

Maria Campbell, *Eagle Feather News*, October 2014

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### **We have so much to learn from our role models**

I have had many role models in my life, some of them very old, something very young. Each one contributed to the child I was in the adult I became.

I have never forgotten any of them. Sometimes they have preceded to the very back of my remembering but it has only taken an event, Words spoken, and adjuster to bring them immediately into my space to remind me.

I haven't thinking a lot about them for the past few weeks as I have been researching preparing for keynote address I'm giving out a child welfare conference in Ontario this month.

As you all know, we have more children in the care of social services and we ever had in residential schools.

And so it is imperative, I believe, that if we are to change those statistics you must stop looking for answers and solutions outside of ourselves, our families, and communities and look inward, to find the strengths, teachings, remembering's and role models to bring us out of the dark and terrible place.

I believe we have the people to do that in the leadership. I also believe we have the courage and determination.

I do not believe we can make change with the worn out tools the colonizers passed on to us in his hurry to assimilate us so he could take our land and resources.

Most tools have not ever works for him. One need only to look out his own country and those he colonized to see starvation, war, disease and the killing a woman and children.

Nothing is worth that.

But we can make change by coming together and finding a new way to move forward. A way to use the common sense that creator gave us and the knowledge that each one of us carries, from the smallest child to the oldest person..

This means a new way of thinking, of living and doing things in role models can help us do this.

Role models, elders and community leaders who are kind, gentle and tough as nails, people who understand the sickness of colonial history but remember and practice the old knowledge and wisdom. Common sense stuff like building our own homes, for example.

Going into the bush, taking trees like our grandpas did and building good solid sensible houses. We don't need running water, flush toilets or gas furnaces.

Those are things we can get later, when we can afford them. But we need more housing like right now.

Why are we waiting for a contractor who could care less about us, to come for millions of dollars and build a house that will fall down around us in a few years.

Look at some of the houses are people built long ago, some of them are still standing and with some work, you could probably live in them again. I know because was some work I have lived in one of those old houses for nearly 40 years.

I have been able to do that because someone role model for me, that it could be done and also reminded me that I was raised in and wireless houses and came out of the healthy person.

I have electricity for 20 years, but I still have no running water, I haul it from Rosthern. I have wood heating and a lovely outhouse with a warm seat for your bum on cold days in a book shelf should you want to read while you're sitting there doing your business.

It didn't hurt my children, they worked hard to contribute to the well-being of our family by hauling wood, melting snow to bathe and shoveling it to get us out of the driveway on stormy days.

And seeing my grand and great grand children look forward to visiting has to my friends, so they can do the same thing. (Lol. For a week that is).

I didn't do it for nostalgia or believe me, to show off. I did it because I had very little money and I did not want my children to grow up on welfare. I was like many single moms, in a desperate. I don't need to explain what it feels like to be on the verge of homelessness.

One day I read a story in a native newspaper about a woman who was looking after her ill an crippled father and had no home because her van, not considering a priority, refused to give her housing. Her father had been a builder of the log homes on the rez before Indian Affairs houses so she decided she would, with this help, just build it yourself.

She started with an ax, an old suede saw, Hammer and a bucket of rusty nails she pulled from whole boards she salvaged at a nearby dump together, with your determination and strength, his knowledge and wisdom they built a home for themselves.

It was a wonderful and inspiring story. I forgotten her name, but I remember she was from the Red Pheasant First Nation.

I decided if she could do it so could I. My late father, still living at the time had also been a long builder but he was no longer able to work he was however able to direct us. My oldest

daughter and I completely gutted and rebuilt 100-year-old house with salvage from the Rhostern dump. There was lots of good stuff and not dump, doors, windows, lumber.

Then one morning, sleeping late because we were all nearly worn out trying to beat the winter, we woke up to people laughing and talking in Cree at the front of the house. Some old men had come over with their tools to help us finish building the porch and a deck, enabling us to be the first snow storm by had day.

I would never been able to do this or believe they couldn't live without all the amenities we have come to rely on without the woman in her old father to role model for me. And our work on that old house reminded those four old men of the value of helping others as they stepped up.

We learn, the old men and myself, by comparing notes during tea breaks that we are also were relatives. Laugh if you want but for most of us don't really know who our extended family is anymore, something that was not only important in old times what was foundational to the good health of our communities.

I no longer live in that house in the winter months but I still live there from April to October and each spring when I open the house smudge it, I remember the woman and her dad at Red Pheasant and the inspiration they gave me and the beautiful gift of power gave my children.

Yes I believe roll models are important people and we are truly blessed because we have so many of them.