**Ken Weyaus Sr Winter Traditions**

I work at the Mille Lacs Indian Museum on the reservation, where a lot of people come to learn about the Ojibwe and our way of life.  They learn things at the museum that they never learned from books.  We teach visitors about the Ojibwe way of life and our culture.  We talk to them about traditions from the beginning of time and about the way the Ojibwe survived through the seasons.  Some of these traditions are no different than they were 300 years ago.

Now that it’s winter, I’d like to tell you a little bit about what the Ojibwe traditionally did this time of year.  In the winter, the Ojibwe would leave their ricing camps near the lakes and go into the deepest part of the forest where the pines would protect them from the big winter winds and it would be warmer.

The women would make a lot of clothing during the winter.  And because of the cold weather, the men could hunt bigger animals like bear because the meat wouldn’t spoil.  The hunters had snow shoes to walk on top of the snow and they had sleds to carry things over the snow.  The men pulled these sleds themselves – they didn’t have dogs or horses pull them.  That is because the Ojibwe didn’t believe in taming wild animals and couldn’t own any.  It’s only recently that Ojibwe people could own animals.

The Ojibwe knew how to make their sleds, bows and arrows, toboggans, and other things out of wood.  They were very good at using wood, adapting to a forest environment, and living in the woods.  That’s why we are called Woodlands Indians.

A lot of people have the idea that the Ojibwe lived in tipis and that we rode on horseback all the time.  But that’s not true.  The Ojibwe lived in wigwams or long houses.  Tipis were used more by the Dakota.  Indian tribes out on the Great Plains were the ones who rode horses a lot.  Here in the forests, you probably couldn’t have gotten a horse to pull stuff through such thick trees, at least not until after the logging companies came in and started cutting the trees.

There was not a lot of activity in the winter, so there was plenty of time for teaching children.  Grownups would tell the children stories because they didn’t have books back then.  They would tell the children about wild ricing in the fall, gathering maple sap in the spring, and many other things.

Of course, the children didn’t just learn about these activities by hearing about them.  All through the year, the children would do these things hands-on along with the grownups.  They would learn by doing how to tan a deer hide or which berries are good to pick and which are bad.

Each year, the Ojibwe would change locations for their winter homes to be good conservationists.  This let the animals in the area replenish themselves so there would always be enough game.  The Ojibwe also moved their summer berrying camps and their fall ricing camps each year.  But in the spring, they gathered maple sap in the same place each year because that’s where the trees were.  I’ll write about that tradition in the spring.