**Ken Weyaus Sr Our Place to Stay**

I worked for years at the Mille Lacs Indian Museum, and one thing I learned was that a lot of people haven’t heard the old stories about the Mille Lacs Band and our reservation.

There have been a lot of changes since the old days, when our ancestors lived off the land.  The federal government found out the fishing was good here, so a lot of people came here to fish or open a fishing business.  They had a lot of fish factories, too.

Pretty soon the non-Indians wanted the whole lake and wanted the Indians out of here, so they offered the Indians a reservation, plows, horses and homes.  But Indians are not farmers.  For so many years, they had lived off the land – they didn’t grow stuff.  This was new to them, and a lot of them didn’t make it.

Then in 1862, the Dakota had a big meeting.  They asked the Chippewa bands to chase all the settlers out of Minnesota.  And the Mille Lacs Band stepped in and we made it known that we weren’t going to join in this uprising.  In fact, we helped defend Fort Ripley.

And because of this act of goodwill, the Mille Lacs Band was given the status of non-removable, so we will always be here in Mille Lacs.  We will always have a place to stay.

When I was a kid, we knew that we were on the reservation because our Elders talked about how there was a clause that we weren’t supposed to bother the non-Indians.  So we knew the reservation boundaries:  you knew don’t go there, or there.

The Indians didn’t change anything just because we had our reservation.  We didn’t go out hunting or fishing anytime we wanted to.  We still have our laws about what we can and can’t do.  Just because this is reservation land doesn’t mean we can do what we want to anytime; we have rules to follow.

Our Elders talked about the full reservation as it is today.  But when the settlers knew that we couldn’t bother them, they started to settle in this area, and back then the government just let it happen.  Our Elders didn’t really understand 33 degrees north or 35 degrees that way.  They didn’t carry compasses or maps!  But they just knew how far north, east, south and west the reservation went, whether the settlers paid attention or not.

I think that many people haven’t heard those stories.  I think these are the stories we should tell, about how the Mille Lacs Band helped the non-Indians, and how we used to live way back then.  Then maybe more people will think, “Hey, we can be proud of the Mille Lacs Band.”