



Respect Works Here

Community Champion

Marjorie Mackie reflects on her journey of identity and healing from a time she remembers fondly on the Osoyoos Indian Band. Her face lights up remembering stories of fun with friends: "How much I love those people from Oliver." It was there she nurtured her Indigenous roots after growing up in foster homes in Saskatchewan.

With Cree and Scottish ancestry, Marjorie was born in northern Saskatchewan and lived in an orphanage after her parents separated amid WWII. At Kilburn Hall, potential parents would come on "children shopping days" looking to adopt. But for Marjorie and her siblings that day never came. Unbeknownst to her at the time, her mother had stipulated that the children could only be adopted as a sibling group. That condition ultimately kept them together in their first decent foster placement with a Mennonite widow.

"You know you're not home. We pretended it was home...it was a sad time." While Marjorie didn't know her father, she was able to visit their mother periodically, which she cherished. "I could listen to mother's stories all the time. My mother was always my hero," says Marjorie.

Later, as an adult with children of her own, Marjorie made her way to Oliver where she ran a busy, 22 horse trail riding operation with support from Osoyoos band members who became close friends and family.

After overcoming a time of alcohol addiction in 1976, she took Nechi Counsellor Training, which prepared individuals to become alcohol and drug counsellors in their communities. Marjorie says, "I'd finally come home at Nechi."

She was on a new path, helping others to find sobriety. "It's hard to say how much I loved those people. It was a really great time in my life." Her work became her passion, and her purpose. She received traditional First Nations teachings, learning about the sweat lodge and the medicine wheel, which became central to Marjorie's addictions counselling.

"Our greatest strength comes from our greatest weakness," is a core belief shaping Marjorie's perspective on herself and her life's work.

Her first jobs were on the Oliver reserve as guidance councillor then as addictions councillor. She was asked to be on the board of the Interior Native Alcohol Abuse Society planning a new culturally-based residential treatment centre for First Nations people. In 1979, she became one of the first employees at the Round Lake Treatment Centre near Vernon.

Using the guidance offered through the Medicine Wheel, Marjorie expanded its application in innovative ways to her counselling practise and while at Round Lake, she was the

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subject of a 1985 hour-long documentary, *Walking in Pain*.

She has taught workshops in community, in schools, in penitentiaries, and at World Conferences.

Her granddaughter is writing her master's thesis on "Grammi's Medicine Wheel," an acknowledgment of Marjorie's years of personal contribution in sharing the Medicine Wheel's teachings for one's daily life and for addictions counselling.

"It's in your life; it is your life and you can convert it at any moment," says Marjorie about the Medicine Wheel. The power of words is in its teaching and she lives true to those teachings. "Native people, they always give you their best, no matter what." And Marjorie has.

