



Patricia Main

A Journey of Healing

Years ago, Patricia knew there must be a more excellent way for her people, the First Nation people, but she wasn't sure what that might look like.

When she peered out the window of her childhood home on the Flying Dust Reservation, hearing the busy noises of the household, her thoughts drifted back two generations, to her parents and her grandmother who were forcibly taken from their homes, along with countless children in the United States and Canada, and placed in the mandated government boarding schools to Christianize them, to assimilate them in the common culture. They were not allowed to speak their language; they were not allowed to embrace their culture.

Sadly, many children endured physical, emotional and sexual abuse at these “residential schools,” not to mention the trauma of being separated from family.

No one talked about the pain until three decades ago. “Our National Chief of the (Canadian) Assembly of First Nations spoke about the abuse he endured at one of the boarding schools,” Patricia shared, and the conversations and healing slowly began.

Mission at Work Today

Patricia has seen the healing take place at LIGHT House Lutheran Campus Center (Lutheran Indians Gathering and Helping Together) at Haskell Indian Nations University, Lawrence, Kansas, where she and her husband work as co-directors.

“One young man, Dean, came with friends to the LIGHT House. I didn’t know what was going on in his life at the time, but we talked, and I told him, ‘I want you to know there is a Savior.’ He came to know Christ as his Savior.”

Tragically, Dean went home on the next school break and was killed in a car accident. Later Patricia heard that at the funeral, his mother had said, “I don’t know who Mrs. Main is, but I heard from my son that his life was happier after he talked to her and learned of Jesus.” Pat had shared with him the joy of Jesus as his Savior.

*“Arise, shine,
for your light
has come,
and the glory
of the LORD
rises upon you.”*

A student in one of her classes, Jared, came to LIGHT House to fulfill community service hours after he got into some trouble. Patricia invited him for worship and then to clean up afterwards. She also had him working in a soup kitchen in town. One day it dawned on her that even though his community service hours were done by at least a month, he continued to come to church.

These stories give a glimpse into the continued need for healing. According to

Patricia, generations of children continue to harbor resentment against church and government, and they have scars from the shame, pain, and loss of identity.

She understands the resentment. “I grew up without a culture, without an identity,” she said. “There is so much hurt and trauma and grief in our culture. A lot of that has been passed down generationally.”

A startling statistic proves the devastation these schools brought upon families. Designed to Christianize, they had the opposite effect.

“The sting of this to First Nation people is that Christians came along with the government. They felt they were being punished. It sent a terrible message,” Patricia explained.

"In the twenty-first century, only four percent of the First Nation people believe in Jesus," Patricia stated. "First Nation needs to be restored."

The ministry at LIGHT House is helping to change this statistic. "God is so awesome. He knew what Haskell was going to be in the twenty-first century. God is saying, *Arise and shine for the Light has come!*' That's what we have seen here. Will and I tell the young people and the staff at Haskell that God is raising up our native people for such a time as this."

And like the young people she ministers to, Patricia also has been on a long healing journey from the devastation of the past to a more excellent way in the future. Her story is one of love, hope, faith, and healing and how the Lord is working in her and through her, ministering to the First Nation people.

Childhood

Patricia was one of eleven children who grew up on a Cree reservation in northern Saskatchewan, Canada. Her parents observed a blend of traditional First Nation spirituality with Catholic influence from their years at the residential school. Her mother's faith grew strong after a debilitating illness, and she committed to raising their children in a home of Christian prayer and devotions.

One of Patricia's strongest memories, however, is of the animosity between Native Americans and whites and between different tribes. "The Cree and the Deni people were always fighting. And I'd say to myself, 'Come on, people. Let's get along!'"

This was just the beginning of Patricia's lifelong dream to see healing and reconciliation among the First Nation people.

By her own choice, when Patricia was 17 years old, she left home for one year to attend a sports and college preparatory boarding school. This was not the boarding school of her parents' and grandparents' generations; this was run by First Nation people, who gave Patricia the opportunity to play sports and make friends with people from all different tribes.

In 1988, Patricia married Will, who is Sioux, and she became involved in her community and Lutheran Indian Ministries.

"When I started doing ministry, I was director of an outreach center. We had services such as a soup kitchen and clothing depot," explained Patricia. Life was busy for Patricia, working at the outreach center and raising their two children, Brittany and Matthew.

Personal challenges hit hard at this time, and she and Will separated. "I was a single mother by choice for two years," said Patricia. During that time, she wrestled with life and faith, and she prayed, "God, if You are real, I don't know You like my mom and dad know You."

"I remember getting on my knees and praying. God heard my prayer, and He began to restore me. He began to take away the hurt and the pain. By this time, my husband and I reconciled," Patricia said.



According to the Lutheran Indian Ministries website, "Haskell Indian Nations University began in 1884 as Haskell Institute, intended originally to assimilate Native youth into the American culture. It later became a high school adding vocational classes and in 1970 was accredited as a junior college. Today, Haskell is the most well-known Native American university in the United States. The university has an enrollment of 1,059 students representing over 140 tribes from the lower 48 states and Alaska."

She could feel the Holy Spirit at work in her life as she recognized God's love and mercy through His Son Jesus Christ. Remembering Christ's death and resurrection and that He paid the price for her sins — completely — changed everything. "He took away the shame, guilt, and confusion. He took away the garment of heaviness and put on me a garment of praise."

One of Patricia's favorite Bible passages, Jeremiah 29:11–13, beautifully reflects this time in her life: *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*

The Mission Begins

A phone call from Rev. Dr. Don Johnson, Executive Director of Lutheran Indian Ministries (a ministry of Lutheran Association of Missionaries and Pilots – U.S.) led to their current positions as co-directors of the Haskell LIGHT ministry. While it wasn't easy for Patricia to leave her homeland because she was deeply involved in what she calls the "ministry of reconciliation" among her people, "after much prayer, we moved on faith."

She laughed as she remembered their first stormy week in Kansas. "We had lightning and thunder and tornado warnings! My husband was on tornado watch, and I told him, 'God has brought us this far. He will continue to use us for His purposes.'"

Joyfully, she reflected, "He has blessed us exceedingly."

"In 2006, when we first arrived at Haskell, we walked the campus and talked to students and staff. We helped move students into the dorms and helped with other activities, giving out school supplies, hygiene products, bedding, quilts — all items the Lutheran ladies provided."

The Mains were warmly welcomed onto the campus. "Students were comfortable with us because we are Native, but some students said we preached the 'white man's gospel,'" Patricia said. Whenever she heard this, Patricia would say, "Jesus was not a white man," and then slowly build a relationship where she could share the Good News.

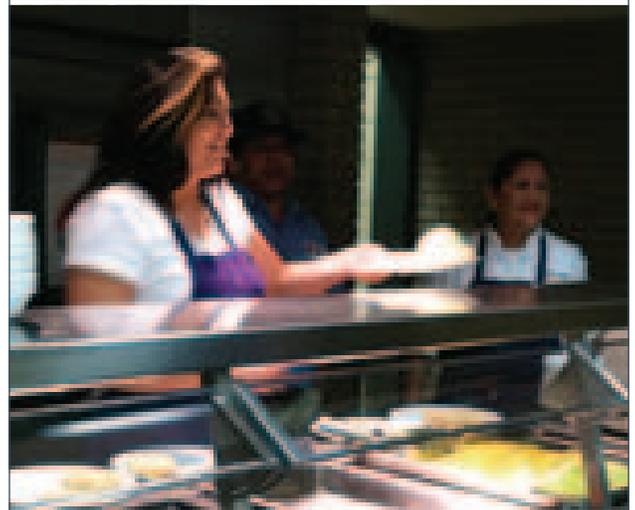
Furthering the Mission

The Mains settled into a life in Kansas with their two children and their mission at the LIGHT House Lutheran Campus Center. They host Bible studies, small groups, and other activities for students at the center, which is a ranch-style house adjacent to the campus. Additionally, they coordinate servant events with the students, such as volunteering at soup kitchens in town.

Patricia's "workplace" is being with people, the students and the staff. "I have so many stories of what God has done and what He is doing. I share my story, and the students see that I'm real. Will and I are very transparent with the students and the staff," Patricia said.

Patricia's joy for her work is contagious. "We always have a good time with the students. Never a dull moment," she laughed.

First Nations is a term most often used in reference to the indigenous peoples of the Americas in what is now Canada. The Cree are the largest group of Algonquian-speaking North American Indian tribes, with 135 registered bands and more than 200,000 members.



“A More Excellent Way”

A challenge to LWML

Patricia challenges the women of the LWML to “receive the Father’s love. Be who God created you to be. Even in weakness, there is excellence. We work for approval, but sometimes He just wants us to rest and listen. There is excellence in resting, where He can release His plans to us.”

Getting Personal With Patricia

When asked what her toughest challenge in her mission work is, Patricia responded with a sigh. “Balance. I could be at Haskell 24/7. I have to take myself away,” she said, acknowledging an area of weakness. “Home is our sanctuary, a place for my family to be together.”

Through her years of service, Patricia has come to “rely on the Holy Spirit. Even through storms, the Lord has done a deep healing for me in my own heart, in my own bloodline. I don’t need to strive. I need to rest more in Him.”

So far, her greatest joy is in the “Holy Spirit explosion” she and Will experienced the last semester. “We had 20 to 30 students coming every Sunday! God is drawing the young people to us, and we’re building relationships.”

These relationships begin with small things like toothbrushes and blankets. Patricia is quick to point out that the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League has been instrumental in the mission work at Haskell. “Thank you for the grant. I was at the Sioux Falls LWML Convention when it was awarded — my first convention. I looked around and said to myself, these are all the ladies who helped us in Canada. This is very cool! Thanks to all of you for the blankets, the quilts, the toiletries, the finances.”

“You are planting a seed. You may think it is very small — a toothbrush or a blanket. But they are big things. If it weren’t for the LWML, we couldn’t function. Those little items are the keys that open doors. It gives us an opportunity.”

“A young lady came to me and said, ‘I don’t believe like you do; I just need laundry soap.’ So I said, ‘That’s okay.’ I gave her the soap and talked about love and forgiveness. She broke down and cried. A year later, she came back and told me that what I said helped her begin to heal.” Patricia continued, “That’s why we are here, to restore the devastation.”

Using the most simple, basic items, God is blessing others through the hands and hearts of the LWML and Patricia and Will — healing a nation in His most excellent way. **Q**

By Lynne Cobb, with Beth Foreman

A Mother’s Story

Patricia’s mother, Neva Mirasty, is a survivor, sharing her story to continue the healing. She testified in June 2012, at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission event in Saskatoon, about her own experience. Pulled away from her family at nine and placed in a residential school, Neva remembered that the nuns cut off her braids and called her by a French name meaning “Little Savage.” At twelve, she was sexually abused but was told to keep quiet. It has taken years for her to heal. “It’s important that the church not only learns and hears of the pain but also how Jesus is the healer and deliverer in our lives. It doesn’t matter if you are rich or poor, black or white or First Nations. God is the Healer and the Restorer,” Patricia said.

