**Clara Jackson Stories Shared Restore History, Culture**

When I was young, my older brother went to live with my grandparents.  They taught him a lot about ceremonies and history, and it would always fascinate me to hear about everything he had learned.

By that time, I had learned that everyone put things in books to document them.  So I asked my grandpa why he didn’t keep his stories in books.  I wanted to have a book of his life and of our culture.  “The creator didn’t give us books,” he would say.  “He gave us a mind.  You can document everything there and pass it along to other people by talking.”

He always said that if I wanted to learn something, I should go right to the source, straight to the horse’s mouth.  Now that’s often how I teach people about my own childhood and what I learned from my family.

I like to share my stories.  Some of my best memories are of gathering, cooking and sharing food.  When I was growing up, you could go to anyone’s house and have a snack.  It was so cool.  My family would always have jam and crackers ready for guests.  People don’t always do that anymore, and I miss it.

When it was time to gather food, I would always wear a special dress.  It was a good pouch for anything.  My mom used to get mad at me for getting my dress dirty and tell me to wear an apron, but my dress held everything and I liked it better.  I used it to carry potatoes, which we would bring inside to wash and chop up.

When we had good luck fishing, I’d also help prepare and cook the fish.  I’d cut up a whole fish, take the scales off, remove the guts, and let it simmer a bit.  Every once in a while, we’d get a bullhead, which was good with a little salt and pepper.  My mom was really good at roasting fish and other food.  Her oven was always on, roasting and baking food.

My grandma always had food on her table.  She’d make jams and put them out on the table with bread all the time.  On hot days, she would put out water in crocks, which kept the water cool.  We would collect water in the crocks for her, and put them out by the food.

My siblings and I did a lot of chores.  My dad would wake us up at 5:00 each morning so that we could get things done before we ever went to school.  We’d haul wood, gather water, and sweep the floors.  My mom took care of washing the dishes in the morning, but in the evening we had to do it.  We had a rotation going – there were six of us – that went by age.

Now it seems that kids don’t have to do as many chores.  They’re not learning as much about Ojibwe culture as I did as a child.  Sometimes young people ask me how to use tobacco and it surprises me.  Why haven’t they learned about this yet?

The lesson to be learned here is that we need to keep sharing our stories.  Otherwise, part of our history and culture could be lost.  When young people approach me with questions, I answer them.  I teach them what I have learned in the hope that they’ll pass the knowledge on to someone else, like a “living” book.