**Dorothy Sam Take Pride in Heritage**

My favorite hobby is making quilts, and I am teaching my daughter how to make them.  Although I use a sewing machine to make my quilts – unlike my mother’s handmade quilts – I still make them to give away at our Ojibwe ceremonies.  This is a tradition we’ve held onto for many years.

We need to be proud of our heritage, and we should be happy to be involved with both modern and traditional ways.  This is what I’ve taught others throughout my life.

I was born in the Aazhoomog community in District III of the Mille Lacs Reservation.  Growing up we learned much about the Ojibwe ways.  We learned the drum.  We learned the ceremonies.  We learned the language and heard stories from our Elders.  We always lived off the land – we fished, harvested wild rice, picked berries, made maple syrup, and hunted for deer, rabbits and porcupines.  Our pharmacy was in our backyard.  We ate healthy and naturally.  That was our way of survival.

After I was married, I moved to the Twin Cities to work.  I started working at a neighborhood club and then a detox center helping people with drug and alcohol addiction.  I also worked with young Native mothers through a United Way program.  After about 10 years of working in the field, I went back to school for chemical dependency counseling at the University of Minnesota Duluth.

During my education and training, I always remembered my Indian ways.  Because of my experience in the field and my cultural background, I knew that a lot of the things I was learning in books would need to be adapted to fit the Native culture.

After school, I went to work at Aurora Four Winds Lodge, a chemical dependency facility at the Brainerd State Hospital for people with Native heritage.  I was a counselor and developed programs that included American Indian traditions, ceremonies and teachings.

In my experiences, I found that illness and identity were the two biggest problems that addicts faced.  They didn’t know how to stop drinking or doing drugs, and they didn’t know who they were.  We had books that helped them get through alcohol and drug abuse, but they needed more than that.   I brought back the American Indian ways, so that I could help them find their identity and move past their addiction.  Illness and identity go hand and hand.

In my work, I saw a lot of young people involved in drugs and alcohol.  Today our youth are not as interested in learning about our culture.   So much of what I taught people about their addiction went back to finding their traditions and culture.  It’s about finding one’s self and valuing life.

Life is important.  We all have a spirit, and we shouldn’t hurt other people’s spirits.  But, this can happen if people are involved with drugs and alcohol.

People today are so busy working to survive that our teachings are often put aside – this is how our culture will be lost.  Learn the ways of your people.  There are many more resources today to help us learn about the old ways.  Even though we live in a modern world, we can turn to our Elders to ask questions and learn from them.  We should always be proud of who we are.