**David Matrious Returning to My Cultural Roots**

I grew up in the Aazhoomog community in District III of the Mille Lacs Reservation.  We lived off of the trail that gave the area the name “Aazhoomog”, which means “crossroads” in Ojibwe.  My father, Scottie Matrious, came from the St. Croix Band of Chippewa and my mother, Grace Sutton, was from the Mille Lacs Band.

My parents were very cultural people and spoke Ojibwe fluently.  My mother stayed home with the kids and my dad was a logger in the spring and summer.  He was a good hunter and liked to gather wild rice.  I remember going to ceremonial events like the big drum with my dad and family.  My father was a drum keeper.  I learned a lot by watching him.

I quit high school in the tenth grade in 1969 and moved to St. Paul to work.  Although I quit school early, I later got my G.E.D. and my A.A. degree in liberal arts.  In St. Paul, I got my first job making $1.50 an hour as a set designer at the local PBS television station.  When I went to work in television, I was very excited and fascinated with the programs and their production.  There wasn’t electricity in Aazhoomog until the early 1970s, so I didn’t have television growing up.

I started out constructing and painting sets before moving to the production side.  At that time, there were very few American Indians in television broadcasting.  When I was 20 years old, I moved to Maryland to work at another PBS station.  It was scary, because I didn’t know when I was going to return home.  Working hard took my mind off of being homesick.

After four years in Maryland, I moved back to Minnesota.  At that time, my parents lived on the St. Croix Reservation in Wisconsin.  My father had a stroke that left him paralyzed on one side.  My brother was finishing school, so I moved to Wisconsin to help my mother care for my father.

Coming home from Maryland changed my focus in life.  The move brought me back to traditional tribal ways, which I had turned away from during my adolescence.  I felt like I was starving for something more and turned to my heritage.  I learned my Ojibwe name and that my family clan was Sturgeon.  I also learned the Ojibwe language, although I can understand it more than I can speak it.

After about a year in Wisconsin, my family moved back to the Mille Lacs Reservation.  Since my father was sick, I began helping him and my mother with the drum ceremonies.  Before I went to Maryland, I was placed on my father’s drum, so I had some experience with the ceremonies.

In the mid-1980s, there was a special election for the District III Representative position and I decided to run.  I lost the election, but still got involved in the community.  I started attending community meetings and sat on the housing committee after being asked to do so by one of the Band Representatives.

Then in June of 1986, I ran again for District III Representative and this time was elected.  I held that position for six years, at which time I was appointed to Secretary/Treasurer of the Band Assembly.  I also held that position for six years.

Today, I continue to be involved with the Band.  I now work at the Band’s Ojibwe Language and Culture Center as a resource specialist and help teach others about the Ojibwe culture.  I don’t pretend to know everything about the Ojibwe culture and drum ceremonies, but what I do know, I want to pass down.  It’s important to share these traditions, otherwise we’ll lose our culture.