

Grandma Sophie Miller

by *Thalia Hare*

Cet article est issu d'une entrevue de l'auteure avec sa grand-mère.

Grandma Sophie is the eldest of five children. She was born on May 1, 1919 at Black Lake, Yukon to Frank and Aggie (Broeren) Slim. Black Lake is situated on the east end of Lake Labarge. The Indian name for Lake Labarge is *Ta'an Mun*. Sophie is from the wolf clan and her Indian name is *Sekie*. Her Indian name was given to her by her grandfather, Slim Jim. After Sophie was born, she moved to Lake Labarge with her family.

Grandma went to school for only six months. At that time Native children were not allowed in white schools. She was taught to read and write by her mother Aggie while spending time out on the trapline. Grandma lived a very traditional life-style. She was taught to hunt, trap, and sew at a very young age. Her grandparents played a primary role in teaching her the traditional way of life. She used to hunt squirrels and recalls selling the pelts for five cents each. Her main mode of transportation was by boat or dogteam. There were no vehicles then.

Grandma's diet consisted of moose, gopher, rabbits, and grouse. She also picked berries and roots. The berries she picked were mostly cranberries. The foods were stored in a high cache. The fish and moose meat were often dried. Every part of the animal was used. All parts of the moose were important for First Nations people, therefore nothing was wasted. The hide was used for sewing. Sinew from the spine, tendons, and legs was used for thread.

Fish was plentiful at one time at Lake Labarge. But people no longer fish at Labarge because of the pollution and sewage. Elders and people

used to come to Lake Labarge from Carmacks, Little Salmon, and Champagne to fish.

Grandma's grandfather used to have a garden so they were able to get fresh vegetables like carrots, turnips, and potatoes. Roots were also an essential part of her diet. Before people had pots and pans they used to use birch bark pots.

Grandma Sophie speaks her Native language Southern Tutchone very fluently. She taught the Native language in school but has since retired. She maintains a traditional way of life and is kept busy by her favourite past-time, sewing and beadwork. Also Grandma has an in-depth knowledge of traditional medicines from the land. She knows which medicine is good for various ailments such as cuts, burns, stomach aches. She is always happy and eager to share her wisdom and knowledge with others.

When Grandma Sophie and her family were in Livingston Creek mining, she ate poisoned fish eggs. The fish eggs became poisoned because the knife that was used to cut the fish was contaminated. In those days when you mined, you had to separate gold with cyanide. However, the knife had not been cleaned thoroughly before it was used to prepare the fish. Grandma was taken to hospital where she was given intravenous for nine days. Since she was young and strong she was able to endure the effects of the poison.

Around 1942, Grandma met and married Gordon Grady. Together they had four children: Geraldine, Glenn, Doreen, and Diane. The eldest two were born and raised in Lake Labarge and Doreen and Diane were born in Whitehorse and spent the early part of their life in the Labarge area. Around 1953-54, Grandma met Don Miller and together they had three children: Barbara, Anne-Marie, and Bev. Grandma Sophie has several

grandchildren and has two great grandchildren.

Grandma's father, Frank Slim, was a riverboat pilot. In the early 1930's her father became enfranchised, which meant that he had to give up his Indian status in order to work on the riverboats. Her father had to go to Vancouver to take a course to get his master ticket to navigate inland waters. He was also known as Captain Slim. Grandma's father worked on a number of steamboats and had taken the SS Keno to its resting place in Dawson City in the early 60's.

Grandma Sophie's uncle, Chief Jim Boss, petitioned the government in 1902 for "land for his people." Chief Jim Boss used to meet with a lot of government people. Because of his compassion and concern for his people he wrote to Ottawa thereby starting the Yukon Indian Land Claim process.

Grandma Sophie recently celebrated her 75th birthday and was quite honoured to receive a certificate from the Prime Minister of Canada. She often speaks of the many changes she has seen throughout the years. Grandma Sophie and her partner Don still reside in the shipyard area of Whitehorse where she has been for the past 40 years. She enjoys meeting people and always has a welcoming smile for whomever she comes into contact with. She still goes to Lake Labarge when time permits and maintains close contact with her family and relatives from the Labarge area.

Thalia Hare is the granddaughter of Sophie and Don Miller of Whitehorse, Yukon. She is a 17 year old student. She lives in Whitehorse with her parents, Barb and Norman Hare, and her three sisters.