**Ken Weyaus Sr Coming Home**

I live right here on the Mille Lacs Reservation.  I’ve been here mostly all my life.

I lived off the reservation for about 10 years, in Minneapolis.  Back in the 1970s, there were hardly any jobs around here, so when I was 30, I went to the cities to find employment.  In Minneapolis, I became an apprentice and then a full-fledged carpenter.

But I got tired of the rat race!  I got tired of fighting the traffic.  It’s a lot more peaceful out here.

Then in the 80s, there were more jobs in this area, more opportunities.  So I moved back to the reservation and started working for the Band.

And I’ve been here ever since.

I did a lot of carpentry at first, building houses mainly for the Band.  After that, in the summer of ’87, I applied at the Mille Lacs Indian Museum and worked for them all the way to 2003, when I retired.  I’ve been retired for four years now.  But not really, because I work helping the other veterans, and we’re always busy.

Today, living on the reservation is almost the same as living anywhere else.  We’ve got sewers, paved roads, our own schools, law enforcement, our own water tower.  It’s like any other town – we’re finally catching up with the rest of the world.

That’s a lot different from what I remember growing up.  Back then, nobody on the reservation had a new car, just old ones.  Because if you were going down the road, you would lose your muffler – the roads were all made of mud.  It wasn’t worth buying a new car.

People would ask, “Do you have running water?”  Yup!  We used to have a pump that we had to run back and forth to in order to fetch water.  That was our “running” water.

There used to be a three-room schoolhouse; that’s where I went to school.  Before that, there was a two-room school, and my brother went there.  It was all Indian kids, but the teachers were non-Indians then.

Before then, even longer ago, I know our people in East Lake and Lake Lena used to have powwows together, even though it probably took a couple days to travel.  They had horses and wagons, and everybody would get together and ride that wagon to Lake Lena for the powwow.  Back then, they used to get together for about a month – no overnight or weekend trips.

Today, museum visitors’ jaws drop when they realize how rough it was back then.  The way some people look at it today, it was hard living.

But that was just the life.  You had to get the maple sap and let it boil down eight hours.  You had to wash clothes by hand.  When our grandparents lived here, everything they needed was here.  They had sap, fish, deer, the wildlife, all the natural things they needed to live off the land.

A lot of stuff is easier today, but you still need eight hours to boil down the sap.

The reservation exists not just as a community but also as a part of history.  When you read about how Indians were put on reservations, Indians did have a say.  This is our land.  We were put here, and that’s just like anybody coming from Europe or some other place and settling here.

This is home to me.  It’s home to Band members even if they leave here.  If they move to California, they still say, “My home is in Minnesota.”  That’s why it’s important not just for us, but for our kids growing up even 100 years from now, to say this is our home, our reservation.