**Beatrice Taylor Summer Gathering**

As the summer days become warmer, I remember the summer gathering I did as a child.

A long time ago, berries were plentiful in central Minnesota.  I grew up in Azhoomog, near the Hinckley area. We could go almost anywhere to gather berries back then, because there weren’t so many rules.  When we found berries, we might build a shelter and make camp, staying two or three days while we gathered.

But gathering was also a part of our everyday life.  We ate berries all summer long, and not just blueberries.  I remember when I was young, we would wake up in the morning and our ma would be reading or sewing.  My sister and I would get a biscuit and tea and we’d head out back for the woods.  Whatever we found that was ripe, we ate.  We ate plums in the late summer, pincherries, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, Juneberries, and the little wintergreen berries.  We even ate the basswood leaves and the tender sumac tips.  We would just chew on sumac. We ate everything, which is why we were so healthy.

I also have summer memories of gathering blossoms and plants for medicines with my grandma.  We had medicines for any ailment. We would begin hunting special blossoms in the spring and go until the last month of summer, when we would end with the water lily and wild rice blossoms.

I remember walking in the woods one time with my great-grandma and my great-aunt, looking for blossoms.  We walked for two days from Azhoomog to Cloverdale.  When it began to get dark that first night, we came by a farmhouse.  I thought we were going to go in and see if it was empty. But instead, Grandma and Auntie both unwrapped little quilts tied around their waists and we lay down right there, in a field next to the St. Croix River.

In the morning, I remember being a little chilly.  Grandma told me to get up and wash in the river.  While I was washing, Auntie found an old coffee can.  She went through the field and picked some kind of purple berries.  They were wonderful, but to this day I still don’t know what they were.  She made a little fire, mixed the berries with some river water, and cooked them.  Grandma always had hard biscuits tied up in a bandanna around her waist.  That morning, we had biscuits and berries for breakfast.

We walked more that day.  Grandma was always walking and walking, gathering medicines to use.  I wish I knew what they were, and how to make them, but I never paid much attention.  Our Elders tried to teach us, but I guess we thought we knew it all.  But just gathering, being with my grandma, oh, it was the best time.

These days, there aren’t many berries left in this area.  So I savor my memories.  Nearly each year, it seemed that fire would strike some area nearby.  But the results the following spring were wonderful, because the blueberry bushes would come back thicker than ever.  By summer, the branches would be laying flat against the ground, heavy with the weight of big sweet blueberries.

I still dream of summer gathering.  I’m walking through the brush, only to hit a little clearing.  It is an ocean of blue in places, filled with the biggest blueberries.  I rest there and begin picking, with the sweet taste filling my mouth.

I dream this now.  But it was real.  That was something to see.