

many times and each move was further away from the reserve. At the request of the foster parents, the CAS had granted them "permanent wardship" of the girl. Adoption couldn't be considered because of regulations stating the adoptive parents were required to be a specified number of years older than the prospective adoptee, and these parents did not qualify.

Education to these parents was a priority. At the end of each school year, the only decision to be made was what subjects would be taken the next year. The girl went onto enrol in a school of nursing. Finally, at the age of nineteen, she went home to visit grandmother. The reunion was a happy one, but now the girl couldn't stay. From there she went to Montreal to find her real mother, became acquainted with her, and returned to nursing school and went on to become a registered nurse.

Years later, following the breakup of her marriage and because ill health was now plaguing grandmother, the girl, now a woman, returned to the reserve with her children. The journey had been finally completed.

The child, girl and woman in this story is me. I've chosen this manner to relate my story, for even today some of the memories continue to pain me.

We remained on the reserve until grandmother died. My children were very close to her and although we all felt a great loss when she died, we are comforted in knowing how much she loved us and the fact that we could share her final years with her. Because I'd been away so long, I felt I no longer belonged. The years when I should have been learning about my heritage were taken from me.

Thanks to my foster parents, the education they encouraged me towards is paying off. Today I work as a nurse in the penitentiary service, where I encounter Natives on a daily basis. My background helps me better relate to them.

My plea to all young Natives:

Set high standards and goals for yourself. It may be necessary to leave home to achieve your goals, but in doing so, never lose sight of your heritage. Do these things not only for yourself, but for your people. Your gains in life will reflect your people.

KAREN KEESHIG-TOBIAS

Losing Them

I start in my mommy's room.
It's dark and cold.
Addin I call softly.

It's dark and cold.

Next stop — my
oldest sister's room.
Keitha I call.

It's dark and cold.

Last stop — Polly's room.
Polly. Polly.

It's dark and cold.

My bare feet —
Pitter patter, pitter
patter, pitter, patter —
in and out of the dark cold rooms.

*Where are you?
Where are you?*

No one hears me
except my mommy.
She holds me in her
strong, strong arms.

*They will come back.
They will come back.*
She whispers in my ear and
cradles me in her strong arms.

*They will come back.
They will come back.*
She whispers.

Karen Keeshig-Tobias (Ojibway-Delaware, Turtle Clan) is thirteen years old. She has published one short story, "Hearing Aids in Space," and acted in a number of films. Karen lives in Toronto with her mother and David, and her older sisters, Keitha and Polly, and her new sister, Emma. This poem is about when her first family broke up.

