

Ethel (née McKenzie) Deschambault

The late Ethel Deschambault worked for many years as a highly respected social justice activist and Probation Officer in the Thompson Region of Manitoba. Ethel was born on the road allowance outside of The Pas, Manitoba along the Carrot River Valley road. Her first cousin Anne Carrière-Acco describes her as one of the most caring persons she has known. Ethel's brother was Murray McKenzie, an accomplished photographer, whose art has been displayed and published in local, national and international venues. He regularly freelanced for the *Winnipeg Free Press* and his work has been published in the *Toronto Star*, *Photo Life*, *US Camera*, and *Time Magazine*.

After leaving school, Ethel worked as a Certified Nurses Aid at the Clearwater Lake Sanatorium and was also their Cree Interpreter. She then worked at the Thompson General Hospital. She was the Chair of the Thompson Local of Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) and was active with the Catholic Women's League where she served on their Social Action Committee.

After working for one year as a volunteer to find housing for sixteen homeless families squatting on the outskirts of Thompson, she was hired as a Domestic Counsellor with Manitoba Health and Social Development. Subsequently, she joined Probation Services (Manitoba Justice, Community and Youth Corrections). She completed her Post-secondary education with the New Careers Program. Ethel and her husband Barney Deschambault raised five sons.

Community participation:

- 1974-75—Member of the Northern Judicial Task Force.
- 1975—Mother of the Year.
- 1977—Nominated Woman of the Year, Thompson Y.W.C.A.
- 1980-81—Thompson Crisis Centre Board of Directors.

Ethel was one of the visionary leaders who were instrumental in the establishment of the Louis Riel Institute. At the legislative hearings for the Louis Riel Institute Act, MMF President Billyjo DeLaRonde paid tribute to Ethel:

When this vision came out first about a Louis Riel Institute, it started many years ago. One lady who is not with us today was instrumental in developing this idea, a lady from northern Manitoba by the name of Ethel Deschambeault [sic]. She died of illness shortly after this thing started. I am sure she would be very proud to see that this dream has progressed this far.¹

Reference:

¹ Hansard: Bill 12--The Louis Riel Institute Act, Legislative Assembly of Manitoba the Standing Committee on Law Amendments, Tuesday, October 24, 1995 (p. 1930).

Sandy Greer, "Ethel Deschambault: The Defender," *The Pemmican Journal*, October 20, 1982: 9-12.



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