**Natalie Weyaus Always Interested in Learning**

I used to live across from the old Reservation Business Enterprise building.  That turned into a bingo hall, then they put in slot machines.  My house was one of the homes bought when Grand Casino Mille Lacs needed to expand and make a parking lot, which is where the hotel is now.  I moved to the Port Mille Lacs area, and I’m still there.

My work

When my youngest son was three years old, I went to work for the Indian School at Vineland as a teacher’s assistant.  When it closed, I worked as an elementary school librarian for two years.  There were funding cuts, so I decided to go to college.  I went to Brainerd Community College (now Central Lakes College) and got my AA degree.  I went on to St. Cloud State.

During my time at St. Cloud State, the Indian students walked out of Onamia High School and started an alternative school.  I was one of the teachers at that new school.  I eventually went back to college, taking evening classes to get my bachelor of science degree.  I did my student teaching at an inner city Minneapolis public school.  While I was student teaching, I was asked to be an associate judge for the Mille Lacs Band.  I served as Chief Judge for two terms.  Then I stepped down and went to work at the casino as a blackjack dealer for a while.  Then a research director’s position opened up and I worked at that for three years.

That’s when I got this job as a Tribal Historic Preservation Officer.  I monitor building construction on and off the reservation, making sure that construction contractors don’t damage or build on properties where Indian burials took place.  Contractors consult with my department within the Band DNR to help ensure they comply with federal law.  The Band Tribal Historic Preservation Office is funded by the National Parks Service, and we get our authority to monitor federal undertakings by the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106, a federal law.

My culture

I was brought up Catholic.  My mom was sent to boarding school as a teenager.  She eventually came back to the reservation, but she never talked about it much.  As my siblings and I grew up, she had us all baptized at the Little Flower Mission.  We went to church every Sunday, and we were dedicated Catholics.

It wasn’t until my daughter went into treatment that I started to learn my traditional ways.  I attended a family meeting and she was going to sweats and learning the Ojibwe ways.  Then I started listening to the teachings too.  Now I understand the beliefs and traditions.

I eventually lost interest in my Catholic ways, but I still have my spirituality.  I pray in English, but I’m learning Ojibwe and I put out my tobacco when praying and making my offerings.  One thing I always try to do is put out tobacco.

I make quilts for the big drum ceremonies and have made my grandchildren’s dance outfits for powwows.  I was put on the ceremonial drum in place of my mom.  That was a big honor.  We have a women’s gathering every year here on the reservation and we try to encourage women to learn our traditional ways.  We do sweats, which heal and purify the body.  I do as much as I can culturally and try to pass it down to my grandchildren.

I can’t speak the language fluently, but I can understand it.  I’m still learning my language and the traditional ways.  I’m always interested in learning.