



# Batshaw Alumni Association

## Newsletter

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### A Cree Adventure

By Nicolette de Smit



When I was about 10 years old, I announced to my family that when I grew up, I would become a teacher for the Cree children in Northern Quebec. Now, almost 50 years later, I finally had the chance to “teach”, but mostly to learn, in the Cree Nation of Chisasibi.

In early October 2013, I was invited by the ACJQ to join a project providing Youth Protection trainers to workers of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay. Michael Udy was already part of the team, and he had suggested my name when an extra trainer was needed. I was thrilled!

I prepared myself as best I could, researching and reading everything I could find about the Cree Nations of Northern Quebec. Michael had already been to Chisasibi, and filled me in about

some of the realities of the northern community.

The history of the Cree struggle to maintain control over the lands where they had lived for thousands of years is fascinating. The Quebec government had never negotiated any type of treaty when they began to develop the James Bay Hydroelectric Project in the early 1970's. A group of well-educated young chiefs sued the Quebec government to try to stop the project. It would result in



Young Cree chiefs negotiate with Robert Bourassa in 1972

the flooding of thousands of square kilometers of traditional Cree land. They won their case, but the decision was later overturned by a higher Court.

Nevertheless, the result of the legal and political action was that the Cree of Northern Quebec were able to negotiate a far better treaty than any other First Nation before then.

Much of the settlement money was invested to create important infrastructure such as Air Creebec and the Cree Health Board. The James Bay Agreement also provided for ongoing financial compensation, education, environmental and social protection, and most importantly a significant degree of self-government and power. As a result, the Cree of Northern Quebec enjoy a 21<sup>st</sup> century standard of living.

Three weeks after my invitation, armed with a bit of knowledge and many questions, I was on my way to Eeyou Istchee, the Land of the Cree.

Air Creebec is the only airline that flies to all the Cree communities each day. The little Dash 8's used for the flights are designed to require very little runway space. The plane seems to go straight up and down, stopping and starting on a dime. On one of my flights back, the



Dash 8 at Chisasibi airport

plane made numerous extra stops to pick up Air Creebec workers on their way to their annual company Christmas party in Val D'Or. This left a strong impression that the Air Creebec flights are much like a Montreal city bus for people living and working in the North.

Chisasibi is the largest community of the Cree Nations, with a population of nearly 5,000 people. The village is quite small by southern standards, but the territory of the community includes over 800 square kilometers.

Chisasibi airport looks like a small-town bus station, except that the large windows look out on the runway. It was bustling with people arriving, and others waiting to board the plane.

With everyone around me speaking Cree, I had my first impression of being in a completely different country. Everyone spoke perfect, unaccented English, but immediately switched back to Cree when not dealing with someone from the south. Families talked quietly among themselves, and often seemed to tell jokes. There was lots of subdued laughter.

The airport is about 7 or 8 km from the village, and most people were picked up by friends or rela-

tives. Fortunately for me, a former Batshaw worker was on my flight, and I was able to get a lift into town with her on the hospital transport van.

I saw that the village was a stretched out, suburban-style community along a long road, with lots of crescents and circles dotted with



modern looking single family homes. Most of the houses were built of wood or other siding materials, and many were decorated for Halloween. Large SUV's and minivans drove everywhere. If not for the tipis built in many of the back yards, I would have thought we were in a small town in Ontario.

Visiting workers are usually housed in shared lodgings. Mine was a modern, well-equipped suburban home with three bedrooms. My housemate was a Cree worker who had flown in to attend the training. She was very quiet at first, but as we got to know each other she provided me with a wealth of information about the community, the taxi service (it's unreliable at best), and the local stores.

After settling in, I set out on foot to explore the community, and to find out where I would be giving the training.

I eventually found the Youth Protection office, and the administrative assistant who would be helping with the logistics of the training. I also explored the three stores, the two banks, and the large central community complex. These were all in the center of town. I later learned that many other official buildings of Chisasibi are scattered throughout the town, and not easily accessible on foot.

The community complex, called the Mitchuap building, is impressive. It looks like a huge modern tipi. Inside, the walls are decorated with beautiful paintings featuring Cree themes. Most of the community services such as the local radio station, the local hotel, and the community cafeteria are housed here.



There are three stores in the village. One is "the dep", open late and providing a small quantity of needed items. The largest store, called the "Northern", is sort of like Walmart, supplying everything from fresh fruits and vegetable to lamps and children's toys. And the last one is the "Co-op", with mostly grocery items.

On my second trip I discovered the Chisasibi Hospital. It is a little



Chisasibi from the air



Shopping centre parking lot

oasis of southern, mostly Quebecois workers, with a great staff cafeteria. The hospital is probably the only place where you forget that you are in a Cree community.

Despite the physical similarity to other small towns in Canada, Chisasibi is clearly a different country. About 92% of the population speaks Cree as their mother tongue, and everyone speaks Cree to each other.

This is much easier to grasp for someone from Europe, where language and culture changes as soon as you cross a border. Some of the Quebecois hospital workers I spoke with were still shocked by this reality. For me, it was thrilling to hear this original, vibrant North American language being spoken everywhere.



The Training

The participants in my three day training sessions were mostly experienced, senior workers - the

“elders” of both the community and of Cree Health and Social Services.

Since I arrived late on the first day (none of the three taxis in town showed up to pick us up), everyone had a wonderful laugh at my frazzled entrance. This broke the ice perfectly. Several of the elder ladies helped their fellow senior worker (me) get organized. From then on, the workshops were warm and inclusive.

I was privileged to hear about life in the North; experiences from a generation back, when everyone still lived “on the land”; and the problems in the modern community. Together we worked on visions of a better future for families and children in Chisasibi.

I was able to affirm to the workers that many of the findings from modern neuropsychology support the effectiveness of traditional clinical practices, such as chanting, dancing, drumming and healing circles, to help people resolve past trauma and achieve a healthy emotional balance.

One elder worker shared a beautiful story with the group. It was about a childcare worker she had met in another community. He told her that his grandfather had predicted many years earlier that he would eventually work with kids. The grandfather held up a baby rattle traditionally used by good Cree parents to soothe fussy, crying children. The elder illustrated how the sound of the rattle had grown dim and silent over the years. He pointed out



Miniature copy of the traditional Cree baby rattle

that it would be up to his grandson to help bring back the sound of the rattle, and the healthy parenting practices of the past.

The story perfectly illustrated the goal of the training sessions. Everyone could identify with the message: use traditional approaches within a modern context to strengthen and support Cree families and children.

I am still very new in my training work, and in learning about Cree life, culture, and the work of my Cree colleagues. However, it was a privilege to have participated in this experience, and to have met wonderful people doing the same hard work we do at Batshaw, albeit in different circumstances. I am happy to be going back for future sessions.



Some of the elder participants dressed up for Halloween: proof that training can be fun!

## Time Traveling Through Adoption Services

By Kathy Faludi

Two years after retiring, I received a phone call asking if I would be interested in working on a project involving (very) old, mostly adoption files.



The conditions and hours were flexible, although the 2 year time frame proposed seemed like another lifetime. However, it suited me and I accepted. The nature of the job was also a good fit as I had always been involved in some aspect of files: file recording and progress notes, access to files, or conservation and destruction. A retired archivist at Batshaw was hired as well. With our different skill sets we are an ideal team.

The files date, with some exceptions, from roughly 1930-1958 and were never part of an electronic information system. The work itself is fairly simple: read the file, pull out key data, enter information into a database, then try to match the file with that of the adoptive couple. Files where there was no adoption have been identified for destruction at a later date.

Frankly, when I started I thought the work might be a bit dry. I have been more than pleasantly surprised. What is it that has proven to be so interesting, and actually captivating? I am reading the life story of thousands of people; the biological parents, the children in their very early weeks and months, until their placement with the adoptive family.

These files have taken me on a journey into mid-century Montreal Anglophone society, in short, an historian's delight! As I too am a baby-boomer, these children could well have been my neighbors, classmates, or friends.

The sheer enormity of the numbers has also sunk in - there were well over a thousand adoptions each year on the island of Montreal alone. Sadly, children who were handicapped, had serious health problems, or who were not, dare I say - Caucasian -were not considered adoptable. Also, children, as young as 6 months old were routinely given IQ tests and if they failed, they were not recommended to be shown to



adoptive families.

Typically the stories were as follows; young woman finds herself to be pregnant, asks to have the baby adopted, so the agency gets involved in planning for the upcoming birth.

The "pf" (putative father, as they were called then), were sometimes married men, or lost interest when they found out their girlfriend was pregnant, or were not ready to take on the responsibility of parenthood. As often as not, the relationship was casual, and the women did not want to involve or even identify the "pf".

Many young women came from rural areas of Quebec, Ontario or the Maritimes, where there were no resources for them, nor did they want anyone in their small communities to know that they were pregnant. If they were unemployed, the agency helped place them in domestic work while waiting for their

“confinement”.

The older files, portrayed people struggling to overcome poverty as North America was climbing out of the depression, or told of women whose husbands were serving overseas, or who had affairs with soldiers who were



then shipped overseas. As well, there were “serial” mothers (then as now), giving birth to

### ***Want to get involved?***



***Propose an activity***

***Donate your time***

***Do some fundraising***

***Come to the Fun Lunch***

***Attend the AGM***

***The Batshaw Alumni Association is there for you!***

many children, all placed for adoption.

I am also immersed in the way social work, specifically adoption work, was practiced, in those times.

I use the word “stories” deliberately. The files were indeed that. Recording was done in narrative style, rendered with enormous detail. It makes reading them enjoyable, though I don’t subscribe to this method of recording! One aspiring novelist-worker wrote, “...Mary, are you in love with him?” She was at a loss to answer.

As well, judgmental comments and descriptions were plentiful, as in, “she was a tall, large-boned, buxom girl;” “the baby is small, thin and rather unfinished looking;” “mother was found to be a high-grade feeble-minded type”.

There were interesting clinical impressions as well; “the diagnosis at that time was that the child was a neurotic expression of a need for a gift to her mother”; or “she appears to have low mentality, but that may be due to a limited range of experience”; or “no clear impression was gained as to the reason for mother’s pregnancy”.

Contrary to imagined (mine!) stereotypes of adoption practice in those days, they weren’t “baby snatchers”. Alternatives, usually involving the extended family were explored. The women did not have to sign consent until 6



months after placement and there was little pressure to do so.

Ironically, sometimes a woman called to place a young child for adoption, and these women’s consent was taken within a few days! With the lack of social supports for single mothers then, adoption was almost inevitable.

There were individual stories that had me in tears, and there were some stories of real triumph. The internal struggles of women who did not want to give up their baby, but felt they had no choice was heartbreaking. On the other hand, the joy expressed by the adoptive parents after the placement of the baby balances the sadness.



## MagicJack: an alternative to high long-distance costs

By Zalman Bitensky

If you have ever wanted an inexpensive way to add an extra phone line, or are tired of expensive long-distance bills and have a high speed internet connection, then MagicJack may be the answer for you.

MagicJack Plus is an internet based phone which can either be attached to a USB port on your internet connected computer or, if you have a router, it can be connected to the router and an electrical outlet with no need for a computer.

We have had our MagicJack since

2009 and are pleased with what we have saved on long-distance costs and that people from Montreal can call us free of charge when we are in Florida.

### Set up is quite simple.

A: Using a computer

1. Plug the MagicJack into a USB port and a phone into the MagicJack.(figure A)
2. The rest is done by the on-board software. You will need to set up an account with Magic Jack. This is easy to do. You plug your MagicJack into a USB port on your

computer and then follow the directions on the screen. For complete instructions go to this website <http://the-gadgeteer.com/2011/07/22/magicjack-plus-review/>

B: Without a computer

3. Before you can make and receive calls do step 2 in part A. When you have registered and obtained a phone number go to step 4
4. Plug the Magic Jack into the power base which is plugged into an electrical outlet. Then attach the network cable to the

MagicJack and the other end to the router. (Figure B). Attach your phone to the MagicJack.

That's it. Start making and receiving calls



A: Set-up with a computer



B: Set-up without a computer

**Cost:** The MagicJack Plus costs \$59.00 at La Source which they say comes with a one year subscription. The yearly subscription fee is \$29.00 +\$10 for a Canadian number. The great advantage is that the Canadian number can go anywhere in North America. It can even be used when you travel as long as you have an internet connection through a computer or network cable.

### **Spring 2014 BAA FUNDRAISER:** Sale of Gently used, high quality and designer handbags

The alumni executive is planning another fundraiser, with proceeds to be shared between the Batshaw Foundation and the Alumni Association.

This year's fundraiser will be the sale of handbags and wallets that are new, gently used, in good condition

and of good quality.

The event will coincide with the Annual BBQ that takes place at Weredale Park to raise funds for camp(TBD).

Closer to the date, which is usually in June, we will send our membership

more details about donations, date, time and place.



## Book Review: *The Burgess Boys* by Elizabeth Stout

Reviewed by Barabara Kemp

This is a book I really enjoyed. Some may recognize this author's name – she has received the Pulitzer Prize for an earlier work, *Olive Kitteridge*, and is also well known for the novel, *Amy and Isabelle* (two other great reads).

Without going too deeply into the plot, this is a story about a family of two brothers, their sister, Susan (a twin to the younger brother), and Susan's teen-age son, Zach. Susan and Zach still reside in their hometown of Shirley Falls, Maine, but the brothers have moved on to work and live in New York. A crisis arises for this family when Zach gets himself into legal trouble by committing an act of vandalism which insults members of the Somali community who are also residents of the small town.

The author uses this story line to explore many issues – the impact on a family with secrets and

with troubled and unexplored relationships that must now come together around the fallout that results from this incident, the open - and not so open - prejudice that exists in a small, economically depressed town when a visible minority settles in its midst, and the legal concerns of how to constructively address the actions of this confused teenage boy.

Elizabeth Stout is an elegant, intelligent writer and in her hands the study of these characters and of a town all forced to confront matters that have been left unresolved because of how they threaten the status quo makes for wonderful reading.

### Other Books I Recommend

*Broken Harbor* by Tania French. This book is the study of a criminal investigation of a shocking murder in a small town in Ireland. Although the book has interesting twists and turns, it is



also an intriguing character study of the two lead investigators and how they cope with the crime and with what their investigation reveals.

*The Rosie Project* by Graeme Simsion. This is a truly delightful book written as if by a man (named Don Tillman) with Asperger's Syndrome who has decided to look for an appropriate woman to be his wife. What results is an original and charming romantic comedy. You'll have a few laughs and I guarantee that Don Tillman will become one of your favorite fictional characters!



## Sandhya's Spanish Style Garlic Shrimp

By Sandhya Karnick



### Ingredients:

1 lb med. Shrimp, peeled, tails left on.  
 2 cloves garlic finely chopped  
 1 dried red chilli, broken up, or  
 1/2 tsp chilli flakes  
 Juice of half lemon  
 1 tblsp chopped parsley  
 1/2 cup olive oil

Heat oil, fry garlic till light brown. Add red pepper and fry for a minute, add shrimp and fry till cooked. Add salt to taste..

Add lemon juice, parsley and serve with garlic toast.

## CARP: the Canadian Association of Retired Persons

By Carol Kimmis

Quebec has its first Chapter of CARP, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, also or perhaps better known as "Zoomers". The Metro Montreal West Chapter (#37) was inaugurated in September 2011.

BYFC Alumni Association welcomed Marcus Tabichnick and Lee Royko, chairperson and vice-chairperson respectively, as guest speakers for our annual meeting held October 1st.

Those present learned what CARP is about, and the value and advantages of being a member, and went home with complimentary copies of Zoomer

magazine and membership forms.

CARP has more than 350,000 members nationwide with about 15,000 in Quebec, and approximately 3,000 in the Montreal area. CARP works for you in many ways.

**Advocacy** - CARP is a national, non-partisan organization committed to a "New Vision of Aging for Canada", e.g. a voice in Ottawa. Susan Eng, VP for Advocacy, is very active regarding modifications to pensions and Old Age Security as introduced by the Conservative government, and most recently, the changes announced by Canada Post and how they could affect the lives of seniors.

**Benefits** - There are many ways to save money through CARP membership, e.g. discounts and value-added services from leading brand name providers.

**Community** - CARP is committed to building a strong sense of community and shared values with a broad diversity of individuals and groups through local Chapters. Membership in CARP is recognized in the US where AARP is the acronym.

You can save \$5 by subscribing to CARP online. To learn more about the discounts and advantages of being a member, please check the website: [www.carp.ca](http://www.carp.ca). To request information about the local Chapter of CARP, you can contact them: by email - [westislandcarp@gmail.com](mailto:westislandcarp@gmail.com) or by telephone **514-624-3830**.

### How to Join CARP

#### It's Easy

You can get all the great benefits of membership for as little as \$14.95. And membership includes your spouse or partner, free! Joining online is fast and secure – and you can save \$5.

**Join CARP  
Now!**



## Social Fun Lunch: October 22, 2013



**Great food!**

**Wonderful friends!**



**Catching up!**

**Join us next  
time!**



## **October 1, 2013: Batshaw Alumni Association Celebrates its Sixth Annual General Meeting**



**Don't miss the next meeting!  
Time and date will be  
announced soon**

## Notes from the president

By Zalman Bitensky

**Since** my last report in the June 2013 issue of this newsletter, the following new events have transpired.

On October 1, 2013 the sixth Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Batshaw Alumni Association (BAA) was held. There were 24 attendees which was up from our last AGM. The speakers from CARP were interesting and informative. People seemed to enjoy their time socializing with past colleagues.

Your hard-working executive met on four occasions during this period. We designed and organized the activities of the Alumni Association and worked at increasing the membership of the association which now stands at 142 members; this up from 118 last year. We organized the Annual General Meeting, this Newsletter, and continued to send the members copies of 'Apropos' and other relevant information.

The Social Committee organized the seventh successful Social Lunch which was held on October 22, 2013 and involved 20 participants. Another Social Lunch will be planned for spring 2014. Stay tuned for information about this and other events.

On June 13, 2013 the BAA held a successful used book, CD and DVD sale. This fundraiser was held in conjunction with the annual Batshaw BBQ. \$175 was raised from this

event. Half of this money was given to the Batshaw Foundation and the rest stayed with the Association. This event gave the alumni an opportunity to give something back to the clients and to see and talk with many of their former colleagues. I wish to thank all the many contributors of books, CDs, DVDs and all who came to buy or help out at the booth. Other fundraisers, such as a used purse sale, are in the works. Further suggestions for fundraisers would be appreciated.

This year, due to work pressures, Nicolette de Smit resigned from the executive. Nicolette, it will be remembered, was the motivating force behind the formation of the BAA. I know that I speak for us all when I say thank you for all her great work over the last 6 plus years. Her drive and energy will be missed on the executive.

This summer Van Small accepted a position in northern Quebec and this prompted her resignation from the executive and her position as treasurer. Her work at keeping our accounts, and her contributions to the executive were much appreciated. These losses were the reason we had an election at the AGM. Angie Bisson was elected unanimously so that we now meet the constitutional mandate that the executive have 7 members.

Financially the BAA was able to meet

its commitments through the support of members who made contributions at events and from our portion of the proceeds of fundraisers. Our bank account has balance of \$640.39 as of January 1, 2014.

At this time I wish to thank Michael Udy and Margaret Douek for their support and encouragement. I know I speak for us all in wishing them a happy, healthy and rewarding retirement.

In conclusion I wish to thank the members of the executive; Louise Jessop, Barbara Kemp, Sandhya Karnick, Julia Paré, Carol Kimmis and Angie Bisson who have helped make this a fruitful year. Thanks also go to all the members of the Association without whom none of what we did would have succeeded or have been necessary.

On behalf of the Association I wish to thank Batshaw Youth and Family Centres for their continued support in providing us an office, a place to meet and the means to communicate with the members of the Association.

I wish you all a happy, healthy and satisfying year.

Zalman Bitensky, President  
January 2014

