



# Gladys Taylor

*A Portrait Compiled by Alice Williams*

**S**he is untainted, unspoiled by the education system of the dominant society. She's a person of raw strength and earthiness. Gladys Taylor is a 75 year-old Elder who has spent all her life in Curve Lake Reserve, 20 miles north of Peterborough, Ontario. She has 10 children. "I lost 3, but I've still got 7," she proudly claims. I asked her how many grandchildren she has. As soon as I said that, her eyes twinkled and we both started laughing as we both realized she didn't know just off-hand. Laughingly she explained, "Oh-oh-oh-oh— I should really count them up."

As we watched our TV soap, she took a writing-pad and counted up her grandchildren. Seventeen she has. She also has seven great-grandchildren.

Gladys is a deeply religious woman, who has loved God all her life. Several years ago, the Native Ministry of the United Church of Canada made her the Leading Elder for all of Canada.

The following are excerpts from her record of thoughts, ideas, prayers, sermons, diaries and poems.

*Bizindan weweni [Listen carefully]. It's not right to ask an Elder to repeat a story again. You get knowledge by listening.*

In a treasured picture-frame, Gladys Taylor has this poem and a photograph of all her children.

## What Are Our Children Worth?

All people place a value,  
On things they call their own,  
Their clothes and cars and jewelry,  
Their friends, their health and home.

The possession of greatest value,  
We will ever have on earth,  
Makes me ponder this question,  
What are our children worth?

So gather your children around you,  
Guards guide them with hand and heart,

For all too soon will come the day,  
When you and they must part.

Then all your days will be lonely,  
You will miss their youthful mirth,  
All our love and all our life,  
That's what our children are worth.

**31 August 1988**

Today I seen on TV a "Advert." It showed numerous items but the one that caught My fancy was a large bowl. Around the edge was Nice Smooth lumps of glass and sort of frilly lace which reminded me of when I had a play-house as a small girl, and I had a Very Special Friend who was Very dear to me. We shared everything. When He was Sad I was Sad too. He could put his head on my shoulder and we would sit this way till the hurt was gone, and one day he brought me a large piece of this Kind of bowl for Our play-house. I really treasured this, it was frosted green. And when you turned it, it would have golden and blue tinges. I always kept this polished. Now I only have the Memories because my Special Friend went away and I can only go back to childhood days. Now I'm grateful, even when friends part they can't take away Memories. They leave them behind, they're Consolations on blue days.

### My First Thoughts This Evening

As I look back over the years, even as far back as my childhood, I see so many changes. Some good. Some bad. Others that will never change, such as being Indian. But I love being Indian because I love challenges. Naming some, I'm the first Native woman to get a license to Serve Communion to my people without going through college and I didn't study theology. I'm sure I wouldn't have ever been any use if it had to be on account of knowing English ways. Because I didn't go to school long, I was working by the

time I was 11 years old.

**15 March 1986**

Last night before I went to sleep, I was thinking back, many years ago when I was a Young Mother. How good it was to rock my baby to sleep; to Sing those Ojibwa hymns and hear the even breathing of My Little One, Who felt so safe in My arms. Now alone in this big house there's Nothing. Only Memories. But some time during the night, Something woke me. I could feel baby breath on My Withered Cheek and hear that even breathing. Once more : life is so good to me. It's great to be alive.

This was when I was Very sick and was here all alone. My time rolled backwards that night.

### Smoke Signals across the Lake

I see the Smoke of three Camp fires  
On this Sunny March Morning,  
They come from the fires, built on the  
Shore

By the Weedigo's of the four Corners  
They meet here Once a year to decide  
The ways of livelihood of their Nations  
To Smoke the pipe of peace.

They must have Come to a good under  
standing

Because I see the Sign of one Single  
Smoke

Where they have each put bits of to  
bacco.

That says there will be peace and under  
standing

With Our Indian Nations.

So let us lift up Our arms to embrace  
The warm Sunshine of our Mother  
Earth's love

Let us : feel the pulse of Nature's heart  
beat.

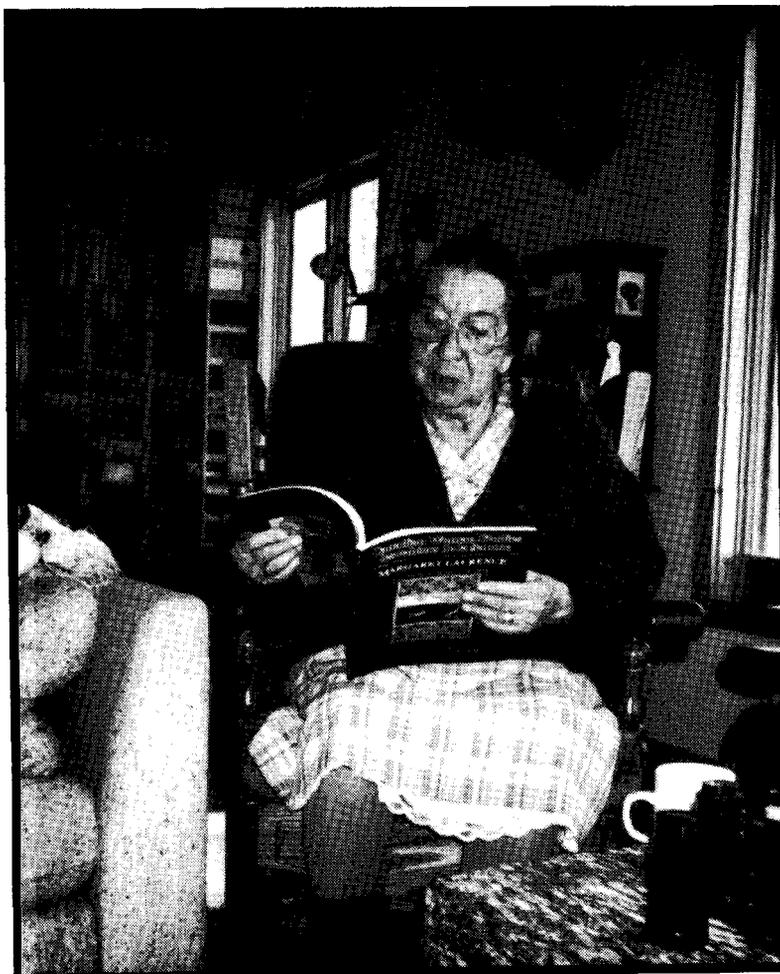
We will have the good feeling of  
Belonging to our land, and live to  
Keep it that way.

**Sunday December 4**

Today has been a good day. Cold —  
Clear and Windy. Some snow fell, and big  
patches of ice formed on the lake, smooth  
paths among the waves. It's dark now, the  
wind is still strong. My  
Children were all home, also  
my Grandchildren, even  
little Anna.

**Wednesday, December  
21, 1988**

We had lots of Snow ear-  
lier in last week but it has  
rained and now it looks like  
a green Christmas. I remem-  
ber when I was a small girl  
and the Nish Nobs would go  
hunting for food. Some times  
when it was a mild spell and  
the porcupine would be out  
they would kill it for the  
quills. And also the meat is  
real good, but they had to  
fetch it from a long ways.  
And it being so sharp. And  
nearby they would drag it,  
they would cut a branch from  
the tree that had sort of a  
hook. They would pull it  
through its mouth and drag  
it home. Then the Old Ones  
would get mad and scold  
them. They believed when  
you done it that way you



were bringing on a big snow storm. I'm afraid if I tell this to the White people they will make me drag a porcupine up and down the ski slopes to prove Our beliefs (hee hee).

Memories of Yester Years...

I'm glad of this opportunity to share this Sunday Service with the people of the United Church. I work in Our church when there's no Minister to take Our Service. Although My Services are different because I usually Speak in My Native language. But I have to use English too because we have people in Our Church who aren't Native or Some who don't Speak or Understand it, but when I give Communion it's done in Ojibwa. I feel so good about it all, its just like balm to Our Souls. I'm also a leading Elder for all of Canada's Natives. When they get Ordained I attend the Ordination.

### Wednesday, February 15, 1989

I visited a big Church this week, took part in its Service. I was One of the three who were asked to take part and was also the last one to speak. As I sat there listening, they talked about Money and the cost of everything, the drought, the Ozone layer, the Earthquake Victims, Acid rain. But no one spoke about the One who is the head of that building.

### Saturday October 24

Mom's Birthday, nothing can measure my loneliness today.

I was sitting beside the bleachers feeling Very lost and friendless when a big black car came toward me blaring its horn. I moved out of the way and as I looked at the people in it, I seen Chief get out and walk toward me. He folded me to his breast with tears streaming down his face. He said, Mom it's nice to see you. He was sick looking and his clothes didn't fit but he was clean. He had a blue windbreaker. In the pocket was a hair ornament: a baby's face, it held a nice white feather. He said, Mom it's for your hair, and there was also a small bottle of something that looked like sand-coloured seeds. As we talked he said, Mom I come for you. You'll come to live with me. Granma came with me. Let's go and see her. We went. She was busy cleaning her little house. She had made a birchbark flower pot and it wasn't finished yet. I felt so happy. Then Chief said, Mom lets go. I

said, don't leave yet. Well I came after you Mom. I'll have to go now. I turned to speak to Mom. She wasn't there. The only thing I seen was two figures flying toward the east. I can feel my hopes and heart crumble. I called out, Wait Chief. I'll go. But they just kept on going. I woke up Crying.

### The International Year of the Child

What does it mean? Who is it for? It must be for the whole World, the neglected, the abandoned, parentless, beaten and bruised, the molested, the murdered, the homeless, the retarded, the crippled. Why is it such a big celebration? It must be for the healthy child that's lucky to enjoy the good things of life: good clothes, lots of toys, three good meals a day, a vacation, later on a car, Credit Cards, Booze, dope, lots of Friends, Money, Beach parties, drag racing. But where does it all end? It ends in the earth. Where all humanity came from in the beginning of time. There was a time when such a day was unheard of for every day was a day of the child in the eyes of and life of an Indian grandmother. My heart beats slow: like the beating of the drum: when they sang the death Chant even my steps are slow. I walk with my head down: there are times I lift up my eyes to observe the beauty of Our earth and wish I could see into the future.

### Equal Rights?

Do you know what that means? Do you understand what it stands for? My foot steps follow the path of the evening sun : I'm getting on in Years now, but all my life ever since I've understood a bit of the English language, I hear my people say, we want equal rights. I don't think they know either. Here's what I think, why is it so right when a Indian man sells his Indian blood for a white woman. She gains also in the bargain, every Indian right, when she gets settled snugly into the band her demands are big if she has Children, maybe by her previous marriage or out of wedlock. Why are they always given a better opportunity than the honest-to-goodness Indian Kid? But when a Indian woman marries a White man she is looked upon as a non-Indian. How can anyone change who you are? I was born Indian, if I was a white woman, how can I become an Indian because I married one? If these are equal rights, I think when an Indian man

takes a white woman for his wife he should lose his rights as well as an Indian women. The scale that weighs out human rights should balance equal, because when the Indian woman and her white man have kids they are called Metis. Again the white man gets all kinds of help; because he calls himself Metis too, he builds a nice home, nice furniture, turns himself inside out to be a good Indian. I don't know. I guess they are just used to pushing. The reason they get ahead.

### 7 October 1987

This day is overcast and my outlook is just as grey and dreary. My heart ache from last evening still hangs on, those days come often now. It makes me wonder if it's any use trying to fit into the white world of my children. My roots are very obvious, my ways, my thinking, even my looks. I'm just as unique as an arrowhead.

As I look upon this ordination I feel honoured, to be a part of it. I have been looking back at the time when we first started the Native Ministry in 1981. We were a weak people, but we put all Our faith and our expectations at the Feet of God. We knew we couldn't do it on our own. So we figured if we put Him in first place with everything we do He would see us through. That's why we have come this far. We are looking at the rewards of our Faith. I remember, when I witnessed my Calling we had gone to White Bear Reserve. I couldn't understand why I was asked to go but there was my letter and it said my plane ticket would be at the terminal. Then a few days later we went on a sight seeing tour. The bus stopped between two high Mountains. I got off and as I looked up past the timber line, up past the boulders to the snow caps on top, I felt so small and useless just like the small bugs crawling on the ground. I felt so humble looking at his vast creation, and thinking I'm a part of this. What Can I do? Then like the gentle breeze that blows over the Mountain's grasses, I heard God's Call. As small and useless as you feel, I have work for you to do. Feed my Sheep. The closeness of Him was so real. I felt His hand on my head again as I did one other time, and I know it will again, when my life's work is ended as He whispers in Soft Ojibwa,

*You're Home my child, you're Home.  
Come rest in the shadow of My love and all  
the tired will be gone.*