, he says. Come on. I'll go with you, he says, and I'll show you what you're going to eat. So he showed him. He went with him and he showed him the pheasant and the wild turkey. He showed him that. He says those [*are*] the things you can eat like that, he says. And then he showed him the pig and the cow. Showed him all they had and then they came to the deer and he says we'll get a deer. So he shot and he killed a deer. And they took that deer home and they skinned it and everything. And he says that's what we'll have. Those are the things you eat, he says. When you go look for something that's what you bring home and cook. But now what you got there. So he gathered up all the parts of the body and they went and

buried it. They buried it, the body that he brought and they skinned the deer and cooked the deer. And that's when he *[the cannibal]* started to eat proper food. He'd eat no more humans. Now he *[the Peacemaker]* says, there's others who are doing exactly what you are doing and you must go and stop them, he says. Show them what they got to do.

He showed them. He taught them everything. And he taught him to pray. He says, he showed him Heavenly Father and you pray. Pray for yourself, he says, and he'll guide you. He says he'll never let you down. And that's true to this day. And I know. I know that's really true. And that's what we should do. I got a wonderful hymn in the Bible, in my prayer book where it tells you to take everything to the Lord in prayer. And how, how we are ourselves. He we let things go and be discouraged. You should never be discouraged. Just take it to the Lord in prayer. And never, all the needless problems we carry, all because we do not take it to the Lord in prayer. *Sylvia and I, because I knew the hymn, paused and sang together "What A Friend We Have In Jesus."* She was tickled at our joining together in song. After our concert, Sylvia took up the story and continued.

Deganawidah did everything for us. After he got the people so he could talk to them and everything, he brought them all together and he says now, he saw they're all different nations. And he thought that's terrible. They're all kinds of fighting against each other. Fighting against each other. Killing each other and everything. And that's one thing he got over. He got each nation and asked them to come together and cross their arrows and be united. And they're the first United Nations of the world. It was done by Deganawidah. And he didn't finish there. That wasn't complete. He told them, after he got them united, he says now you're united. Now, he says, now you've got to make the Great Law, he says. We'll get the Great Law from God, he says. God will give us the Great Law. So and this is the same time that Christ was getting the Commandments made



too. Moses went up and got the Commandments in Christ's name. The Ten Commandments. That's what the Great Law is, the Ten Commandments exactly.<sup>27</sup>

But Deganawidah did it a little bit different. He went to a white pine tree and he said now you gather around this white pine tree. Had them all join their hands, the nations. They made a circle. They formed this circle around the tree and they all hold hands because they were united. He says now in order to make a United Nations stand, there's something else you've got to do, he says. You see that white, that tree I want you to dig up this tree and don't destroy the roots. Because the roots are what he is going to use for the Great Law. Now, he says, you dig that up. So they dig it up with stone axes and whatever they had and everything. Their hands and everything. Got all the dirt away and they saved the roots. They were careful with the roots. Well, when they got the dirt all loose, the tree fell over. And they cleaned all the roots and he took some water and cleaned off the roots and the roots were as pure as that [*Sylvia gestures towards a pure white envelope lying on her table*]. Now, he says, these are known as the White Roots of Peace.

He took a root and he says, I'll tell you what each root stands for. He took the first one. He says now, this you're never to forget—your Creator. That's your first root. You're to honour him with your heart, your soul, and your whole body. And look to him. Look up. Always look up. Don't look down. Look to him, he says, and you'll live a long life, he told them. And now he says, the second root is this, he says. He made everything in six days. He made this whole earth in six days—the water, had the water and the sky

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<sup>27</sup> Sylvia has amalgamated the White Roots of Peace with the Ten Commandments. The White Roots of Peace, extending from the Great Tree of Peace to the four cardinal directions, enabled any individual or nation who wished to avail themselves of the Great Peace could follow the roots to its source, growing in the heart of the Confederacy. Sylvia's ordering of her ten White Roots are in a slightly different order than the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20:1-17 (Authorized King James Version).

and everything fixed perfect for you to live in six days, he says. So you must honour the seventh day. The seventh day, he says, is the one you're supposed to not do a thing. And he told them, like on Monday you do the washing. On Tuesday, you do the ironing. On Wednesday, you do the cooking and on Thursday, you do the cleaning. And on Friday you clean and Saturday you do the baking and you get everything done. But you're not to do one thing. Nobody is to do a thing on Sunday. Not to cook or anything.

He repeated each one of the Ten Commandments. He did give them a definite image of them all. Now the First and Second Commandments—the first was honour God and the second one was to keep the Sabbath day holy. And the Third one is *[about how]* a woman has been given permission and honoured to raise the children, to have the birth of a child. And he says a man is picked out to help her raise that child. So he says your Third Commandment is to honour them two people. Honour your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. That was the Third Commandment.

Then he said, now he says, when I came here I saw a man killing other people, he says. That's your Fourth Commandment. Thou shall not kill. Don't take a life if you can't give a life. So there's four Commandments. And the Fifth Commandment is thou shall not steal. Don't take anything that don't belong to you. And then the next Commandment is thou shall not bear false witness. You're not supposed to talk about people. You're not supposed to be a gossiper. Now I, we were all guilty of that *[Sylvia and I laugh and snicker]*. Well it goes on to say that anyone who breaks one of these commandments is least in the Kingdom of God. That's how strong the Great Law is. And he says thou shall not swear. He says you mustn't swear by the land because that's God's footstool. Mustn't swear by the heavens because that's his seat, he says. That's

**his seat of power. And you're never to swear.**

**These are all strict commandments that he gave. And then he told them it is not right to commit adultery, he says. Adultery is living with this person and living with that person and changing with this person and that person. That again is a good law to keep. Not supposed to commit adultery. That's your Seventh Commandment, he says. Now you've got to remember these things. If you live up to these, he says, you're going to see the home that God has provided for you. 'Cause it tells that in my Father's house—I think Christ told them—in my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you, see? That's Christ's law. Christ told that. And he told his people that. He says you live these great laws, there's a home for us. But if there's no home for us, there's a brimstone fire. We're going to suffer for the rest of our lives. We'll be thrown in that brimstone fire. So it's serious. People should think about these things. They're things they should do. They should respect things.**

**And then he says, another thing. You must not go bother your neighbour's home. Keep to your own selves. Visit your neighbour and be always good to your neighbour because your neighbour is one that maybe you need first to call upon. So he says never be bad friends with your neighbours. We're supposed to live in harmony with our neighbours. Now, he says, those are all your commandments. He give you ten fingers and ten toes. These laws are written from head to feet. And we're supposed to be—we're marked for that. And the people don't realize that. They don't realize they're marked for anything.**

**Well, anyway he gave them law. That was the Great Law. And we're all supposed to live by that those Ten Commandments.<sup>28</sup> That's really what it is, the Ten**

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<sup>28</sup> Sylvia's synthesis of the Great Law and Christian teachings.

**Commandments. Christ gave the Ten Commandments to the people and he gave, he says now you accept what I tell you. Do you believe what I tell you? They says yes. Well, he says, because you believe that, I'm going to make you known as the League of Peace. Where you dug up that tree and you saw the white roots, how pure they are. How wonderful they are. Now, he says, another thing we got to make you do. You go and get everything you use to hurt people—stones, stone axes, whatever you have that you might hurt people with—whips, everything. You take all them and throw them in that hole. You're not to save anything that's going to hurt somebody, he says. That's what you do. So they had to get anything they did to hurt anybody with and throw it in that hole. Christ was the greatest teacher. I consider [*Him*] the greatest teacher that ever walked the face of this earth. He was wonderful! Both him and Deganawidah. They did things and they showed people, especially Deganawidah. He showed people and when he dug that tree up and show them the roots and showed them everything, showing them what they were for and made them throw their weapons in there, what better way than to see that done?**

Well, after they were all through their missions, God met the two messengers in the middle of the ocean. I don't know whether it was the Atlantic Ocean or the Pacific Ocean. They met him anyway. They brought the East and the West together. That's what they say these three fingers are for [*Sylvia demonstrates*]. That's supposed to be God, one's Christ and one's Deganawidah.<sup>29</sup> And they met. And they told about all their teachings and what happened to them. And Christ told Him what they did to him. And Deganawidah told Him what they did to him. And He [*God*] was so surprised to think of what the people would do. He says the people took Christ in spite of a robber and a thief

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<sup>29</sup> God, Christ and the Peacemaker is Sylvia's version of the Trinity.

and everything. They spared the robber and the thief and everything here and Christ they crucified. They hollered crucify! But Deganawidah, there was nobody put beside him. They didn't bring nobody that was in jail or anything to him. He never knew anybody like that, because he told people all about the good things and they kept following him and the good things. And he preached to them like that. And they were good to him and they watched him when he left them. They saw him. They saw him rise and go.

*About how the people in the East treated their messenger of peace, Sylvia says but what did they see [of] him? Died, buried and put in a sepulcher, soldiers on each side. But he got away too. And they didn't see him go. Now he says, there's going to be punishment for what people have done, he says. There's no place in heaven for these people who crucified Christ. They must always put their head down when they speak, try to speak to God, he says. Their head must be buried like that<sup>39</sup> [Sylvia bows her head]. But these guys must always look up, he says. They done what's right, he says. They must look up and stand straight with their hands open beside them, he says. And that's the way they pray, he says. Never look down, he says. You haven't downed your Saviour and [what] the other have got—it's punishment to them.*

Well, the people of the East, they get right down on hands and knees and everything. They go right down totally, they're so sorry what has been done. But they say it will go from generation to generation that has to bear the burden. A white man has it very hard work. I pity the white people. I really pity the white people. I really pity them because they don't know what they face. They don't know what they're facing. I

<sup>39</sup> During my first visit to Sylvia on Six Nations Territory, she instructed me in the proper way to pray. I remember thinking at the time that this teaching, which Sylvia just threw into our conversation, was odd but significant. Later, during a subsequent visit, Sylvia explained to me why we pray this way which is contained here. Sylvia's explanation speaks not of Western peoples' superiority over those of the East but of the Western people having better manners as prescribed by the hospitality principle.

*asked Sylvia to explain her meaning. Well, look how hard they have to work. They have to work very hard and they do work hard. Look at our people. Do they work hard? They don't know what hard work is [she laughs]. Work seems to come so easy for them. But a white man, he really has to work hard.*

*Sylvia marveled to me several times about the knowledge of her elders, specifically her parents-in-law [Libby and Pat Sandy]. Of her father-in-law she says [about his knowledge of Christianity], I nearly fell over. Now how would he know that? Often these things that he used to say to me I wonder how he knows. And to this day, I've wondered and wondered how would he know these things? And I couldn't understand why he ever knew them things. I thought you're strictly Longhouse. How come you know them? So they do know. They know something and they heard it from somebody. Well, that's what he says. Well, do you see the funny things he said to me? Well, that so far anyway. That's where that went with him. And ah, well my [maternal] grandmother told me [the story about the Peacemaker].*

*Concerning her mother-in-law, when I asked how old she was at her death, Sylvia said I don't know. I don't know her age. I don't think she ever really knew her real age either. She never, ever went to school. Never. But she knew. She knew when the summer's coming up, the time of year. She knew how far the sun traveled. How far it went back and forth. She knew everything about it. She knew all about the heavens. How come? After, when I got married, she told me about this and that and I thought, how come? You know so much about the heavens, about the stars and everything. She knew all about them. So [don't] tell me they don't learn things.*

*I asked Sylvia about an exchange she had with her mother-in-law one time about Sylvia's inability to speak Indian. I asked her about something I could do. I told her how*

could you say that? She says, what? she says. I don't know how to say that. She says there's so much, so much you should know, she says, if you knew the language, she says. And they don't know the language. You'll never know, she says. Got to know the language to know what it is 'cause you know, we're blessed with a pure language. There's no swear word in the language. There's no curse word in the language. Our language is all love and everything. No hate whatsoever. We're been put, we were put like that by the, by our messenger, the messenger Deganawidah, *[whose]* name is never to be told. Never to be inherited. Nobody's to have that name. The same as Christ. Nobody's to have the name of Christ.

*The Peacemaker* give us a language. He give us language where there's no way in our language can you curse a person, can you swear at a person, can you do anything against a person. No way in our language. And look what they're trying to do. They're trying to throw that language away. They're doing everything to get rid of it. They don't want to utter that language. Seems to be a curse to them. Why should it be a curse to them when it's such a sacred language? It's one language that should be universal. You're not a nation if you haven't got a language.

*In the fall of 1992, Condoled Cayuga Chief Jake Thomas recited at Six Nations, for the first time in English, the Great Law of Peace. Chief Thomas faced a great deal of opposition against his decision to recite the Great Law in English. Fear was expressed by some Chief and other people that an English rendering would diminish the Great Law's message and power. Chief Thomas cited the lack of the languages amongst the Six Nations of the Confederacy as being the main reason to give a recitation in English. An article appeared in the United Church Observer the following spring in which both Sylvia and our cousin Robert Jamieson [nephew to my grandfather], an Interpreter for the*

*Confederacy, were interviewed. Sylvia is quoted as saying “well, after the Peacemaker finished his work here, he sailed from us in a stone canoe and went out to the middle of the great salt water to meet his brother who was spreading the good message of peace far away. As they sat in the middle of the ocean, the Peacemaker’s brother showed him his wounds. ‘They wouldn’t accept the great peace,’ the brother said” (Doxtator 1993:43).*

*Our cousin, Robert Jamieson, a Cayuga Elder, is quoted as saying he heard the story somewhat differently. “Some of the old timers said they were the same,” he says. “This is how I heard it. Our Peacemaker went away to spread the good message in a stone canoe. He said that ‘one time the birch tree would bleed and then you would know I will return.’ So the tree did bleed. And one day out of the fog came the Peacemaker in a stone canoe. Only he had cuts on his face and on his hands and feet, and in his rib. He said ‘don’t touch me, but now I am going away.’” The Elders concur on the end of the story. They all say the Peacemaker told them he would be “under the ground with the coming faces.” ... There will be a time when you need me again—and if you call my name, I will be there with you.” Doxtator also observed that “among the Elders there is some satisfaction in knowing that the Indian people of North America accepted the Great Peace. We didn’t kill the Peacemaker” (Ibid.)*

*Remembering back to my first visit with Sylvia and finding a Clan Mother reading her New Testament (!), I laugh at my then-self, at my surprised shock and the cognitive dissonance I experienced. I have also had occasion to think about the religious differences between the “up above” and the “down below” and the supposed and perceived quantity of differences. Are the differences really chasms that divide people, or has middle ground been achieved where the differences disappear in an amalgamation, not altogether*

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<sup>31</sup> The phrase “coming faces” denotes those people who are yet to be born.



*seamless, of a gathering of the two into something quite different? Or, is it still as Red Jacket, a Seneca Chief and great orator, in his reply to Reverend Cram in eighteen hundred and five, said "Brother, you say there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit; if there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it?... We also have a religion which was given to our forefathers.... It teacheth us to be thankful for all the favours we receive; to love each other, and to be united; we never quarrel about religion" (Wallace 1969:205-6). Sylvia experiences no confusion, sees no discrepancies in her religious beliefs, nor does she see any contradictions between her religious beliefs and her other practices.*

*About the practice of reading corncobs, Sylvia explains yeah, that's the flint corn. That's the one you read. See, our language, our original language is in colour. It's our written language. It's all in colour. And we're told to look after that if we want to know what's going on. Every year to look at that, that corn. I asked about the subject matter of the reading. A little bit includes the weather. 'Cause if it's dark, things are going to be bad. But if it's light, we're all right. And the different colours, if you can read colours, it's wonderful what you find, find out when you read the flint corn. Just the colours. But you have to read, be able to read the colours. Now redness would be pure and honest and upright. And then the white is to be honest and upright too. And ah, divine, divine and everything was supposed, that perfect life. It tells us that.*

*Short cobs. Known as flint corn. That's the one you read. They grow it now [April 2000]. They're supposed to be getting it ready now. They're planting that now. That's the one we're supposed to read when they ripen in the fall. Everybody that knows, wants to know anything, that's their book. That's the life book for the year, see? That in corn. I usually get three cobs. I like to get three cobs. I usually hang them up. A*

lot of people hang them up for Thanksgiving. And that's a good thing to do too. That's what I like to get them, three cobs of it. And then I read those. Some of them are just practically black sometimes. Oh it's a bad, bad thing when they're like that. But the more, the more white they are, the better it is. *I said that I thought that the mostly black cobs must weigh her heart down a lot.* Yeah, it says a lot of trouble. There's wars and everything. We're apt to face them. But we [*we Indians*] can't declare war. Our Peacemaker made us the League of Peace. He made us bury all our weapons and everything. And that's what's happened to this ah, white people. They, they've got a United Nations, but they never destroyed their weapons.

*I asked Sylvia about the mush that I was served the day after her birthday party in February. Sylvia held a feast on her birthday for everyone, saying it was needed because everyone was not feeling healthy. After being given the recipe for corn mush, I asked if that was the same corn mush that were fed to the False Face masks. Yeah that's the one you use for the False Face. Anybody can eat it. That's what it's for. That's the one they use. When they have their ceremony, they use the corn soup. They use the white corn soup or the cooked corn soup. They have two types of corn soup. I like the cooked one better. One is made with pork. The other is made with beef. The white corn soup made with corn, pork and the white, the other corn soup is made with beef. When we talked about the efficacy of her birthday corn mush, I said that it sounded as if she felt that it performed a miracle for everyone in attendance. Yeah, for every one of them was here. Everyone of them felt better. They eat it all their lives. It's a sort of medicine, I guess. You see the corn is one of the first vegetables that's grown in the spring. It's like the strawberries. The strawberries is considered good medicine too.*

*From time to time our conversations would wander into discussions about the*

*present state of affairs and the occurrences from the past that created the problems of the present. One day, Sylvia talked about Christopher Columbus, the impact of his fourteen ninety-two discovery and the subsequent Two Row Wampum Treaty, struck in sixteen forty-five between the Dutch in New York State and the Mohawks. Such discussions always featured comparisons between our people and the conquerors, with our people always conducting themselves with honour, despite their treatment. So he came and he came over and he landed in the West Indies. He never, Christopher Columbus never stepped a foot on North America. He landed on the island of Santa Domingo in the West Indies. That's as far as he come. He went back. And he took some men back with him. Some of the head men. And they say them head men got back to his country, they got so scared the way they lived and the way they carried on that they died. It killed them. They never came back to tell the people. And they wouldn't come back and tell them what happened to them. The people asked them what happened to our Chiefs that you took? Oh they settled down there. They're happy. That's what they told them. Well, they let it go at that. Never tried to find out about them. Well then, they thought we'd better get together with these men, so they came together and went down in Annapolis Valley. That's in Nova Scotia.<sup>32</sup> They says we'll have a meeting there. That's where these white, these colonists and our Chiefs met.*

And they discussed their problems, that there were so many of these [*Sylvia uses the table as a map*] coming here and that these had the control and these didn't have anything except they were still living on these people and carrying on. Our people were

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<sup>32</sup> Sylvia has either amalgamated two stories together and means New York State or she is referring to the story contained in the Passamaquoddy (New Brunswick) Wampum. According to the Passamaquoddy tradition the Five Nations of the Confederacy sent messengers to all parts of the country inviting all nations to participate in a great council of peace.

keeping them. They says now you're getting too many people here. We're getting to that we can't stand this. What are we going to do? Well, they says, we'll make a treaty. Yes. And one guy says we got the water here. He says you have a sailboat and you have the canoes, he says. We'll put the sailboat and the canoe together. And we'll put a string of wampum around, white wampum, he says. They make it stand.

White wampum in the Longhouse stands for the law, he says. We'll put wampum there. And there's the water there. The sailboat's here and the canoe is here. Now we'll get in that canoe and we'll go along. All right, he says, that's all right. You look after your people. We'll look after ours. And never, never step in another man's boat. That's what they were told. That's the Two Row Wampum. And that's one treaty they don't want to talk about. They don't, they don't think it's right what they done.

You see, then they made the Two Row Wampum, they made these two boats and they were supposed to go the one way and the white man was supposed to govern his white people and come here to live. And the Native was supposed to govern his. Put the sailboat for the white man and the canoe for the Native. And they were supposed to sail along together like that. And progress together. But one was never to step into the other man's boat. That's the ruling of the Two Row Wampum. *I asked Sylvia if she thought it was a mistake for our people to have been so hospitable to the Europeans when they arrived in North America.* No, I don't. I think that was a wonderful thing for them to do that. To think they welcomed them instead of killing them!

*Sylvia's thoughts about the international scene again compare the two cultures.* But we can't declare war. Our Peacemaker made us a League of Peace. He made us bury all our weapons and everything. And that's what happened to this white people. They got a United Nations but they never destroyed their weapons. They haven't finished the

job. Look look at their weapons there. Just twice as big and everything. Good Night! Them tanks they got today, they *[are]* just double, more than double the size they were before. And they got guns that can shoot from overseas to here. Well, that's what's killing their United Nations. That's what killing their United Nations. If they'd have put that in and followed up on that like our people did, they'd have peace on all over the world.

Our trees wouldn't be dying and the water get polluted and the air wouldn't get polluted. Just everything's coming on us now. We're sitting in the middle of pollution. You're afraid to go out there. Afraid to go stand in the air. I've had an operation on skin cancer. And I can't go out in the sun. I've got to stay out of the sun. They say the ozone layer is bigger. It's bigger this year. And that's terrible. That's what's the matter with their United Nations today. They've never discarded their weapons. They never got rid of their weapons. It's not about peace at all. They're out to become the masters and say might is right, they say. They've had war after war. Look at the big wars they had—Spanish Armada, the French Revolution and all the rest. Fight! Fight! Fight! All that war does is get rid of the people, make broken homes. Cause a lot of sorrow. That's all that war does.

*Speaking about my grandfather's return from World War I she says when he came back he was so worried. He was really worried. He says you know, I don't think we done any good, he says, going over there, he says. I think we done more harm to our people. Oh? dad says. How do you mean you did harm to our people? He says why if the Germans had got ahold of us we would have had no treaty or anything left. It's not so at all. The Germans are nice people. But we, he says, I think we done a very harm to our people, he says. One morning they lined us up. Every one of us, he says. In fact, they were going to send us all home because we weren't supposed to go into that army because*

we didn't belong to them, he says. We were a nation and a nation that is been made a League of Peace, he says. And they said we can't. When we got in England, well, you can't have these Six Nations. They declared they'd never go to war at any time. They ended up created for the League of Peace. We'd better send them right back.

Oh, no, they said. They're trained. They're trained, they said. We can't send them back after they trained to do all that they trained to be done, he says. They're trained how to kill a man and how to do everything, he says. And we gotta have them. No we don't, he says. They're a nation that's been created as a League of Peace. And you can't take people that's been created for the League of Peace. What do you mean? he says. Well, he says, this is been done for a nation. They're united nations and he says they're strong. United you stand. Divided you fall. Remember those words: united we stand, divided you fall. And we're not going to divide that nation.

One guy spoke up. Well, he says, I'll tell you what to do, he says. Don't send them as Six Nations. Take some of them, put with the Dutch. Take some of them, put with the French. Take some of them, put with the English. Break them up like that, 'cause they're well-trained men. Well, he says, you all agree to that? Yes, they agree to that and that's how they kept them over there. But before they did that, before they got them divided up like that, they got them all together this one morning 'cause they knew they were going to send them to these different sections.

"Boys line up." And they lined up. And they put them in trenches. And they went through and they gave them all the strongest drink they could give them. And some of them almost passed out from that strong drink. And they came in with a book, with a paper, a long foolscap paper. They came in with it folded like this [*Sylvia demonstrates with a piece of paper*]. There was writing at the top there. And their names was all down

here. Now, they says, we've got something here that we want you all to sign.

They were all drunk then and had to sign it. If they didn't sign it, they'd shoot them. They don't save a soldier if he don't do as he's told, you know. They take them right straight. All right. They went down there and a guy was all right. He signed. Another guy signed. Another guy was too drunk to lift his hand. They, they just took the pen, put it in his hand like that *[Sylvia demonstrates]* and they held his hand and they signed his name for him. And that went right down like that along that paper. When they got through they said thank you boys. You done a very good job. This is your good record. And Claude was so worried about that paper when he come back. And he told us about what they done. And I wouldn't tell anybody 'cause I felt, well, that's not right. That's not right to expose that. No sir, I wouldn't tell anybody.

That paper under that paper *[that they signed]* read: we want to dehorn the Six Nations Chiefs and put in a more progressive form of government. That's when they signed against us. That's the honour they were supposed to give these soldiers today. And that's our trouble right there. That's what they done. It's a big division that's amongst us today is right there. That's the beginning of it. Now I didn't tell anybody that *[Claude's story]*, about that. Wouldn't tell anybody. *On the strength of the petition, the Canadian federal government imposed an elected system at Six Nations in nineteen twenty-four, which replaced their traditional form of government. I asked Sylvia about what had happened during the takeover; did anyone get hurt or was anyone killed?* No, nobody died. No. But when they fought over the fair grounds, this Colonel Morgan pointed a gun at a woman. He didn't shoot, but he pointed the gun at her. It scared 'em. He got a fine of ten dollars that Colonel Morgan. Oh he was a rascal! He was from Africa. They had him from Africa. And he used to whip them coloured people. He used to demonstrate. He

brought home some *[whips]* back with him to Brantford. And where he lived at, at night he used to, he used to demonstrate. He'd demonstrate about how he used to whip them Africans. He'd demonstrate. He used to go out and show the people how he used to whip them. And I knew people who lived near him and they told me, they says, you got some superintendent up there, they says. He's got, got black whips and every once in a while he comes out and demonstrates. I supposed he used to imagine he's whipping them black, coloured people.

*Sylvia had photos for the first elected council or the "dehorners" with Colonel Morgan front row centre. Morgan was Superintendent of Six Nations from nineteen twenty-three to nineteen thirty-four. Here's your dehorners. There, that's the first council that they put in by acclamation. This is Dave General; that's William Smith; that's Hilton Hill; Colonel Morgan; William Powless; Joe Hill; Archie Lickers. That's Archie Russell and John Lickers—John Crooked Leg Long Lickers [Sylvia laughs]. Fred Johnson. This is a Davis, Jim Davis; Frank Miller and this is ah, Frank Montour. And that's William Jamieson up here. That's nineteen twenty-four. That's when they come in and took over. Yeah, they were in by force. The Mounties had no right here. They were trespassers here. No right here whatever. And they went in and set these men and backed them after they got that paper from them [the petition signed by the Six Nations participants in World War I] signed. What they signed. The paper they signed: we want a more progressive government. We want to dehorn the Chiefs.*

*We haven't got a government there at all. We've got that elective system there that are draining us [like] water. They put in the elective system. Council members, before they take their position on the elected council, have to swear an Oath of Allegiance to the Crown. The majority of the population at Six Nations consider the elected council to be*



*nothing more than an arm of the federal government. Electorate turnout for any election is about fourteen percent or less, elections not being our way. They put in the elective system to undermine us and again, we're doing it against ourselves. They won't listen. They took an oath of allegiance and everything be done. Well when they give an oath someone said no, we don't want that oath of allegiance. We don't want to have nothing to do with England. We don't want that in there.*

They didn't put down oath of allegiance when they come to that. They put down "participation," which is the same thing. But they're not educated enough to know that's the same thing. So they used "participation." They're all British subjects. The elected council are British subjects. They're the right arm of the government. That's what they stand for and they do as they're told. They don't do anything *[for us]*. They claim they've got a majority. They haven't got the majority. And we as a nation sitting here with our eyes shut. *[Sylvia reverts to a whining voice.]* No, I don't want to cause trouble. No, I don't want to cause trouble. *[Sylvia raises her voice many decibels]* when the devil are we going to open our eyes and see things? That's what I want to know. They brought them in purposely. They brought the C-31ers in there to get the majority. And the C-31ers come back all free. They all got paid to go out. They got their pay. They come in free. What right do they got to come back free? *Sylvia refers to the Bill C-31 members who are able, although the majority do not live on Six Nations Territory, to vote in the elections. Sylvia said that my grandfather, having accepted enfranchisement, received a payment of six thousand dollars. I have reminded Sylvia that I am a C-31er and have said that I would not vote in any election because I do not live there. I cannot, in all good conscience, presume to tell the people at Six Nations how I think they should live. I've also told Sylvia I do not vote in any elections—it's not "our way." When Sylvia*

*sounds off unfavourably about all the C-31ers, I am, in her mind, exempted, or she forgets I am C-31.*

*[The elected council] can't come to no agreement 'cause they know they're not doing what's right. They're undermining us. They're doing everything to destroy us. That's what they're doing. They're following the steps of that Precision Mathematical Plan that they call it. Why them guys don't even know anything about that. If you told them, they wouldn't understand. They're illiterate. They don't know the meaning of that mathematical plan. They don't know that. I guess they couldn't even spell it. It's terrible. They don't investigate anything. Somebody can talk [them] into anything. Talk about it and they think it's all right. It's worse than children. Well, they haven't got any education. What education have they got? You can't put third and fourth book graduates<sup>33</sup> in there to run a government. Sylvia's usual annoyance at the elected council was fanned into anger at the time of our conversation because of a failed business opportunity they had entered into with a person whose credentials and background the elected council had not investigated. The on-Territory jobs promised did not materialize, contractors were in danger of not being paid and accounting procedures were questioned. What we should really do is lay a charge against them councillors for impersonation. They're taking the place of our government which they have no right to do. They're not put in by our [Confederacy] government. They're professing to be our government. That's the impersonation.*

That's all money. This is all *[about]* money. They had a gathering to bring them together and Mrs. Anderson made a speech. She got a bean seed. She took a bean seed and

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<sup>33</sup> Sylvia is using the old system of the designation of primary school grades. Rather than Kindergarten to Grade VIII, they were Primer, First Book Second Book, Junior Third, Senior Third, Junior Fourth and Senior Fourth. Sylvia is referring to their lack of education.

she took out a loonie. Now I want to show you, she says. I'm going to plant the bean seed and I'm going to plant the loonie. Which do you want? All right, the beans come up. Oh, I can eat that. Whatcha going to do here? You want the loonie? Can't eat the loonie. Didn't grow. I'm telling them not to accept no money at all. Because I know Huron Miller was a darn good dancer. From a little fellow they let him dance. And the people used to throw money at him and everything. He made lots of money. Today he can't hardly walk. And people told him long before not to do that. You daresn't do that because no money should be involved in our way in any way. What we're given in talent, we're supposed to use the talent free.

*Despite the imposition of a more progressive form of government in nineteen twenty-four, the Six Nations Confederacy Council is still in existence. When I asked Sylvia about the frequency of the Confederacy Council's meetings, Sylvia replied that they met the first Saturday of every month. Laughing with acerbity, she added that the next meeting was Saturday, April 1st, April Fools Day. Sylvia is not a fan of the hereditary government, either. Well I'm trying to get these boys that are supposed to be Chiefs. I want them to live up to their honour, the honour that was placed on their family. It's an honour to be placed in that Chiefs line. They don't seem to realize it. And here they're out there following that Precision Mathematical Plan to get rid of us. And don't ever think they aren't doing it.*

*Decrying the erosion of the clan system, the woman's supposed to pick out a very intelligent human being and one that's honourably living. An honourable living man. And a full-grown man, not a baby. Well, they started to put babies in that darn thing. What's a baby know? No man can sit on our government unless he's put there by a woman, the Clan Mother. The Clan Mother's been given that right to put some honest, pure, good-*

living man there. That's the only man we can put there. But they'll go to work and put a man in as Chief and go hunt for a woman to be his Clan Mother. *Enquiring about the efficacy of the Confederacy Chief, Sylvia responded with they tell me they're paying the Confederacy to sit back, that they're giving the Confederacy money. Yeah, that's what's going on. That's why the Confederacy don't say nothing, don't tell nothing, don't listen to nothing. Don't listen to anybody. They're not right in there at all.*

The Chiefs make Chiefs. They make their own Chiefs. They don't go to no Clan Mother, that Confederacy. They're not right at all. Not never been put in by a Clan Mother. Been put in by Chiefs. And they got a white man sitting in there. He's one of the councillors. And them Chiefs go to work and make a councillor. They put men in instead of the women [*putting the Chief in*]. No man can sit on our government unless he's put there by a woman, the Clan Mother. The Clan Mother's been given that right to put some honest, pure, good-living man there. That's the only man we can put there. But they put anything there. They'll go to work and put a man in as Chief and go and hunt for a woman to be his Clan Mother. And now they got even a white man sitting with them. They got [*just any*] women on [*holding*] chairs. A woman is not supposed to take any chair except the Clan Mother. She holds the chair. She doesn't sit on the chair. She holds it. And all the chairs are women. And every Chief is named. His name carried his position, what he's supposed to do.<sup>34</sup> Everything was planned out for us by our messenger.

Anything to destroy us. They're trying to destroy everything that our prophet gave us to do. He even named all the Chiefs. Placed them where they should be sitting, how they should sit, how they should face each other and what it is to go by where

<sup>34</sup> There are fifty Confederacy Chiefs whose names are hereditary from those appointed by the Peacemaker. Upon being appointed as a Confederacy Chief, the new Chief assumes the name held by all his antecedents which also indicates the position of that Chief's chair around the Great Council fire.

they're sitting. There's the fire that sits up here and the well that sits here [*Sylvia uses the table to illustrate the positioning*]. And these things are very important to us. They don't go ahead and appoint them here and there. That's handed down to them. We got to do things right. They got to learn to do things right, but I don't think they'll ever see it unless it gets pictured under their nose.

*According to Sylvia, there are no Mohawk chairs occupied at the Confederacy's Council at Six Nations.*<sup>35</sup> They never acted because the way that Confederacy was disrupted. They were jangling among themselves and they weren't carrying on like they should. And the Mohawks walked out, said they weren't carrying on, carrying it out right. Well, there was no Mohawk chair left. And my Chiefs have never gone down there. They've never gone down to mingle with them. And the law is nothing, [*nothing*] goes through unless the Mohawks are there because all of those nations, they gave them [*the Mohawks*] the privilege to be the sovereign power. They're the head power. And that's why anything that they do is no good because the Mohawks aren't there. The Mohawks is supposed to take the lead.

*Sylvia declares the situation to be muddled up, 'cause that's what the [Canadian]*

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<sup>35</sup> Sylvia says *her* Chiefs do not attend the Confederacy meetings at Six Nations Territory because the Chiefs there are not legitimately chosen and seated by the Clan Mothers. Sylvia is also referring to one of the *written* versions of the *Great Law* (there are about twenty) that says that the Mohawk Nation has a veto over any decisions made by the Great Council. Sylvia regards the Six Nations Territory not as Confederacy Territory but as Mohawk Territory and has declared that she will not rest until she sees her Mohawk Chiefs walk back into their Council House in Ohsweken. The argument that Six Nations Territory is, in fact, Mohawk Territory stems from Haldimand's Proclamation of 25 October, seventeen eighty-four. The land grant along the Grand River was purchased from the Mississauga Nation. As the instrument of transfer from the Mississaugas to the Six Nations, Haldimand's proclamation not only specifies the Mohawk Nation by name, but also adds "and such other of the Six Nations Indians as wish to settle in that Quarter" (Cummings and Mechenburg 1970:110, citing Johnston 1964:50-51). The Haldimand Deed, dated 26 February, seventeen eighty-seven, confers by royal asset "the said lands upon us the Five Nations and our posterity" (Ibid., citing Johnston 1964:70-71).

government wants. They want us to tangle up and don't get along among ourselves. As long as we fight among ourselves, they're scot-free to do as they like. This *[Canadian]* government has everything planned for us, what's to be done? They've been studying awfully hard and I've been studying awful hard too. *[Sylvia rustles through her notes and shows them to me.]* That's supposed to be a ladder. This is going down the ladder. They *[the federal government]* started from the top and go down the ladder. I'm starting from the bottom to go up the ladder. *[In a very firm voice, Sylvia declares]* we're going to get back to where we belong, you'd better believe it. They call this a Precision Mathematical Plan. The rungs of Sylvia's ladder were identified as enfranchisement, replacement of the Haudenosaunee traditional form of government, the Indian Act, conscription, assimilation and "marrying out," residential schools, Bill C-31, the elected council and the mismanagement of Haudenosaunee funds.

This is how it was planned. It's been planned out for years. Well, the enfranchisement said you got to be twenty-one years old to enfranchise. We'll pay you the money to you that's coming to you from the funds. And give you Canadian citizenship. The second one is parental. Now, they said, you've been looked after by the woman, but the women have no right to do things like that. It's got to be done by the men. So they took the power away from the women and put men at the top.

Now they had no right to make an Indian Act on the nations. They're not a nation and yet they made an Indian Act. They're a commonwealth. They're not a nation. That Indian Act was in eighteen seventy-one, I think. And our Mohawks walked out of a meeting in Sarnia, Ontario in June of eighteen seventy-one.<sup>36</sup> We're independent. This book proves it so many places. That's where they held that meeting and the Six Nations

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<sup>36</sup> *The Redman's Appeal for Justice*, 1924, p. 14.

walked out.

We'd been made, you know, through Deganawidah. He made us a United Nations when he brought us together and he also afterwards made us the League of Peace, see? And in the League of Peace, you cannot declare war. You cannot take a life. That's why they never took a life. That's one thing when they went with the white man. The white man used to chop off their heads with an axe and with a knife. And then, of course, they done something very bad. So our people gave the white man two things to look after. They have to meet death. They couldn't kill or rape. That's the only two things they can't undertake. Our people gave them that. That's one thing they broke right away.

So they couldn't conscript the boys, but our Chiefs are big hearted. Again they says, now we're all right, he says. We're all right. We won't allow anybody to go but if anybody goes, they give up their rights. You've got an act for enfranchisement he says. They'll all be over twenty-one,<sup>37</sup> they want to go, he says. So you can have them IF they want to go, but you can't take them. *So anybody who volunteered to go ...* Yeah. And, of course, they too gave them good clothes and everything. Their clothes—the best clothes a lot of them ever had on. Picked them out uniforms and gave them all they wanted. Pay them money. They had everything handed right to them. And three hundred of them went. Three hundred of them fell for it. I know mother and dad didn't want Claude to go. They told him not to go. But he went in spite of them. Yeah and they enlisted. They got them to do that. And they gone on and done other things. We've got some more of what they done. And then, after them got a lot of these people enfranchised, they moved to the city, lived just like a white man.

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<sup>37</sup> My grandfather was twenty years old when he joined the Canadian army in nineteen fifteen.

*About marrying off and Indian status being bestowed on their non-native wives, Sylvia says* well, our law is this: when an Indian man marries a white woman, he puts her on the list. And then their children get on the list. You see, the white woman has no clanship and her children can't go on the list. And she's supposed to take that man and keep him. That's her job! That's why all my brothers married white women. But what do they make them? All drunkards. They supplied the beer and whisky and everything to them and where are they today? They're all younger than me. That's what happened to all my brothers. *When I observed that my grandfather Claude drank, Sylvia replied tartly* yeah, well going into the army's got him.

And then these residential schools. Oh terrible. Now they taught them this. This is what I heard when I first got there. Now remember you're here to learn a better life. You will be taught religion and how to keep yourself clean and how to dress and how to be mannerly and taught all of this, so you're far better than what you came from. What you came from are nothing but thieves, dirty and steal and killing each other and everything else. Bill C-31—buy that all these people out and they were enfranchised themselves and everything. They were out and they lived among the whites. Now they're one hundred percent white. Now they got that money to for enfranchisement and they never paid to come back. They've come back free. And the reason that they did that, they wanted that elective system to get a majority. They thought they'll come back. Well, these C-31ers, they were allowed to come in and build and live right here with their families and everything. And they all came back. But I don't think all of them fell for the council.

*The bottom rung of Sylvia's ladder is the missing money. According to Sylvia, there is money held in trust for the Confederacy which came from leases and sales of land*



*by Brant.* That's the trust and England put it in trust for her. And that went on good for, to nineteen twenty-four. From nineteen twenty-four to this day—seventy-six—years we haven't seen one cent of that interest money. The last I heard for the interest money here on our mint money that England held<sup>38</sup> was forty-two thousand dollars for that year. Now one year there was a lot more. One year everybody got eleven dollars each. When it was forty-two thousand, we got three dollars each. That's the last time I remember getting any interest money in the family. And that interest money was held in trust by the Indian Department here until the spring of the year. And then the farmers used to use that interest money to buy their grain and everything to do he planting. Well, that's the Mathematical Stairs. They've been driving that all the time, gradually, little bit at a time. *Sylvia ends off her address with chilling words.* And their favourite word is best Indian is a dead Indian. *Does Sylvia mean physically or culturally dead? For Sylvia, cultural death is synonymous with physical death.*

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<sup>38</sup> Sylvia is referring to the monies held in trust for the benefit of the Six Nations derived from the sale and lease of the Six Nations Trust as well as sale of timber, loans and investments. Expenditures from this included salaries for the Superintendent of Indian Affairs. I am not familiar with the specific instance which Sylvia is referring to here. In nineteen ninety-one, the Six Nations made a presentation to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs demanding an accounting of the trust monies, citing unpaid and unsanctioned loans to the Grand River Navigation Company, for the construction of the Welland Canal and McGill University. "The issue centres not on aboriginal rights, but basic law—the legal obligation of any trustee to safeguard and properly account for a citizen's assets.... Sums in excess of fifty billion have been mentioned..." (Rudy Platiel, Native Affairs reporter, Brantford, Ontario, *Globe and Mail*, 10 October 1995, Section A, p. 10).

## THE FOURTH QUESTION

### Where am I going?

*Sylvia's answer to the Fourth Question lies in the last line of this section. "I'm still going to fight 'til the day I die." With more of her life behind her than ahead, Sylvia's pugnacious spirit, a combination of her inheritance, her context, and her experiences, directs the last lap of her life, be it of many more or few years. Towards the end of our recorded conversations, during one of our many snack times, I asked Sylvia what she thought about having attained, at that time, ninety-four years. It IS an accomplishment. I'm very lucky that I've got my senses, my hearing and everything. I then asked her, looking over all those years, what did she think was the biggest, the best, the most important thing she had ever done in her life? The most important thing I did, I fought for my job. In 1933," all our schools were going to be filled by our own teachers. OK, there was three white people here: Peter Davis, Bill Taylor and Dan Green, in enfranchised Indian. They were supposed to go. There were three going to Normal School [called Teachers College today]: Ella Montour, Harry Lickers and Agnes Hill. They were supposed to come in and take them white people's place. And then we had all our very own—school board, all our own. All our own teachers and everything.*

There was just three empty schools. Everything was ours. And we had a school

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<sup>39</sup> In 1933, all the schools on Six Nations came under the control of the Department of Indian Affairs, where they have remained ever since. In 1973, though, the Trudeau government adopted the slogan "Indian Control of Indian Education" as government policy. Since then, most of the Indian bands in Canada have taken over the control and administration of the schools on their reserves. The most glaring exception is Six Nations. Despite the pride that even the band council takes in its "independence," the Department of Indian Affairs still decides who the teachers will be on this reserve and what they will teach" (Maracle 1996:95). Sylvia was hired to teach by the Six Nations School Board. The School Board's decision was overridden by the elected council and the Superintendent, Colonel Cecil Morgan, because of this nineteen thirty-three ruling in favour of retaining non-Native teachers. Sylvia's request to Bill Smith to act as her witness came from her long time friendship with him rather than as his position as a councillor.

board here. And the school board had a ruling that *[as]* they had a Native teacher graduate, they was to let them outsiders go. They know they had to go. They was supposed to resign, give up their job for a Native teacher. Well, this year, just after I taught the first year, there was three going to Normal School. There was three outsiders here. We had a school board. Well, the school board hired in May. I was hired in May to teach my school the next year. They only hired for one year at a time.

Well they *[the elected council]* thought we were getting too much ahead of them. So they says well, we can't let those outsiders go. We like them. They're good teachers. We got these three that are coming in. What are we going to do? One guy spoke up. Well, he says, give three bad reports, he says. Now we got no good teachers. Three are teachers that are just no good. Well, who would they be? Well, they said there's Sylvia Jamieson—she's just started. She's got a small school. Let's take her. And ah, there's Wilton Loft, one of the oldest teachers. Let's take him. We're always *[hearing]* complaints about him. Half the time he's not in school on time and everything. Then there's Mina Hill, the one that comes from Hamilton. She don't even live here.

Well, I was hired in May. In June I was put from my Number Seven School to Number Six. In July, I was put back from Number Six to Number Seven. In August I got this letter to resign. *During a visit in November of 2000, Sylvia, hitherto silent on the contents of her negative report, confided that her moral conduct was questioned. The male friends visiting her brothers were ascribed as coming to visit Sylvia.* So after that, now who will I see about these reports? I says an inspector. So I called up the inspector and asked him if I could have an interview with him. I was mad at him too for this adverse report. So I went. He says, well, it's the holiday. Why do you want to see me for? I says, I got a letter here I want you to see. I showed him the letter.

He says where did you get this? What is it? Who's it from? he says. It's from the council down there I says. What will I do? Council? What have they got to do with the school? he says. You've got a school board haven't you? I says yes. He says look, if you got a school board and if you were hired by that school board, he says, you're hired. Nobody can put you out. That's what my inspector told me. He says they can't put you out. You're hired for the year. So I says all right. I thanked him very much. I was glad to hear of that.

With that I went to see the superintendent. And I went in there and asked to see him. There was all Indians working in the office—ALL INDIANS—girls were typewriting, everything. There was only one white man sitting there and that was the superintendent. He was in a room all by himself. So, they says, he's in there. So they took me and they says Colonel [*Morgan*] this lady here to see you. He says send her in, he says. So I come in. He says oh, you're Miss Jamieson. I says yes I am. He says I suppose you come to see me over [*what*] we're asking you to do with the school? Yes, I says. I didn't think it was very nice to ask me at this time of year, I says, to ask me in August. If you'd asked me in June, I probably would have gone. But this is no time to ask anybody to go, I says. In another month, there's somebody got to be working, I says. And I intend to work. But, I says, where am I to go? All the schools are taken, I says. I got no place to go to get a job no.

Oh that's all right, he says. He says we just happen to have this ah, mix up, he says. He says we've got these good white teachers there teaching there, he says. And they're good teachers and we don't want them to go, he says. But now you resign he says. You resign and I'll have, in a month or so, I'll have you back teaching just like that. I says look here MISTER, you don't do things like that with me. I'm a human being, I

says. It's not that easy with me, I says. You made me a goat and I'm going to give you a ride, I says. That's what's going to happen with you.

What does any human being do? I says. He says what do they do? I says they go and get a lawyer and get after you. I said I'm going to get a lawyer, I says. I'm going to let him settle this. You can't treat people like that, I says. Where did you come from? I says. You! You plan, poor, low-born Englishman, I says. You never had a coat and pants to match before you could make the Six Nations, I says. You're nothing but a servant of Six Nations.<sup>40</sup> I'm no servant of Six Nations!!!! I'm no servant!! Blah! Blah! Blah! Blah! Hilton Hill walked by. Hilton, he says, I'm no servant of Six Nations, am I? Hilton says NO! I says yes he is, Hilton Hill and so are you! I says. Anybody paid by the Six Nations are servant to that body! I says. So don't tell me what to do, what they don't know. Oh, I let into them two! I was just a wild cat. Was I mad at them. Did I ever tell them!

Well, he says, what are you going to do? I says I'm going to get a lawyer, I told him. What lawyer are you going to get? he says. I says I'll get Lawyer Body. Lawyer Body? he says. That's our lawyer. Good! That's the man I want. One side that knows that *[the]* two sides are doing here, I says. He's the best lawyer I can get ahold of. So after I left him I did go to Lawyer Body. And I told Lawyer Body. And Lawyer Body—oh! He was all for me. Why did they? What's the matter with them? he says. What are they doing anyway? I says that's what I'd like to know, I says. I was already to move. And they moved me back and I says I've got my stuff all back there again ready to go ahead and teach. And I got no job. Well, he says, we'll fix that. And I'll get a letter off to that

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<sup>40</sup> As Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Cecil Morgan's salary was paid from the Six Nations trust monies.

department right away about it, he says. So he called his secretary and wrote a letter right there and told them they wasn't doing right by me and everything. So he sent the letter. He says in two weeks I should get an answer, he says. I'll call you and you come up and see me then, he says. I'll see what happens. And I thought I was so rude to that superintendent too. I thought he's in that; no use for me.

So anyway, I waited. Bill Smith was chief councillor. So I got a letter from the lawyer to come up and see him. He says you come up at seven o'clock, he says. I've got an answer for us from the department. So I went to see Bill Smith and I says, look, I'm fighting a school problem, I says. I says because I didn't resign. I'm not going to resign, I says. I says now I've been to a lawyer about it and I says he's got no answer. So, I says, will you come with me? I says I've got to have a witness.

And he was chief councillor. And he says I'll go with you. Well, I says, I've got to see the man at seven o'clock so I'll pick you up about 6:30, I says. And I says now listen. When you come with me and listen to what the result is. And if not, I says, if they won't let you come in with me, you sit beside an open door and you hear everything that's going on when I meet that lawyer. So he says all right. So he came with me. Sure enough, when I went in there he asked me to come in his office and I went in. But Bill didn't come in, so he sat beside the open door. And he *[the lawyer]* was all together different. He says Miss Jamieson, he says, I'm sorry, he says. They've been good to you, he says. They're willing to give you another job as soon as an opening comes, he says. It won't hurt you to rest a month or two maybe, he says. But they done a bit better, he says. And first job opens, they'll call you, he says. So, I think that's a pretty fair offer. I looked at him. I looked at him in the worst way. I got a look so surprised. I looked at him. I stood up. I says I'm sorry, but I'm not interested. And I walked out.

And then my fight began.

So I had heard about a good lawyer in Cayuga—Richard Coulter. They said he was a smart lawyer. So I went down to see him. And I went down when he had a good day, nobody busy. And they let me right in to see him. And I said I've come to see you. I wonder if you'd help me, I says. I don't want no one to know you're my lawyer, I says. Your name will never be mentioned. But I says, I don't want to do anything wrong. I want sound advice. He says, fair enough. I says now it's going to be a touchy case, I believe. But, I says, will you help me? He thought about it. I said you know the situation now that I'm in. I told him everything about it, what it was. He looked for a minute, around, around [*Sylvia mimes*]. He didn't know whether to take it or not. So he says yes, I'll help you. I says thank you. Well, if anything happens to me, I says, I'm coming to you right away. Well, he says, we'll lay charges against them. Anything happens to you, I'll lay charges against them.

Well, the first I went to school, nothing bothered me. I went to school in September. And they paid me my hundred dollars. They paid me one month. I went to school in October. And I was in school about a week and along came the Mounties. Knocked at the door and asked if I was there. They says yes, and they came right in the school room. And he says Miss Jamieson, he says, you're not hired to teach this school, he says. I said to him what do you mean? I says I was hired in May to teach this school and I intend to do so, I says. I was hired by the school board and I intend to do so. Oh well, he says, we were told to come here and tell you to go. So, he says, we'll have to ask you to leave. So I walked out. I left. I walked to the gate and I set at the gate. And they come and they go in the car. They said well you'd better get in the car. We'll go to the barracks. So, I got in the car. Come to the barracks with them.

I got there and when I got there the corporal was there. He didn't come after me. You see, it was the Mounted Police that came after me. Corporal says what are you doing there? He says they asked you to go. Why don't you know enough to go? I says I don't know. I says I'm here to teach that school I says. I intend to do it, I says. I was hired by the school board. So he called Colonel Morgan and told him. He says well, Mr. Morgan, we got her down here. She wouldn't go, he says. He says she don't intend to go, he says. She intends to do so [*and Sylvia starts chuckling at the remembrance*]. Colonel Morgan says put her on the phone. Put her on the phone and let her talk. And you'd better take down what she says. When I got up to go, he says, you're wanted on the telephone. And just like somebody says—don't say a word. I heard that voice so clear! And so I went and say hello? I says I'm Sylvia Jamieson. The guy [*says*] you're Sylvia Jamieson? I says yes. He says you're teaching that school? I says yes. What are you doing there? he says. I never answered him. You know you have no right there, he says. You've been asked to go. Why don't you know enough to go? he says. You're not supposed to be there. O-o-o-o-h and he called me down. He called me every, he was just swearing. He didn't know what he was saying. And I just let him talk. I never said another word. I never said another word. I just thought such a person! Such a person to put as head of us, our people. I never said nothing and finally he hung up the receiver—slammed it. And the corporal said what's the matter? Haven't you anything to say? Can't you say something about [*the situation*] to him? I says yes. I says he's a very wicked man, I says. He swore at me and everything. Why'd he swear at me for? I says. I haven't done anything wrong I says. That's all I can tell you, I says. He needs education [*and Sylvia and I explode into laughter*].

Well, the corporal said, well never mind. You're not under arrest. ME NOT



UNDER ARREST? AND THEY BROUGHT ME IN THEIR CAR, IN THEIR CRUISER, AND I WASN'T UNDER ARREST??!!?? Who's crazy? *[and we laugh some more]*. Well, they took me back to the school and the school was open there. So I jumped in my car and went right to Coulter. And I told him. I says now they told me if I go back I've got to go to court, I says. So you'd better get me ready to go to court I says. I'll have to let them know who you are when we go to court. But, he says, they won't take you to court. N-o-o-o-o-o-o he says. They'll never take you to court. They wouldn't take you to court for anything like that, he says. I says are you sure? He says yes. I says well, I'm sure they're going to take me to court, I says. You'll see, I says. It won't be this week, but maybe next week for sure. He says, well what are you going to do? I says well, I'll go back to school in the morning. School will be opened. I'll go back. I went back to school. A big chain on there. O-o-o-o-h big, great big links going around the door and a lock on it. School closed until further notice. NOW WHAT RIGHT HAS ANYONE TO CLOSE A SCHOOL? THEY HAVE NO RIGHT TO DO THAT AT ALL!!!! And they wouldn't let the kids in either.

Oh it was the talk of the town, I was *[laughed]*. So I went to the lawyer again. Got in my car and went down to my lawyer and said see? We're going to court, I says. That school's locked up I says. I couldn't get in. Well, he says, that's all right. Keep your eyes open, he says. The minute that lock comes off you be ready to go right in there, he says. And you report at that school at nine o'clock in the morning and one o'clock in the afternoon. So I did. And everybody thought oh, she's crazy. Well, I wasn't standing up for me, but I was standing up for all the other teachers. And oh, they said I was crazy.

Well, that was all right. I reported. So before the end of the week, sure enough, I got a court order. Go to court. So I took it to the lawyer. I says don't you think we ought

to put this off for a week or so? NO! he says. We'll go to court, he says. There's no sense of paying another twenty, twenty-five dollars to lay it over. NO! he says. We'll go right to court [*Sylvia laughs*]. That's when they found out who I had [*more laughter*]. Oh, I had a good lawyer. He was good to me. I went to him and everything, I told him everything every time they'd come there. Six times the Mounted Police come and walked me out of the school! The first time when I went and I told him, he said did you go when they told your? I says yes. He says didn't they take ahold of you? I says no, they told me to go, so I just went. Well, he says you haven't got nothing on them. Not a thing. He says when you come under arrest, they got to put their hands on you. And don't you move, he says unless they do. Once they put their hands on you, you're under arrest. But not before. Oh, I was learning the law, I'm telling you. Well, they took my hand and led me to the gate. That's as far as they'd go. And they says no don't go back, they says. We got to go to court if you go back. I stood there and watch them go and then I'd go back. Next month again, they come again. I made them take ahold of me every time after that when the lawyer told me that. They were in it. They were in a mess.

Well, they kept evicting me. And it came Christmas and I went home and I said to mother, I says, I'm sick and tired of this I says. This is no fun teaching and all that trouble I says. They're going to take me to court and they won't I says. You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to let that other teacher [*teach*] 'cause he's just sitting at the back and doesn't work. That's another thing I said to the other teacher. I says look I got seventy-four pupils here. I says now I want you to take the juniors or the seniors. We'll divide the school, I says and you teach. I'm not against you, I says. I'm after these jobs I says. We've got to hang onto our jobs. So I says you take half the school and I'll take half. They wouldn't. He just set at the back and watch me teach. WATCH ME TEACH

**ALL THE SEVENTY-SOME-ODD PUPILS!!!! They sat at the back of the room and read the newspaper. They wouldn't help me.**

**Well, I did go to court. It was dismissed. When I went back in January, I went across the road and got my lunch. And the boys were mad about them taking me out of school. And that old thing sitting at the back—he was about [a] 300 pound man sitting at the back. And the boys, they agreed. And I didn't know anything about this. They said let's lick him. Let's kick him out. So they planned that. All the senior boys. I had about ten senior boys, big young men. So they said they'd go fight and get that guy out of there, and Jonas Smith [*Sylvia starts to chuckle again*] was one. And they says who will go first? Jonas said I'll go first. I'll go up and hit him and you come right after me. Let's tear the dickens out of him and carry him right out of that school, he says. And I wasn't there. I'd gone across the road for my lunch. Mildred and Alec used to give me lunch at noon. I'd always had lunch with them.**

**Well [*and Sylvia sighs*], Jonas went up. He hit the other teacher and none of the boys followed him. So he took that Jonas by the collar and threw him out and says now you go on home and stay to home. You stay home for a week, he said. So when I come back to the school, they says teacher, Jonas isn't here and I says why? They says that teacher at the back sent him home. He's gone for a week. Oh, I says, that's all right. Let him go. So I let it go and I never said nothing. I never said nothing to him either for doing that. He had no right touching that kid. No right whatever. Well [*Sylvia laughs*] Jonas was gone for a week and at the end of the week—it was February the first—Jonas came back. And I took him in and the other didn't show up at all that day. So on February the second, eleven o'clock, he came parading in and took his seat at the back. I went across and had my lunch. And I come back in and the bell rang. I lined the girls up on one porch**

and the boys on one and I sent the girls in. And the other teacher come up off the chair and went and stood in front of the boys' door, looked over and looked at what I was doing. I thought well, he wants to see how to send them into school. I never thought nothing. And he put his arm up and over the *[Sylvia demonstrates]*, look like that. And the boys went on and on and on under his arm when I sent the boys in.

Come to Jonas, he says what are you doing here? I sent you home, he said and you have no right being here. Jonas says well, you sent me home for a week and my week was up yesterday and I returned to school. But you weren't here, he says. Well, he says, when I send you home you know enough to stay at home. With that I spoke up. Let that boy in! I says. I'm teaching that boy and I intend to do so, I said. Let that boy in. NO! he says. I won't let him go in, he says. If I send them home, they're going to stay at home. With that, he took him by the back of the collar. He led him to the door. I just went right straight to him and I just *[Sylvia claps her hands indicating a slap]*. LEAVE THAT BOY ALONE!!!! LEAVE HIM ALONE!!!! I says *[Sylvia is laughing heartily]*.

The other teacher got in the corner and I says don't you touch them children!!!! I said you have no right sending anybody home, I says. Who do you think you are *[laughter]*. I, I, I, I was just jumping. I had to jump. He was three hundred pounds—great big fat man, big belly—beer belly. Did I ever hit him. And every time I hit him—I hit him in the face—he'd bite his tongue and the blood was running out of his mouth. Oh I hit! They thought I really hurt him with the blood. He'd bit his lip. The blood was running down. He had blood *[Sylvia is laughing so hard she can barely get the words out]*.

Now, I says, anybody to go, you go, get going yourself; right straight. I've had enough of your nonsense setting down here watching me teach and you're supposed to be teaching. And you're getting paid and not me! And I come in and shut the doors. Sit him

out there. Left him. He stayed there for a little while, about ten minutes. He stayed there. Finally, he opened the door and come in. Went at the back and got his chair. Brought it right up to the front and sat right at the front.

And of course, he's wiping his mouth. It kept bleeding. And the kids would snicker. And he wiped his mouth and the kids would snicker. Finally, he got up, went out and slammed the door and went to tell the superintendent that I hit him. So I went [*Sylvia starts to laugh again*] to my lawyer. He sat back and just laughed. O-o-o-o-h he laughed. He couldn't help it. He just laughed and laughed. I was so sober and so scared. I only wore size ten dress [*and Sylvia, like me, is only about five feet tall*]. I was a little bit of a thing.

I says now we're going to court. N-o-o-o, he says. They wouldn't take you to court for that! I went to court. And the night before I went [*I*] stayed with my sister in Brantford so I wouldn't be late for court. And I had to walk down Brant Avenue to the court. And I had to walk down Brant Avenue to the court. And I went down Brant Avenue and on my way down a little dog come out of one of them homes and followed me to court. He wouldn't leave me. He walked right beside me. He went right to court. And anyway, when we went in I was setting there and all at once this dog come and sat beside me. The cryer come in and he says lady, you can't have your dog in the court. I says that's not my dog, I says. That dog don't belong to me. So he took the dog and turned it out. The dog sat outside the door. And the door'd open once and he run in, come sit beside me. He says I told you once before, you can't have a dog. I says I told you once before that's not my dog! Any time that door opened that dog come and sat beside me.

So finally court opened. They put me on the prisoner's chair. I had to go in the other side of that, when the court case was going on. It's what's called the prisoner's

chair. So I sat on the prisoner's chair. They put the other teacher up there. They put him in the box. And did they ever questions him and laugh in the court. The whole court was sitting there. Indians from the reserve. Everybody wants to know what's going on [*Sylvia starts to laugh again*]. The whole court was just filled up with Indians [*Sylvia laughs harder*]. And they laughed so much. They asked the other teacher the darn foolishhest questions. He wouldn't answer them right. The judge says to him what happened when the lady hit you? Where did the lady hit you? Where did the lady hit you? He says she hit me right here. What happened? he says. He says she didn't knock me over. I DIDN'T ASK YOU IF SHE BOWLED YOU OVER OR NOT! I WANT YOU TO TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED! Oh, he scolded him. And everybody almost clapped.

And then he says how who told you to teach that school? He looked around. Colonel Morgan was sitting in the front seat. He says Colonel Morgan. What right had he got to tell you to go teach that school? Well, he says, they needed a new teacher. Well, he said, there was already a teacher in there, a teacher that was hired by the school board and she was there doing her job. What right did you have to be there? Well, he says, the superintendent sent me there. Oh, he says, you do what the superintendent says, eh? Oh that's all right to do what the superintendent says. You're supposed to do as the superintendent tells you he says. You disrespect the school board? Remember, the school board has power too. The school board even has power over your council.

He got after him and everybody was clapping. Order in the court! Order in the court! Order in the court! And then he asked him again. They really made a fool of that teacher. O-o-o-o-h did they ever do to him! And I never got there at all to say anything. So the court was over that day 'til next week. Put it over until next week. Well, next week my lawyer didn't show up. He didn't show up at all. He knew how it was going to go. So

they put the other teacher in that box again. They give him another once over. So it was laid over again. So the next week I went in again. And the minute we got in they announced it—case dismissed. They dismissed that case. They couldn't give me criminal record. I didn't cause any harm. I taught right to the end of June.

*Did you ever get paid for that year?* No! I got nine months coming to me from that year to this. To this day at a hundred dollars a month. I got nine hundred dollars that they got to pay me for that year. The interest and the compound interest. Over sixty years now! That was in nineteen thirty-three and thirty-four. Nineteen thirty-three it started. This is Two Thousand. No, I didn't go back. I couldn't, [I] didn't. I was only hired for the year, see? Well, they hadn't hired me [back], so I guess they let the other teacher teach. I didn't go back anyway. In nineteen thirty-seven, my school was vacant—Number Seven. They called me that I could go back to Number Seven. And I said no. I said I don't want to go back there, I says. I had some friends and some enemies. I don't want that. I want this forgotten, I says. I'll take the next vacancy. So they put Mary Longboat there. And Mary taught there until she quit. And I waited for the next one. And the next one came in January—Number Ten School. And that's where I went back, to Number Ten. And I taught there. I think it was in thirty-eight. I went there and then about 'forty, they moved me to Number Six School and I taught Number Six School in 'forty-two and then they moved me to Number Nine School and I taught there 'til forty-nine. And they put me in Number Eleven School.

Well, when they brought me to Number Eleven School I was teaching there and that retarded class came up. To take the retarded work [I had to take courses]. So I went in 'forty-nine and 'fifty. And when the first year was done I went back and I done the second and third year. I got through all of them and they made me a supervisor for the

retarded. Well, I taught in the basement from 'fifty-three until 'fifty-six. I fell three times at the school. And I knew I had to quit 'cause I kept falling. I was getting these spells like. And it was mainly on account of teaching in the damp [basement].

So they let everything run smooth again for about ten years. Almost was all our Indian teachers. Ten years they bit them again. We're going to get rid of them teachers. We'll get rid of them. Oh, the almighty dollar! We'll offer each one of them a thousand dollars for every year they taught. *Sylvia directs a question to me.* Well, if you taught twenty years, what would you do? Remember you're getting a thousand dollars for every year you taught. *I allowed that this would be, for me, a difficult choice. I'd have to weigh the lump sum of money against my love of teaching. I said I'd have to think long and hard over it. I asked Sylvia what she would do.* I'd bite. I suppose I'd bite. I suppose I'd take the twenty thousand and start a business. But I certainly wouldn't do it today! Not if they offered me two thousand dollars every year I taught. Well, what do you think? Twelve of them gave up their jobs. They brought in twelve [non-Native teachers]. *Sylvia recounted these events with much anger covered by laughter. I told Sylvia, while I applauded and appreciated her actions, I thought that they did not make her popular. This amused Sylvia immensely.* No, I wasn't popular. And I'm not popular now. I'm not popular yet which made us both laugh. *Ruefully, she added* with all that showing them that it could be done, they can't see it. I'm the only one that got back teaching. I'm the only one that wouldn't resign of the three. They can't see that!

*Sylvia has always led by example. Fighting for all Native teachers on Six Nations Territory sixty years ago, Sylvia's own signature action is apparent in other things she has done since.* In the early sixties, I was working in the store and I used to be drawing. I drew a bridge across that river [the Grand River]. Six pillars. I wanted one for each



nation. I called it Six Nations Bridge. And I used the colours. All the colours that the Mohawks had, all the colours that the Cayugas had. I had my bridge all good colours for each span for the nations. One of my sisters come in. What are you doing? she says. I'm building a bridge. Oh, you're crazy she said. What are you building a bridge for? I says I want it for a memorial bridge I says. I want to remember. It's our bridge. And I had everything fixed up. Oh I had a perfect bridge built! It was on a big paper.

And when I got it done, I thought I'm going to give it to that council and tell them to build that bridge. And I wrote a note and I says here's the way I'd like our bridge built and I'd like it done by all our men, I says. We got foremen that are building bridges off the reserve that are right from here. Why can't they be foremen here and build the bridge here? And I put ten dollars on that picture. I gave them ten dollars to start. They looked at it and they thought it was crazy. And another thing I told them too. To make it a toll bridge so it would pay for itself. They shelved everything. They put it to one side. Well, they says, we'll look at it later when we get some money. They didn't consider anything about it at all. I wanted it to be a historical bridge. And they just ... oh, they laughed about it. They laughed about everything I done.

*Of others' efforts to remember, commemorate and celebrate our people, Sylvia cites the pageant held in August at the Six Nations outdoor theatre. Emily General started this pageant and the first thing she put on was the coming of Deganawidah in that white stone boat. She had a white canoe and everything. And he was all dressed in white and everything. It was the most beautiful thing to see! I wanted Gary Farmer [another well-known actor and film maker from Six Nations]. I wanted to talk to him about that. I'd like him to make a movie [about the Peacemaker]. I think that's the only way we can let everybody know our life, the way we live. 'Cause we're the real people.*

Our people were never stupid. They were never, ever stupid. That's why I can't understand them white men to do a thing like this [*Sylvia gestures to a copy of The Redman's Appeal for Justice, 1924*] to destroy us. What right have they got to try and destroy us and have us do it? We're doing it. We're destroying ourselves. It's the only truth I'm following. I'm not following something that's been made up. It's something down in black and white. They [*mainstream*] don't know. They [*mainstream*] don't think they [*our people*] know anything. We don't know this is a Mathematical Plan. Well, I'm doing a Mathematical Plan. I've got to undo it. [*Mainstream*] worked hard to build it up and I got to undo it. That's what I got to do.

*About Sylvia's efforts to bring people together to work together she says well, I've tried three times real hard. I got invitations made and I got a program ready. I got everything ready [about] our treaties and everything and I put them in a pad. Saved them up in a pad. I had about seven different things I had done. And I taped them together and I had all these things to hand out. And I invited all the Chiefs and all the councillors. And I had a pile of these books [Redman's Appeal]. And I says now I'm going to get them all together. There's a nice restaurant here. So I asked them would they cater? Bring my Chiefs and the councillors. And they did. I says well what will you charge me? Well, we'll charge you regular, just a regular price for a plate they said. Well, I says, that's all right. I'll pay for all of them.*

So I get all the invitations out and I thought I'd have the whole place filled up. I got about four Confederacy, three elected. And they had gone to a lot of work and prepared a lot of food. And that's all I got. Well, I was disappointed but I couldn't help it. I gave those their books that I made up and I says now I want you boys to study this, I says. Because we've got to do something, I says. If it's wrong what we're doing, let's

get rid of it. We had a nice meal. We had everything nice to eat. OK. I paid for everything and I let it go. I forgot it. I gave them their books. The only one that connected with me was John Peters [*elected council member*]. He says I wish we had more women like you, he says, that would help us out like this.

And then I called to celebrate the Haldimand.<sup>41</sup> I says you'd have thought everybody should come out and celebrate the Haldimand. It's two hundred and fifteen years old [*October 26, 1999*]. And I says they should. That's the strongest treaty we've got. I prepared for a thousand. I still got enough for a thousand left. Foam cups and plates and everything. I prepared a thousand for that 'cause it was potluck, see? I did enough [*food*] for about fifty people. Anyway I did that myself. I prepared myself for about fifty people. I thought there'd be a thousand because I advised potluck. I thought I'd have too much if I made more. But I just about had enough. Well, I tried to get a bunch together and tried to let them know as much as I can. And it was so disappointing. But I'm going to keep trying. *Sylvia organized another Haldimand gathering in the fall of 2000. With a sigh, she reported that this was also "a flop."*

*Sylvia is wounded by the preponderance of criticism and backbiting she observes in the world.<sup>42</sup> While Sylvia has made her share of criticisms all through our*

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<sup>41</sup> Haldimand Deed, 1784, is the land base for the Six Nations Territory along the Grand River and was granted by the British government to its allies, the Six Nations, as reparations for their lost homelands in the United States. Sylvia's designation of the Haldimand Treaty is a misnomer. Treaties, as defined by Cumming and Mickenburg, are "a unique legal phenomenon" and "can be best understood, from both a legal and historical point of view, when considered as agreements of a very special nature in which the Indians gave up their rights in the land in exchange for certain promises by the government" (Cummings & Mickenburg 1970:53).

<sup>42</sup> The principle of "the good mind" focuses on the perpetuation of the Great Peace. Denigrating and criticizing people creates discord and is not a part of Haudenosaunee tradition. Five hundred years of contact with and domination by Europeans has resulted in this cultural trait passing over into Onkwehonwe social territory.

*conversations, almost without fail she has balanced her criticisms later [and, at times, much later] with softer, kinder words. About Susan Hardy, a long time Native teacher at the Mohawk Institute, while Sylvia reports Miss Hardy's harsh treatment of the students [made worse because Miss Hardy was our own kind], Sylvia also observed that Susan Hardy did the best she could to tell us to be strong and try to live by our people, like our people's supposed to live. And that's all she could do. Although not a supporter of or believer in the Longhouse form and content of worship, Sylvia gives credit where she feels credit is due. Well, that's one thing about the Longhouse. There's no money exchanged. They don't need to pay for anything there. They have to give. Everybody contributes whatever they have. They have to contribute. And they contribute stuff from what they made. What God has given them.*

*Sylvia cites the broadcast and printed media in particular. Well, I can't stand to see them downing people. I can't stand seeing things like that. Belittling people. Try to belittle people. That's all they're trying to do. And who are these people who are trying to do it? Air Farce [a CBC political satire show]. It sure is a farce! I CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY THEY ALLOW ANYTHING LIKE THAT TO BE SHOWN! MAKING FUN OF ALL OUR BOSS MEN AND THAT! I DON'T THINK THAT'S RIGHT! I can't see where it's got any sense. Just to laugh. Just to laugh. Who wants to laugh? I don't want to laugh at that. I looked at that and I get so mad! Look how they make fun of the Prime Minister 'cause he's got a little twist in his mouth. Well, that's another dirty thing that they had no right to do. That boy was sick! That's why his mouth went like that. They ought to be thankful that he's as good as he is today to do that [referring to the Prime Minister's service to the people]. But they don't appreciate nothing. They down you, down you, down you as fast as they can.*

Well, I was telling you about that Eagle's Nest<sup>43</sup> and how they [*our people*] went and took over. The Brantford paper used this. O-o-o-o-h they just, o-o-o-o-h! Radicals! Radicals! Everything. Calling them down. So I says that's not right. They're not radicals! They're not. They don't agree with what's going on. They know there's something wrong. They tried to show it up that they were doing what's right by us. And the papers made a big hullabaloo about that.

Even if I make a speech, they're always criticizing my speech. And I made a speech down there at the Council House, a big meeting. And they asked me to speak. So I spoke. I told them when I spoke [*we are*] setting between two governments, an elected one and the Confederacy. I spoke about our people and how our people had lived and all the contributions they gave. I says our people have given a lot of contributions. Oh they contributed so much to this world [*and*] nobody gives them a wink. Next day, got a newspaper. In the editorial MRS. SANDY'S GOT HER SMOKE SIGNALS CROSSED! Yeah, right in the paper. I thought gee whiz, they don't listen to me. What's the matter with them? Anybody else, the little things they do, they get ahold [*and they*] get it for the rest of their life. That's our trouble. Back-biting and swearing and everything like that. That's not a good mind! [*Adodarho*"] didn't have a good mind. It's just like snakes.

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<sup>43</sup> Eagle's Nest Tract is situated in Brantford Township, East of River, on the Grand River between the City of Brantford and Cainsville. Six Nations had consented the Eagle's Nest Tract, among others, to be let on short leases. These tracts were subsequently sold by the Crown without the consent of Six Nations and the proceeds from these sales were never paid to the Six Nations.

<sup>44</sup> In the story of the Peacemaker's attempt to spread the message of "the good mind," one of the biggest, most difficult undertakings and his final task was to bring "the good mind" to Atotarho, Chief of the Onondagas. He is described as having a crooked body and snakes for hair, physical manifestations of his wickedness. The Peacemaker is described as combing the snakes from Atotarho's hair, thereby removing from him all evil. The Peacemaker then placed deer antlers on Atotarho's head and appointed the Onondagas as the Fire-Keepers and Atotarho as the principal Fire-Keeper.

**That's your own thoughts.**

**Now when your government is set up by divinity—and our government has been set up through divinity—that means no power can overpower them. You can't overpower what's been put here by the Creator. The Creator is the one that set up everything for us. He set up our constitution. He set up our government. He set up everything for us. They can't overpower the Creator's work. He says come on! Together you stand. Divided you fall. And that's what we're doing. We're not trying to stand together. We're letting ourselves go. They [*the dominant culture*] got us doing it! Now today. I'm the only one that's left that can do anything. And believe you me, I fight. I fought a lot. And I'm still going to fight. 'Til the day I die.**

## CONCLUSION

The act of bringing Sylvia's story out of Six Nations Territory—her permitting and my carrying—has been a labour of respect, kinship obligation, fondness, friendship and tribute done for our family, our community and my other communities. Sylvia's story is an illustration of the power, temerity, insistence and longevity of culture, vestiges of which can last outside of, and away from, the culture for generations. Not impervious to change, adjustments, growth, damage or destruction from both external and internal forces, this vital, from-whence-we-come life force—silent, covert, stealthy, flexible, sure and insistent—shaped and directed Sylvia's circle of life.

Sylvia's permitting her story to become a public document and my carrying this story beyond the confines of Six Nations Territory is our way to make the Elder teachings portable to the next generations. Chief Jake Thomas described our Elders as *our* books and *our* professors. Customarily, as Harriet Jock told, Elders sit and wait for the people to come to them. The lack of Elder proximity presents a problem. As *our* books, the Elders are not stores or archived in one close library, available to be checked out for a period of time. As *our* professors, the Elders do not offer courses in various locations in Haudenosaunee 400, Anishnabe 100 or Haida 600. Our Elders as our books tell their life stories. As our professors, the teachings are *amongst* the remembrances and experiences of their narrations. The teachings are not highly evident or readily apparent, but are presented as a multiple-message stockpile of fodder for the mind and nourishment for the spirit.

Sylvia's story, in part, is about how she mediated the external changes and adjustments, first by learning about how the mainstream world has impacted on the life of Six Nations and then by putting that understanding to work *for* her rather than *against*

her. Sylvia, at age eleven, refused to believe and accept the Mush Hole assimilation propaganda. Told that she came from dirt, ignorance and thieves, Sylvia knew very well the lack of veracity in this statement. When describing her childhood, she emphasized the teachings she received from her parents, in particular the weight placed on good table manners and the Fifth Commandment, the prohibition against taking “even a pin” that did not belong to you. At the Mohawk, Sylvia experienced, for the first time in her life, cold and hunger. She recalls the abundance of warm bedding at home and recounted how her parents subsidized her and her sisters’ diet by placing private orders for them with local suppliers.

Sylvia also mentions at length Susan Hardy, “one of our own,” who taught at the Mohawk and the impact on Susan Hardy, from Sylvia’s perspective, of Miss Hardy’s unsuccessful efforts to reconcile and mediate the two worlds. Sylvia concludes, with regret and sorrow, that Susan Hardy, having cut herself off from her Six Nations relations, had nowhere to go on her retirement from teaching and was eventually taken in by a retired Mohawk Institute principal in Brantford. Sylvia views Susan Hardy with understanding and with little hint of condemnation. While Sylvia deplores Miss Hardy’s actions, Sylvia recognizes the perils of mediating amongst the different worlds and the life-negating results of choosing total assimilation was a way to survive. My grandfather, Claude, also chose to join mainstream society. When talking about Claude’s leaving Six Nations, Sylvia displays empathy and understanding about his decision, confiding that she bears him no animosity. Over the years, Sylvia did visit him, renewing and maintaining the kinship ties with someone she always considered to be one of her brothers.

Sylvia seems to be unaware of her own assimilation. Stating that our family was



Christian from “‘way, ‘way, ‘way back,” Sylvia, like Black Elk, sees no conflict between or inconsistency in her seemingly incongruous acts of religious worship and of cultural practices. For Sylvia, there is no incongruity or inconsistency. Although Sylvia identifies herself as Christian, and specifically, Anglican, it is a brand of Christianity in which the threads of both cultures’ religions mix, weave and bond together to create something else in which the threads of neither are lost and the precepts assume an ease of living together in a comfortable, mediated peace. Knowing that I do not consider myself Christian, Sylvia, contrary to the Christian directive to spread the gospel, has not exhibited a need or desire to proselytize me into her Christianity.

I discovered that our family, according to the 1871 Census had, sometime in the intervening decade from 1861 Census, become members of the Plymouth Brethren. The Plymouth Brethren group was formed in the 1820s in Plymouth, England and was an offshoot of the Anglican Church. The Brethren found the Anglican form of worship to be dull and dry and in its staidness, to be far removed from God. A revitalization by returning to their roots and the Bible was seen as necessary and an evangelistic form of Anglicanism was born. In 1865, one of the Brethren, Joseph Scriven, wrote the hymn *What A Friend We Have In Jesus* that, by 1870, because of its popularity, was included in hymnals of many other denominations.

During one of our discussions Sylvia, in talking about the comfort she found in religion, mentioned how she took everything to the Lord in prayer. I recognized her words as from *What A Friend We Have In Jesus*. I started the hymn and Sylvia joined in. At the conclusion of the first verse, Sylvia had to sing the second verse as a solo because I did not know the words. We then went on to sing together several other hymns laughing, delighting in our both knowing the same songs and in taking turns challenging one

another's knowledge of our respective hymns. Our challenging one another was not a very devout or pious use of the sacred songs. Sylvia won as she always knew the second verses to both her *and* my selections. From this new way to be together, we also discovered other songs that we both knew—*School Days* and *Bicycle Built For Two* among others—that we sang together with the same glee, enjoyment and gusto that we had put into our renditions of the hymns. We also discovered that we shared a preference for the livelier hymns such as *Onward Christian Soldiers*. The significance of our joining our two voices together in singing was secular rather than sacred. We had found another way to be together via hymns.

While Christianity versus Traditional has become a divisive factor amongst First Nations, Sylvia displays the flexibility of the Haudenosaunee on matters of individual autonomy and survival of the nations as set out in the *Great Law of Peace*. From my understanding of the *Great Law*, peace was not synonymous with the absence of war. Rather, the principle of “the good mind” dwelled on harmony and cooperation. All peoples had a standing invitation to join with the Five (and then Six) Nations under the *Great Tree of Peace* and live in peace and power and righteousness. Since conflict or arguments about personal beliefs would run counter to a peaceful and cooperative existence, individuals' personal beliefs were considered private and not a subject of enquiry.

Sylvia, on the matter of religion, exhibits the Seneca Chief, Red Jacket's viewpoint stated over two centuries ago: we never quarrel about religion (Wallace 1972:206). Sylvia, on the matter of religion, exhibits the Haudenosaunee respect for the privacy of individual belief and for individuals to hold different beliefs. In Sylvia's accounts of her marriage and her religious beliefs display this Haudenosaunee elasticity. Conflict in her marriage was

not a result of a difference in religious beliefs. Sylvia recounts with amusement that she was “doubly married,” having been joined with Wilson by both Christian and Longhouse rites. In her telling of the stories of Christ and the Peacemaker, she tells, in essence, one story. In her description, sometimes she indicates that she is illustrating the parallels of their lives, while other times their individuality melds into one identity. At the end of her telling, Sylvia returns their individuality to them with her description about their respective methodologies for spreading their messages. For Sylvia their respective messages are from two people who are, in Sylvia’s actuality, bringing the same message.

In telling Sylvia’s story I encountered several tasks: understanding her narration as listened to; understanding her narration from the perspective of others as they would read her words; and then uncovering her messages contained in her life story teachings. In the presentation of Sylvia’s story, I re-arranged Sylvia’s narration as her answers to the Four Questions. While these questions were never posed to her as direct questions, this format, beginning and ending with the interrogatives where is Sylvia from? and where is Sylvia going? illustrates the concept of the Circle of Life as well as how Sylvia’s and my concentric circles are connected and interwoven, one with the other, with both the past and the present and how the past and present influence and have determining effects on the future. Arranged as her answers to the Four Questions, Sylvia tells about her becoming the individual that she is, what she did and does as that particular individual, who she is as shaped by the world as she sees it and those things she will continue to do in response—“I fought. I fight, ‘til the day I die.”

The easiest section was stringing Sylvia’s stories together as the answers to the First Question. I had heard a great number of these stories before and had jotted them all down over the years. It was this long list of stories that prompted my decision to record

for posterity her life story. In having kept track of her stories, I was armed with a long list of requests in the event that the improbable-next-to-impossible happened—that Sylvia’s telling should flag or slump at some point. My own individual genealogical research, both in the written sources of the various holdings of both the Ontario and National Archives and, orally from other branch family members, also enabled me to ask for Sylvia’s versions of past events and ascertain how her rendering had changed through the retelling through our branch or how it differed from the recorded evidence and from those versions told by other family members.

Considering Sylvia’s childhood as a whole, we are presented with a startling contrast between her family life and her life at the Mohawk Institute. Then as now, I am in awe of Sylvia as a nine year-old girl having the wisdom to identify the assimilation-to-civilize propaganda as propaganda presented to her during the orientation speech at the Mohawk. I still chuckle at her wisdom to use her physical appearance, Sylvia being smaller and paler than the other Native children, to avoid the heavier work at the Mohawk and how she and I laughed appreciatively at her ability to perpetrate and perpetuate this ruse. Amongst the celebration of her child wisdom, is Sylvia, for the first time in her life, becoming acquainted with and knowing of both hunger and cold. For Sylvia, her stay at the Mohawk, although a step backward, was a teaching that determined, in her time, the extra special type of teacher she would become.

The longest section was the answer to the Second Question—what is Sylvia? Sylvia’s actions speak more decisively and extensively of her than her words. “Instead of focusing on *roles* within families, native families focus on responsibility” (Morrisseau 1998:29). The Second Question is Sylvia’s life as being group- not individual-focused and an account of her attention to her duties, responsibilities and obligations to the many

people to whom she is connected. In my listening, I hear her stories as affirmations of her value and belief system. Many times, Sylvia, in her remembering and commemoration, was told she was crazy. Undaunted, she went on to do what she thought was right. When she was informed she was a Clan Mother, Sylvia, while admitting to be almost overwhelmed by the unanticipated and unforeseen turn of events, recovered quickly and went “right straight” to one of *her* Elders to acquire the necessary teachings to fulfill this additional responsibility to our people that had just seemed “to roll to her.” Through her actions, Sylvia affirms her belief that the community is more important than the individual. Through her actions, Sylvia upholds her valuing the community over herself personally. She may be thought to be crazy and she may not have the knowledge to do what she is called upon to do, but she will charge ahead and live up to her responsibilities as she knows them to be.

For clarity, I sequenced Sylvia’s stories under her various roles and yet, in having done so—even for the sake of the lucidity of the work—I have introduced a synthetic element to Sylvia’s story. Sylvia’s life is not easily compartmentalized into roles. She serves her community as diligently as she does our family. She has warred as vigorously against the outside dangers to Haudenosaunee culture presented by the dominant culture as she has at home. Sylvia is distressed by the cultural disarray in her community caused, in her view, by the bad choices some community members make tempted and influenced, as they are, by the “almighty dollar.” Sylvia cited Mrs. Maynard Anderson and Mrs. Anderson’s story about planting a loonie and a bean seed as one voice of reason in the community. In all that she does, Sylvia, in fighting *for* cultural preservation and continuation, is fighting *against* the mortality of our people.

The most difficult question to be answered was her Third Question—who is

Sylvia? It required discovering and uncovering her personal philosophy, values and beliefs. Sylvia has been influenced and shaped by several different worlds—Christian, Haudenosaunee, and Christian-Haudenosaunee; mainstream, Haudenosaunee, and mainstream-Haudenosaunee—and where these same several worlds merge and become something different, she has also been shaped by this mixture. It is difficult to track those individual threads when they become commingled and tangled with others, especially when this blending took place generations before either Sylvia or I made our appearance on the family stage. Sylvia's credo must therefore be inferred.

Rather than attempt to untangle and ascribe Sylvia's beliefs and values as either products of assimilation or vestiges of the culture into which she was born, I will dwell upon those that she has declared to be *not* the ways of our people. In hearing of an incident in which some Six Nations children were encouraged by the provincial authorities to inform on their parents, Sylvia expressed a great deal of anger. From her anger, she compared this incident to Nazi Germany and the Hitler Youth where the German children were taught and encouraged by the state to spy and inform upon their parents. In decisively and unequivocally stating that this was not our way, Sylvia was expressing her anger about the meddling of the state in Six Nations Territory business and the consequences of this interference—the damage being done to the cohesion of Six Nations families.

Sylvia has also expressed strong feeling against the general pervasiveness of “downing” people, citing the media as the chief culprit, both in legitimizing and promoting its practice. Branding Native demonstrators as “radicals” by a local newspaper, the mocking of “our boss men” on national television and, after being asked to speak, her words being judged as Sylvia having her “smoke signals crossed,” Sylvia expressed her

thoughts about the disrespectful criticism she has experienced and observed. While Sylvia is not condemning criticism as such, she is outraged and deeply offended at the mode of criticism which is aimed at the individual or the group in a personal, hurtful way. Sylvia separates the behaviour of the actor or actors from the actors themselves.

Sylvia, when critical of others, almost consistently makes a balanced report. Disapproving remarks about an individual's actions were accompanied later (and sometimes much later) by softer and gentler words. About Susan Hardy, Sylvia states that she was not only "one of our own" but near kin and her meanness to the students was unfathomable. Later, Sylvia says that Susan Hardy "did the best she could." I have a sense that Sylvia's assessment of Susan Hardy came from Sylvia's acquisition of experience since the time she attended the Mohawk. In Miss Hardy, Sylvia saw another Native teacher who went outside of Six Nations to follow her profession. In Sylvia's estimation Susan traded off her family and heritage for her teaching position and, upon her retirement, Susan Hardy was alone and dependent upon a stranger to provide food and shelter for her in return for her housekeeping duties.

The only person about whom Sylvia had no balancing words or about whom Sylvia made no redeeming observations was Colonel Cecil Morgan. In Sylvia's mind Morgan personifies the injustices heaped upon our people from the outside and embodies and symbolizes the destruction of Six Nations sovereignty over self-government and education. The outside control over these two areas destroys our past, disrupts our present and inflicts changes on our future. In recounting what she knows of his actions that hark back to his past career in Africa, she identifies him as a racist. In defining Morgan during her face-to-face encounter with him as a "servant" of the Six Nations (the Superintendent's salary was paid out from the Six Nations trust money), Sylvia alludes to

her deep-seated outrage at not only the presence of this individual and what he represents; the clout that accompanies his position which Morgan is “not shy” about using, but the Six Nations having to finance this reminder and source of mainstream intrusion and oppression. Sylvia declared Morgan to be a “wicked” man at one point in her narrative. I have heard this word used by other members of our family to identify pure, unadulterated malevolence.

At the time of the imposition of “a more progressive form of government,” Sylvia was eighteen years old and attending school in Brantford, but returning home on the weekends. Drawing on an experience from when I was eighteen, that, although not a personal crisis (a maternal aunt took a year to die from cancer), did in a covert way, permanently shape and change my attitudes on terminal illness, suffering, death and dying. I identify with Sylvia at that same age. Being eighteen and on the cusp between adolescence and adulthood, dependency and agency I think an individual is, if not more vulnerable to the impact of events, then more permeable. Events have a greater, a more lasting impact and tend to be greater shapers of the individual-to-come than the events experienced later in life experienced after the transition is completed from dependency to agency. For Sylvia, Morgan was our rented racist who was bent on destroying our people from his position from within and, having identified him as evil personified, she would not back down from him.

The last of the Four Questions—where is Sylvia going?—I have answered with what I have termed as Sylvia’s signature action. This answer came out of my asking Sylvia if *she* thought she had lived a good life. When she replied in the affirmative, I then asked her, in her looking over her whole life, what was “the biggest, the best, *the most important*” thing she ever did. Her reply was immediate. She fought for her job. My



**selection of this event as her signature action both showcases what Sylvia herself considers to be her most important contribution and to illustrate best who and what I know Sylvia to be. In selecting this past event as the answer to where Sylvia is going, I have collapsed past and present that is, perchance, the signature phenomenon of our project.**

**Her story of fighting for her job, by itself, could be considered to be an act of self-interest and self-preservation. Coming at the end of our sessions, with all the other stories of her big and small battles, it is Sylvia's campaign to resist further imposed changes from the outside, to preserve for her children the right to have their own Native teachers and her way of picking up and continuing Deskaheh's campaign against the destruction of our sovereignty. It is an act of preservation of her people first rather than an act of the preservation of self. In preserving her people, she is, ultimately preserving not only her self, but all those who have come before.**

**Sylvia has often spoken bitterly about what she sees as a lack of any government or leadership at Six Nations. Of the two governing bodies that do exist, Sylvia observes that neither acts in the best interests of our people. Affixed especially to her discussions of the elected system is Sylvia's statement that "all the good fighting me are dead." The elected council, forced upon us at gunpoint, she terms as impostors and agents of the Canadian federal government. She also expresses a lack of faith in the Confederacy Chiefs because they appear to not listen to the people. Common to the lack of legitimacy of both bodies, Sylvia points out that neither body consults with the women of the nations. Yet, despite her lack of trust or confidence in either body, Sylvia hosted a dinner for both elected councillors and Confederacy Chiefs in an attempt to promote cooperation and harmony between the two bodies. While she reported her disappointment at the low**

attendance numbers, Sylvia also said that she would not allow her disappointment to discourage her from future efforts. She would keep on trying. She did also convey that one of the elected councillors, when thanking her for her efforts, also added that both bodies needed more women like her.

Sylvia also expresses her consternation over people not knowing their clan. When Sylvia talked about the *very* long ago, she would refer to that time as when the women owned the land and then, with irritation, she would go on to talk about the switch that afforded our men the opportunity to assume ascendancy over rather than continue with the cooperative partnerships with our women. The erosion of the clan system at Six Nations is of great concern. Knowing one's clan is, at least as important as knowing one's nation. Intended to serve as a check and balance within the Confederacy to counteract any rise of nationalism within any of the Five, then Six Nations, it also provided each individual an assured welcome in each of the Nations everywhere in Confederacy Territory.

When Sylvia explained about the marital arrangements of our people, she stated that it was the woman who was responsible for looking after her partner—"that's her job!" When our men marry non-Native women, that element of the clan system is lost to our men as well as their children's ability to trace their descent matrilineally, as is our custom. Within her own marriage, Sylvia was the economic mainstay. Even when her marriage turned out to be less than she would have wished, she remained and made the best of the situation. As with her dissatisfaction with the two systems of government, Sylvia has the ability to accept the reality of the situation and put her efforts into making the situation better.

I have a sense that Sylvia's activities as a Clan Mother are more family- than clan-

focused. Since so few people know their clan, the Jamieson family as a group may be more concrete, more numerous and more readily identifiable than Sylvia's clan. Even though Sylvia knows very well my maternal lineage and my great-grandmother's clan (Cayuga Nation, Turtle Clan), she treats me as near kin and, with the gift of the necklace, told me that I must never forget that we are the People of the Flint (Mohawk). In Harriet Jock's description of the responsibilities of an Elder, she alludes to an additional responsibility of modern Elders—to bring our people home. In bringing me home, she also summoned home with me my father, my brother, my three children and a cousin or two. For Sylvia, bringing our people home, specifically our Jamieson family members, is an act of war against the federal government stratagem of assimilation as well as fulfilling her Elder responsibilities.

Sylvia and I agreed on the importance of our project although we never discussed or shared our respective reasons with one another. I have ventured to say that our project was the next ordinary step in our connectedness. In supplying the "why" for Sylvia, Barbara Myerhoff's observations are largely apropos. "(L)ike so many of the elderly," Sylvia is "very fond of reminiscing and storytelling, eager to be heard from, eager to relate *parts* of their life history," their being "more afraid of oblivion than pain or death" (Myerhoff 1978:39, italics added). The latter portion of Myerhoff's observation is not entirely descriptive of Sylvia. It contains an element of negativity and dread that is not present in either Sylvia's account or Sylvia herself. For Sylvia, our project is not a last desperate act of self-memorialization but is an all-out relations encompassing act of celebration.

In a word, Sylvia is upbeat. She states, with her usual abundant self-confidence, that she *has* indeed lived a good life. In her selected narrations, Sylvia is witnessing her

life, both in an observational sense and a religious sense. In her charting and review of her life to me, Sylvia lays it out, not for my approval, but as her own (and possibly re-) inventory for herself. Religiously, she recounts her life as having done what was given to her to do. In her performance, she executed her duties to the best of her ability, living a life of service to others. Sylvia's other- rather than self-focus is according to the principles of the *Great Law* that teaches the ascendancy of group interests over personal interests and affirms personal autonomy that must be accompanied by the responsibility to make good, moral choices.

My "why" was part genealogical and part "personal quest" (Ibid. 12). Both combined to involve me in a transformative experience, the extent, the profundity, the enormity and the depth of which I was not fully prepared and which often troubled and trammled my work on Sylvia's life story. I often found myself divided with one foot in the sailing vessel and one foot in the canoe. Stated another way, I found myself being expected simultaneously having to walk both sides of the street at once. Sylvia's story of the *Two Row Wampum* illustrated the impossibility of sailing *smoothly* with one foot in a canoe or canoeing *easily* with one foot in a sailing vessel. I was often conflicted between writing from my heart from the effects of her story on me and writing from my head which the presentation of her story demanded.

Preserving Sylvia's life story is something we started discussing, as genealogists, many years ago. In *A Study of Genealogists & Family Historian*, Ron Lambert found that "genealogists'" interests in the past is "firmly rooted in a desire to know their ancestors as people" as well as the desire "to bequest this knowledge to further generations" (Lambert 1995:23). About the role of the family historian, the fulfillment and satisfaction from family history research results in "... an enlarged sense of self, a valued position

**within the extended family, companionship with other genealogists, and a perspective on time which unites the past, present and future” (Ibid. 24).**

**In having done genealogical research on other lines, my experience of working and sharing with Sylvia was very different. While I do find myself in Lambert’s findings as to the motivations cited for family history research and the effects on the researcher, I am aware of many different kinds of forces at play that only intensified over the time of her narration. I attribute some of these forces as a result of giving and hearing the stories on the actual site where they all took place. The others that swirled, mingled and gained in strength were, in part, the outcome of Sylvia’s narration that transformed my linear pedigree chart of lists of people and their dates into a group of living, breathing people. A great deal of the force quantity was created, not by engaging in a search for our family (they were already there!), but by Sylvia being Sylvia and me being me. Genealogy is not what we do. Genealogy is who we are.**

**On this side of Sylvia’s life story, considering the process as a whole, I feel she regarded our project as an opportunity to build her own lasting memorial, designed as she would have it designed under her own creative hands. Over the preceding year before we did the actual taping, each time I visited, the subject was brought up either by her or myself and, each time, she would express the same amount of eagerness and enthusiasm for our collaboration. As an Elder who sits and waits for the younger generation to come for her teachings, I am sure that much of her eagerness and enthusiasm results from not only having a captive audience, but also, being confined to a wheelchair and therefore house bound, an opportunity for more company as well as being included again in the educational process not only as the central figure of a thesis, but also in her lending of assistance to a family member seeking an education.**

Sylvia was well prepared for narrating her life. It poured out of her. My list of questions to keep the stories coming was not needed. It was obvious that she had certain things to tell about herself that she had previously determined as essential to be put into the lasting record that was to speak for her not only to the world outside of Six Nations, but also for when she was no longer here to speak for herself. As Sylvia's memorial, her life story is a representation "of reality in which narrators also communicate how they see themselves and wish others to see them" (Errante 1998: citing Stein 1987, Volkan 1988). In constructing her memorial, Sylvia knew she had the freedom to choose those things she shared with me as well as the freedom to choose not to share other things with me. As *her* memorial, Sylvia built it carefully, recounting those things that would illustrate the worth and value she felt her life to have and to illustrate as what and who she intended to be remembered.

Our very act of telling, listening and preserving is about Sylvia and I both carrying out our individual and collective cultural duties, responsibilities and obligations to our people, our family and ourselves. In our borrowing of one another, we have, in our sharing, maximized the other's gifts and, by combining our efforts, created an opportunity for the one thread of the Jamieson family in the tapestry of our people to be examined individually-but-together and its story to be, once again, retold and retold with the most recent inclusions of Sylvia, me and all our relations. In Sylvia's telling, she is carrying out her responsibilities to hold and pass on those things that she knows. In listening, I am fulfilling my responsibilities to have sought Sylvia out to listen and become a repository for those things she wishes to share.

During our conversation, I was, a few times, in danger of being engulfed and swept away by romantic notions of our exercise being a replication of what our people had been

doing generation after generation. In finding myself in a place-that-was-no-place and in a time-that-had-no-time, I found it difficult to keep my feet on the ground when the ground kept shifting and the occasional waves of romanticism and rose-coloured nostalgia buffeted me about. The magnitude of Sylvia's story was massive. The strength of Sylvia's story was enormous. Sylvia, as the last remaining person of her generation, carried all the stories and voices of all who have come before. The story was called forth, made welcome and expanded by the energies of Sylvia's telling and my listening.

My listening was not passive. By my having sought Sylvia out and by listening to her stories, I assumed many responsibilities not only as a keeper of her story, but, having been entrusted by her to carry her voice to the outside world, I also bore the responsibility to carry her voice as she spoke it. As-she-spoke-it had to be arranged and re-arranged and manipulated for the second-hand audience absent at the telling and outside of our place-that-was-no-place and time-that-was-no-time and understanding influences and guided by both cultures. One culture expected me to create a story from those things Sylvia shared with me. The other culture directed that I tell Sylvia's story *exactly* as it was told to me. Wrestling with the story itself, mediating between the two sets of expectations, mindful of Sylvia's trust placed in my to carry her voice *truly*, Sylvia's story has been finally set down. What remains with me is the monumental experience of the intensity of the power of the orality process and its capacity to not only make itself felt, but its power to guide, direct, influence and bring about changes in *this* participant.

While constructing her memorial, I also saw Sylvia's choices of stories to be part survey of her life to her and part counting coup with me. Her survey stories—most often about preserving the family memory in which her actions were declared to be crazy—were offered to me for my assurances that I thought what she had done was

tremendously important, that the family was fortunate that she had and was still exerting all these efforts on our collective behalf and that what other family members saw as craziness, I saw as essential and commendable. Her counting coup stories were put forward to me to savour with her, her victories both large and small, both overt and covert.

Sylvia appears to be generally at peace with her life and satisfied that she had done, with responsibility, all she could do with all that was given her to do. From her place of most, if not complete serenity, Sylvia has given forth, in two statements, her understanding of the reality of the world, what that world is saying to her and her reply to that understanding. These two statements are in part her mission statement and part declaration of her intent to change—single-handedly if necessary—that reality. Her slogan, or more descriptively, her T-shirt messages are “the only good Indian is a dead Indian” and “I’ll fight ‘til the day I die.”

In my “get acquainted” readings of the culture from which my father’s family came—and before I knew from where I came and started to know what and who I *really* am—the message I received about First Nations people was “the only good Indian is a dead Indian.” I was taken aback to hear my own conclusions from Sylvia’s lips in my own words. I wondered what in her life led her to that conclusion. And I wondered about what effects this lack of permission to live from the dominant culture had on Sylvia all through her ninety-five years. Here is my theory based on Sylvia’s often repeated statement that “all the good fighting men are dead” coupled with the anger toward and absence of softer, gentler words for the chief “dehorner,” Colonel Morgan; the words of Deskaheh, his failure at Geneva to which is ascribed his death; and her having published, at her own expense for distribution, Deskaheh’s *The Redman’s Appeal for Justice*. *The*



*Position of the Six Nations that they Constitute an Independent State, March 1924.*

Over in Ottawa, they call that policy 'Indian Advancement.' Over in Washington, they call it 'Assimilation.' We who would be the hapless victims says it is tyranny.... If this must go on to the bitter end, we would rather that you come with your guns and poison gas and get rid of us that way. Do it openly and above board. (Johansen 2000:74, citing Johansen and Grinds 1997:111)

The imposition of the elected form of government coming at the time it did (when the Six Nations had already taken their case to the League of Nations) and the effects on our leader made a considerable and lasting imprint on eighteen year-old Sylvia on many levels.

Aside from the injustice of the imposition of a foreign form of government by one nation on another and Deskaheh's powerfully worded, ringing response, the effects of the League of Nations' failure to act was a powerful cultural jolt. This failure by the world to recognize the Six Nations as an independent state is considered to be a contributing factor to Deskaheh's premature demise. Unable to return to Six Nations, Deskaheh traveled to New York State where he died alone, the Canadian authorities preventing his family at Six Nations from going and attending to him in his last days. Knowing the value Sylvia places on family, Deskaheh's last days alone was every bit as egregious as all the other previous waves of shock from the 1924 takeover. When I hear Sylvia say "all the good fighting men are dead," I look at her and I know that all the good fighting women are not.

Rather than Sylvia accepting "good Indian-dead Indian" as a death sentence or as the denial by the dominant society permission to live, she has chosen to view good-Indian-as-dead-Indian as a gauntlet thrown down and she has picked it up. For Sylvia death is not the physical death of our people as individuals, but death as the eradication of assimilation of our culture. Death by assimilation she regards to be just as sure,

**deliberate and intentional as ethnic cleansing and slow, insidious, covert, but nonetheless premeditated, calculated and methodical genocide. And Sylvia will fight until the day she dies with, from time to time, a face-to-face battle and, in between times, with remembering, teaching, bringing our people home and as a proponent, supporter and source of our customs, our history, our culture and our stories.**

**Underlying Sylvia's story is a much larger theme.**

**The Mohawk Indian people or the Ojibway or the Lakota or the Cree—any natives in North America—we're not supposed to be here. We're physically supposed to have been annihilated long time ago. But for some reason, I guess, when the Creator made us, he must have put a little extra in our makeup because we're just like a cat. You throw the cat and he always ends up on his feet and that's the way the Mohawk is. No matter how far you threw us, no matter how much colonization you put us through, no matter what you did, we mostly always land on our feet. We might be scared. We might be dizzy a bit from the throw, but we land on our feet and that's why we're here yet. And I always think about it that the Indian is one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It isn't just Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon. The Mohawk, the Sioux and the Lakota and Ojibway were also part of that wonder because we're still here. And I guess that's our most valuable teaching tool that we have, is our presence in 1999, in this modern time of the world. (Porter 2000)**

**The core of Sylvia's story is survival. In accepting the "good Indian-dead Indian" as a challenge rather than a death sentence, and in answering the challenge with her pledge to fight 'til she dies, Sylvia fights against anything that she perceives as a threat to our people. By merely being alive, Sylvia regards herself as both proof that our people have survived and a guarantee that we will endure. In throwing her energies into ensuring that the past is remembered and preserved, Sylvia, always a gambler, hedges her bets. Should she lose the battle of survival, our memory will not die. As a wise gambler, Sylvia intends not to lose. She has acquired the one essential tactic of survival—adaptability.**

Sylvia's ability to survive comes from her being a Haudenosaunee woman. The *Great Law of Peace*, in defining women as mothers of the nations and, therefore subjects of respect, also assigns the social responsibilities of guardianship and keepership of the land, the children and the culture. A male Elder at the Women and Wellness Conference at Ohsweken in 1995 observed that Haudenosaunee women who join the mainstream women's liberation movement are taking a step backward. Citing the *Great Law*, he went on to review for and remind the audience of the special and revered position of women in Haudenosaunee society. Janet Mancini Billson, from her interviews of women at Six Nations states "Iroquois women tend to see themselves as relatively powerful, and not especially in need of liberation (Mancini Billson 1995:49). As a Haudenosaunee woman, independent and self-sufficient, Sylvia sees that liberation is indeed needed, not for the women of the Confederacy, but for the Confederacy itself from the effects of colonization, from the Mathematical Precision Plan for assimilation and from the stranglehold she sees the federal government has on her people, their independence, their survival and the collaboration between the federal government and some of our own people willing to act as federal agents to help destroy us from within. As a Haudenosaunee woman, Sylvia has kept alive the spark of independence that she accepted from Deskaheh.

"Tough" has always been the word that I have used to describe my cousin Sylvia Jamieson Sandy. At the start of our relationship, by describing her as "tough," I meant that I found Sylvia to be a no-nonsense type of woman. Today, this toughness that I describe has a bigger and deeper meaning as found in the Hopi prophecy that says a Nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. Closer to home, Art Solomon, an Anishnabe Elder has written on the same theme: "the woman is the

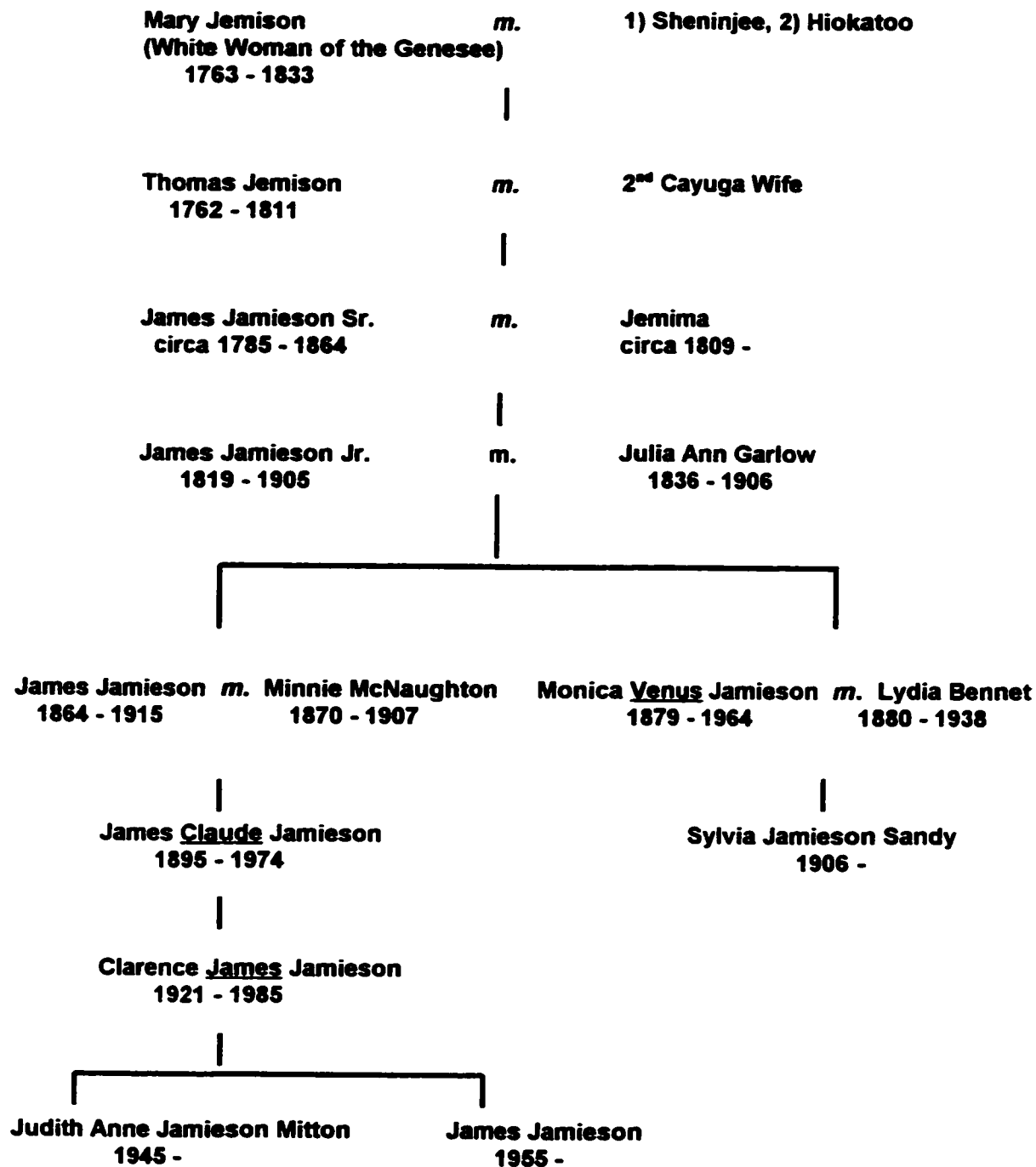
foundation on which nations are built. She is the heart of the nation” (Ibid. iv).

As a Haudenosaunee woman, Sylvia represents and embodies the principle of “*tewetatha:wi*, best translated into ‘we carry ourselves’” (Monture-Angus 1995:39, citing Kane and Maracle 1989:10). Carrying self demands that each individual be independent and self-sufficient, to conduct one’s self from a position of agency and self-efficacy, and to attend assiduously to one’s age- and gender-determined responsibilities. In thinking back to their traditional powers as strong leaders and “to the legacy of the clan mothers,” Haudenosaunee women “have an inherent ‘cultural right’ to be strong, assertive and capable women” (Ibid. 49). Sylvia, as a Haudenosaunee woman, even having ninety-five years, being diabetic and confined to a wheelchair has not allowed her independence, her fighting and righting spirit or her determination to fulfill her responsibilities to her family, her community and her nation to become diminished. Sylvia’s life story is about survival.

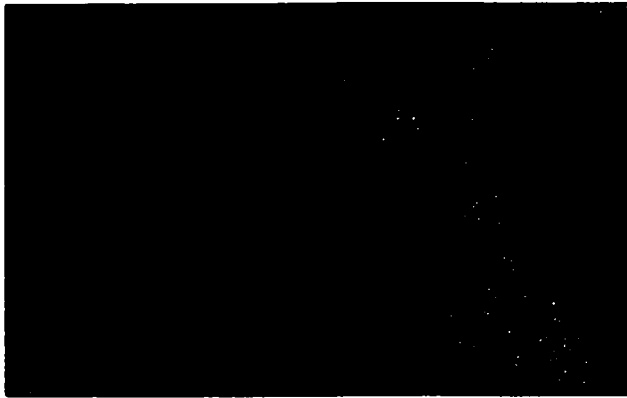
Our collaboration which was founded on similar interests of like-minded individuals, was multi-layered and having multi purposes. In joining together and combining our efforts, we maximized the effects of our respective talents and skills. At the least, our joint project was more than just preserving for posterity an elderly family member’s story as any *good* genealogist is expected to do. Our collaboration is Sylvia and I performing our duties, responsibilities and obligations to one another, to our family and to our people. Those seeds that she sowed over forty years ago found fertile ground. Sylvia waited for me to come searching. And when I did, it was *we*, in making ourselves available to our family’s conduit from the past to the present, who provided insurance for the future that our family story would not be forgotten. From past cycles of telling and listening and of remembering and preserving, Sylvia and I have, *together*, spun another

**circle, traveled another cycle. Telling and listening, remembering and preserving *are* cultural renewal, a demonstration of *our* having taken up the challenge *and* evidence that we have survived. Sylvia and I will both fight to the day each of us dies.**

# **JAMIESON FAMILY TREE**



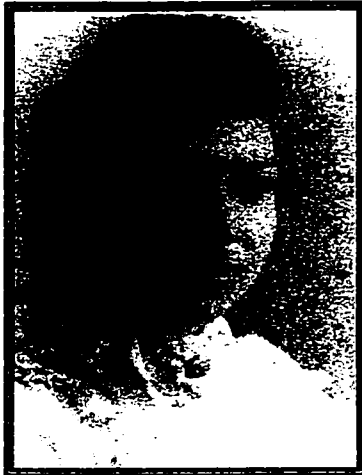
The above pedigree chart is very much abbreviated. Sylvia was the fifth of fourteen children. Claude was the fourth child of nine.



**James Jamieson Jr. with his daughters.**  
*Photo from Wanda Overhiser, Rochester, NY*



**James Jamieson Jr., Sylvia's grandfather, circa 1900.**  
*Photo from Wanda Overhiser, Rochester, NY*



**Clara, Lady Dufferin Jamieson, Sylvia's paternal aunt.**  
*Photo from Wanda Overhiser, Rochester, NY*



**James Claude Jamieson in his World War I uniform.**  
*Photo from family archives*



**Cover photo - Sylvia and I at her house, 2001.**  
*Photo by Charlie Harrison*



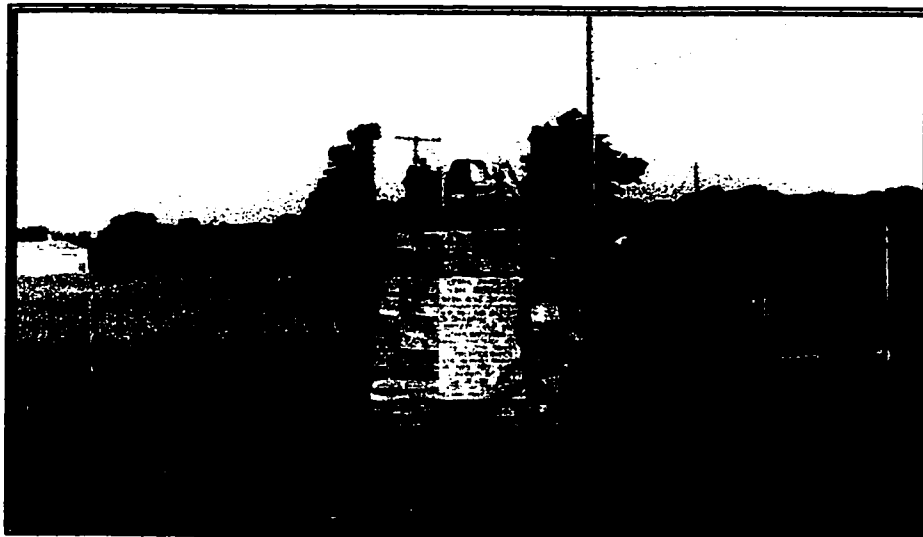
**Sylvia's grandfather provided the lumber for this church. Sylvia installed a commemorative plaque in the interior, June 2001.**

*Photo by Cherie Harrison*



**Jamieson tombstone purchased by Sylvia. In the background are the original tombstones of our Jamieson ancestors.**

*Photo by Cherie Harrison*



**Sylvia's memorial to her parents and siblings and her fence around the Jamieson cemetery, Hwy #54.**

*Photo by Cherie Harrison*



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For an Indian, home is the place where your tribe began. Home is a place where your people began and maybe where your family began and where your family still is.

*Janet Campbell Hale*

My listening was not passive. By my having sought Sylvia out and by listening to her stories, I assumed many responsibilities as not only a keeper of her story, but, having been entrusted by her to carry her voice to the outside world, I also bear the responsibility to carry her voice as she spoke it....One culture expected me to create a story from those things Sylvia shared with me. The other culture directed that I tell Sylvia's story exactly as it was told to me. Wrestling with the story itself, mediating between the two sets of expectations, mindful of Sylvia's trust placed in me to carry her voice truly, Sylvia's story has been finally set down....

*Judith Jamieson Mitton,  
Two Voices*



*Photo by Cherie Harrison*

