**Marie Bengtson Coming Home, Physically and Culturally**

I was born and raised in Aazhoomog (the name we have for the Hinckley area), but I moved away for a while.  I lived in the cities and then out West in Wyoming and Montana.

I was going through a divorce when I decided to move away.  It was a tough lesson for me, but I learned a lot about myself and the life I was living.  My life wasn’t very good out there because I was an alcoholic.

I had my kids with me then, and I always put them first.  They were never hungry, and they always had clothes and a place to stay.

But after 16/17 years of drinking every day and every night, I woke up one morning and said this life isn’t for me.  I used to drink when I lived in Minnesota, but not as much as when I moved away.  I think I just couldn’t handle the stress out there.  I have been sober since.  I didn’t have to put myself into treatment; I just looked in the mirror and told myself this life is not for you.  I packed up all my things and moved back home to Minnesota in 1996.

I’ve learned a lot since then.  We weren’t steeped in the Ojibwe culture when I was growing up, so now the more I learn about my own culture, the more I find it comforting.

I’ve especially learned from another Elder who lives here.  We talk a lot, and she’s very knowledgeable.  I ask her questions and she will tell me the answers.  If I had a problem, I would ask her what I’m supposed to do.

I still understand Ojibwe a lot better than I can speak it.  I can talk to myself in our language, but I can’t hold a conversation like some of the other Elders.  I picked up the language from hearing my parents talk to each other and when they had company over.  I liked it when visitors came so I could listen to them speak.

I tried other religions before I came home, too, but now I can just sit outside and listen.  My dad taught me that if you have problems, just go out in the woods and walk – you’ll find your answer out there.  I can sit outside and watch the animals come out.  And I attend some of the ceremonial dances; I usually help out and bring food to the ceremonial building.  When I was involved with church religions, I always felt something was missing.  Now I feel complete knowing and learning my own culture.