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Marriage and Work on the Reservation

Fred Auginash or Nahwahjewun of Big Sandy Lake

Nahwahjewun, also known as Fred Auginash, had the fortune and misfortune of being born on Big Sandy Lake in 1888, a decade of crisis for Ojibwe bands in central Minnesota, a year before the state passed the Nelson Allotment Act. Big Sandy Lake is a stunningly picturesque part of Ojibwe Country, today dominated by non-Indians who pay high prices for lakeshore property, though it was once the place my grandfather learned to work the Ojibwe seasonal economy. My grandfather's first decades at Big Sandy Lake must have been filled with turmoil, as the ability of Ojibwe people to control their own movements and ways of making a living by harvesting wild rice and other natural resources and gardening, trapping, fishing, and hunting were abruptly constrained. Through twenty-five years at Big Sandy Lake, my grandfather's future there was never secure.[1]

How my grandfather came to marry, raise a family, and one day die on the Red Lake Reservation, a hundred and fifty miles from Big Sandy Lake, is a narrative of settler colonialism and Indian fortitude, and thus a fundamentally American story. I discovered the most devastating episodes of his biography from the study of Indian history, and some more heartening chapters from our family stories, through which I first met my grandfather.

Just as today, the Auginash family place in Redby, a small village on the reservation where my brother and cousins have homes, is situated next to a shallow tributary river that flows into Red Lake and was the source of clean drinking water in my mother's childhood; she frequently recalled cutting holes in the

ice during winter for this purpose. Red Lake people call this spot "across the river." My grandparents for most of their marriage resided in a simple, white, wood frame house with floorboards covered in patterned linoleum purchased in Bemidji, though sometime after Grandpa's death and in my lifetime the house was painted pink. At this time on mid-century Ojibwe reservations, kerosene lamps and wood stoves were the main sources of light and heat. It was a decent reservation house in an era dominated by the less desirable tarpaper dwelling.

Like all families, my relatives are selective genealogists, and as Ojibwe people they tend to cherry-pick and favor the stories that can be exchanged in late-night conversations like comic currency. Of all the family stories about my grandfather, there is one I am able to visualize with no trouble. It was winter in northern Minnesota, a time of year when Ojibwe men found time to socialize in competitions called the Moccasin Game. Grandpa Auginash considered himself a skilled player, and he hosted many of these contests in his own home and visited other Ojibwe men late into the winter's night for this prolonged but lively activity.

The Moccasin Game involves an audience and sets of four players, some of whom sing and drum throughout the games as partners. Four bullets, one of which is marked, are hidden under moccasins. Players use carved wooden counting sticks to keep score and pointing sticks to indicate the moccasin where they believe the marked bullet is hidden. Depending on the audience and their betting, Moccasin Games could grow extremely raucous while the "guessing" and wagering was taking place. On one occasion Jeanette went looking for Fred after he had been gone for several days, taking a broom to Dan Bellanger's house in Copper City, a neighborhood on the reservation, and chasing her husband home. Grandpa Auginash knew many Moccasin Game songs and sometimes wagered to excess. Of course, his fortune occasionally waned, and one time he really "lost his shirt." My mother recalled one snowy morning when she was a girl, Grandpa Auginash briskly walking up the path to the house, coatless and shirtless

My mother, Florence, in the yard of the Auginash house across the river, early 1950s.

after a night of playing and wagering with friends. The picture of Grandpa Auginash striding up a snow-beaten path I have walked so many times, in the frigid winters I also knew having been born at Red Lake in the month of February, is a reminiscence deliberately passed down to me from my mother. She loved the man whom she always referred to as "Papa," thought he was hilarious, and wanted me to know the kind of person he was.[2]

My uncle McKinley Auginash, my mother's older brother, inherited his barrel-chested physique from Grandpa, and also his love of hunting, fishing, and trapping. McKinley's personality and hearty passion for Ojibwe ways of life at Red Lake provided my most direct link to my grandfather. McKinley was also hilarious and a prime storyteller, and he loved to take me hunting with my male cousins, even though I was a girl and he had not only three sons but five daughters of his own. This was probably because I enjoyed his stories, and storytellers need fresh, polite

Fred Auginash, about 1930.

listeners. Listening to him as we rode the reservation in his mint-green Ford pickup truck, deer hunting at night, were some of the best hours of my youth. He fired shots with an astounding accuracy. Uncle McKinley, or Zonsway, gave me a new Ojibwe name when I was in my teens, after he recovered from a difficult back surgery. A lifelong hunter, he chose a bird he often saw in the winter, Bíne or Partridge, and since we consider naming to be a reciprocal relationship as embodied in the notion of the namesake, or niiyawe'enh, he and I also had a spiritual bond. McKinley spoke Ojibwe and had grown up watching the Moccasin Game and hearing the drumming and singing in all-night sessions. Sometime during the 1970s, he became one of a number of Ojibwe men to begin reviving the game at powwows and

other gatherings. Finally, I heard the songs that accompanied the story, and so this memory of Grandpa Auginash's lost shirt has become my own.

Other information about Native grandparents can be gleaned in basic census data and tribal enrollment records, something American Indians have in excess, since the government has been calculating our blood quantum and what band or people we are related to since the nineteenth century. For a longer view of ancestry, we can even pry into early annuity records, from a time when the U.S. government was making scanty payments to the Ojibwe and other tribes in exchange for fantastic land sale deals. According to tribal records, Grandpa Auginash was born on August 15, 1888, to Susan Ahwasegeshigoqua Martin and Jack Nodinishkung Kechegwe Auginash, and was one of two sons; the other was John Aynemahsung Auginash (1887–1933). Grandpa's name appears as Fred Nahwahjewun Badboy Auginash. John Auginash eventually had a large family at White Earth. Fred's relatives at White Earth, where Jack Auginash had an allotment, at some point began spelling their last name Auginaush. My mother and her brothers and sisters were very close to their White Earth cousins. My non-Indian father once told me that Grandpa Auginash, whom my father loved, respected, and apparently communicated with despite a language barrier, attributed his surname to an ancestor Agenose, whose name appears in his family genealogy on the tribal enrollment records.[3]

Grandpa Auginash also considered Sam Yankee, or Ayshpun, to be his brother. Born around 1900, Yankee was a spiritual leader within the Midewiwin, a drum carrier, and he is today remembered as a significant political figure for his work in the 1960s and 1970s as head of the tribal council on the Mille Lacs Reservation. Sam stayed in their place of birth at Big Sandy Lake. When I was a child, my parents and brother and I visited Sam and his wife Ada at their home near Big Sandy Lake in McGregor, Minnesota, and they frequently called on my grandmother at Red Lake. The sight of Sam's feathered bustle and false braids (he was a veteran

and had a crew cut) hanging from the rafters of his home in McGregor was not to be missed, and as a serious dancer, Sam was usually present for the big Fourth of July powwow at Red Lake.

Unlike Sam, Fred took an allotment on the White Earth Reservation (as had his father, Jack), but he resided on the Red Lake Reservation after his marriage in 1928. Many Ojibwe never actually occupied the allotments they were assigned, favoring more meaningful places of residence. Some Ojibwe from the Sandy Lake, Rice Lake, and East Lake communities under pressure to remove to White Earth considered taking an allotment, selling it, and then using the proceeds to return home. I do not know if Grandpa Auginash ever resided on his allotment, though he insisted he owned land at White Earth and never chose to put it up for sale.

The background to the Auginash migrations away from Big Sandy Lake and within Minnesota was a political struggle over land and resources, which took the form of extreme racial harassment of Ojibwe and the expulsion of many of our people from the central part of the state. At Big Sandy Lake, Jack Auginash and his two sons must have continued as long as possible to seasonally move and make a living on and off the officially designated Mille Lacs Reservation. No doubt, the Auginash family interacted with new settlers and immigrants who, unlike the earlier generation of traders, resented their presence and way of life. My family was part of a broader Ojibwe community whose members experienced steady, systematic, and sometimes life-threatening harassment as they worked to make a living while local and state law authorities deployed and proclaimed regulatory power over the region.[4]

In the more recent American era in Minnesota beginning in the 1830s, the right of these Indigenous communities to the continued use of their homeland was affirmed in the Treaty of 1837. In early negotiations, Ojibwe and U.S. leaders agreed that Indigenous people had rights to labor on the land being ceded, and so the Ojibwe continued unabated to fish, hunt, harvest, and take responsibility for its resources. However, their treaty rights were

contested time and again by a settler society that emerged with the population explosion between 1849 and 1858, the years Minnesota was a territory and the fastest-growing place in the United States. Settlers exploited even the reserved land and resources, openly squatted on Ojibwe land, and deliberately, even contemptuously, planted gardens in plots where the Ojibwe had recently plowed. From a legal standpoint, settlers turned their backs on agreements they should have abided by since treaties with the Ojibwe had been negotiated by the United States. A century of racial conflict ensued.[5]

Ojibwe legal scholar John Borrows has written about the "persistence of Indigenous law," which has often been ignored in troubling ways by U.S. and Canadian courts but is also historically incorporated into the legal formations concerning Indigenous peoples. In recent years, courts have been more willing to recognize the legitimacy of Indigenous perspectives when considering issues related to nineteenth-century treaties. In *Minnesota v. Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians*, the U.S. Supreme Court examined the issues. The Mille Lacs case was noteworthy for the thoroughness of the band's historical, legal, and cultural research, which included the presentation of Ojibwe world views, political ideas, and linguistic understandings in the testimony of experts. Linguist John Nichols testified about how key phrases in the Treaties of 1837 and 1855 related to "hunting, fishing, and gathering and with the relinquishment of right, title, and interest to certain lands" may have been translated into the Ojibwe language by interpreters during the negotiations. Nichols pointed out that the Ojibwe language has fewer words than the English language for "individual ownership of land" and that for some English vocabulary used in treaties there is no direct Ojibwe equivalent. Ojibwe leaders involved in the negotiations frequently employed the phrase wenji-bimaadiziyaang, or "from what or where we get our living, our life," a comprehensive idea often used in prayers which referred to "all the necessities of life," including food, clothing, shelter, and medicine.[6]

Evidence presented in the case uncovered detailed information of a corrupt system in which officials of the federal government and state of Minnesota sabotaged Ojibwe treaty rights and undermined their landownership, as the Ojibwe always maintained. After a century and a half of misrule, I will never forget the spring day when I heard the verdict announced on the radio. A major political moment for tribes and the state, and a victory for treaty rights among all the Lake Superior Bands of Ojibwe, it was also a case with potential national impact for other tribes pursuing similar legal action. Grandpa Auginash and Sam Yankee did not live to hear of the Mille Lacs victory over Minnesota in the opinion: "After an examination of the historical record, we conclude that the Chippewa retain the usufructuary rights guaranteed to them under the 1837 Treaty."[7]

It is important to keep in mind both the aboriginal and U.S. treaty rights held by the Ojibwe while examining the contemptible history that followed. The state of Minnesota seemed determined to fail Indians within its borders. After the U.S. Senate extinguished title to most of the Dakota holdings in southern Minnesota, killing and exiling the Dakota after the 1862 war, state policy and practice neglected to protect Ojibwe lands from settlers. Minnesota Ojibwe people were greater in population than the Dakota and geographically widespread, living in central Minnesota and north to the border of Canada, and from east to west. A series of treaties signed in the 1860s took more land from Ojibwe bands; Red Lake leaders maintained only the center of the band's original lands through treaties of 1863 and 1864. As immigrants continued to pour into Minnesota, a crisis point was reached in the 1880s. It was exacerbated by the work of the lumber companies, which were beginning the task of stripping central and northern Minnesota of its vast and valuable white pine forests. To the horror of Ojibwe families, the dams the companies built to control the movement of logs created havoc with water levels in rivers and lakes, which caused wild rice and cranberry harvests to fail. Ojibwe in central Minnesota retaliated by

tearing down the dam across the Rum River, a critical waterway connecting Lake Mille Lacs to the Mississippi River.[8]

The Ojibwe were strong believers in diplomacy, as shown by their frequent delegations to Washington, yet they were continuously stretched to a breaking point. The government showed a consistent inability to recognize the truth of the situation. In 1883 an agent was sent by the commissioner of Indian Affairs to visit Mille Lacs, where he belittled Ojibwe labor practices he witnessed as an explanation for the roots of early reservation poverty, rather than coming to terms with the reality of settler encroachment on Indigenous resources and water: "These Indians, at proper season of the year gather wild-rice, cranberries, blue berries & c. and hunt deer; rabbits and other animals when they can be found, but are often in want because of relying on such resources, instead of making personal effort toward advancement by way of manual labor."[9]

Demand for boundaries between Ojibwe and settler society led to further treaty negotiation and the creation of reservations. These policies culminated in 1889 with the Nelson Act, a politically and church-sanctioned strategy of ethnic cleansing. James McClurken explained the consequences for Ojibwe bands including Sandy Lake: "the Episcopal Church, the State of Minnesota, and the United States agents continued to stress the old theme, repeating that Mille Lacs Ojibwas should move to White Earth." Passed by the U.S. Congress ostensibly for the "relief and civilization" of Ojibwe people, the act emphasized their land and labor. It is one of the most significant legislative acts in Minnesota history, as well as an altogether puzzling piece of legislation. Like the Dawes Act (or General Allotment Act) of 1887, under which reservations across the country were split into allotments, the Nelson Act called for the "complete cession and relinquishment in writing of all their title and interest in and to all the reservations of said [Ojibwe] Indians in the state of Minnesota, except the White Earth and Red Lake Reservations." It was intended to compel assimilation by forcing Ojibwe people to give up their

homelands in every area of the state except these two reservations, where they were to take privately owned allotments. All "surplus" land was to be surrendered and entered into the American public domain.[10]

The Nelson Act was simultaneously adamant and inconsistent about Ojibwe removal, as it also allowed Ojibwe people to take allotments on their own reservations. The ultimate goal was to consolidate Ojibwe people on two large reservations, but consolidation was never fully realized. At Mille Lacs, congressional authorization for a railroad line across the reservation and the arrival of more illegal settlers disrupted the allotment process (and also intensified governmental pressure for removal). Red Lake, while refusing allotment entirely, signed the Agreement of 1889, which gave up 2.9 million acres and maintained about 300,000 acres of land and 500,000 acres of water still held in common. The Nelson Act's legacy was Ojibwe dispossession, wild rice habitat decline, clear-cutting, and permanent costs to our water and forests. Ojibwe people had to ride out the permanent storm of this terrible legislation that was constructed to provide enormous bounty for Minnesota's new population and their insatiable timber companies.

During the post-1880s crisis on reservations, the political landscape was so murky the Ojibwe themselves often divided over removal and internal politics. Those who resisted removal in favor of staying in their homes found themselves subject to intimidation and escalating violence from local law authorities. Tensions were volatile in central Minnesota as dozens of new settlers filed entries and built homes on the Ojibwe homelands of the Mille Lacs Reservation in 1889. The outrage continued when Andrew Berg, one of many thieves to settle the reservation, inconceivably laid claim to Mozominee Point, the exact location of Ojibwe summer homes and the Midewiwin Lodge. First the pine timber, then the maple groves where Ojibwe women sugared on and off the reservation were overrun and exploited. I am often astonished by the violence

of Minnesota's settler society and their disregard for Ojibwe and Dakota humanity, including an indifference to treaties and other legal agreements negotiated between governments. After studying the Nelson Act since my college days, I am still confounded by the motives of individuals, including Congressman Knute Nelson, the Norwegian immigrant who sponsored the act. And I can only speculate about the anguish within our family that finally compelled Nodinishkung, my great-grandfather, and his sons Aynemahsung and Nahwahjewun to leave their home at Big Sandy Lake for the White Earth Reservation.[11]

What was it like for young men like my grandfather, Nahwahjewun, learning to hunt and fish at the turn of the century, when Ojibwe were often arrested and jailed for these activities? How did he regard American law or justice when Minnesota citizens perpetrated violence against his community, violating their legal and human rights? My grandfather was a boy of thirteen in 1901, when the Mille Lacs County sheriff forced twenty-five Ojibwe families off their lands near Isle, Minnesota, a few dozen miles from Big Sandy Lake, marching them to a public highway while setting their houses on fire. Surely the Auginash family knew about this and other acts of terrorism, violence compounded because it was carried out by men in charge of maintaining peace. Families were faced with the decision to risk future intimidation in their own homes or abandon their homelands for an uncertain future at White Earth. I wonder when the tipping point came for my family. All I really know from records, according to the rolls of 1913, is that Nodinishkung and his son Nahwahjewun had allotment numbers 4829 and 4830 on the White Earth Reservation. Nahwahjewun was just twenty-five. My grandfathers are listed by their Ojibwe names only, and fortunately for my task of locating them among hundreds of individuals with Ojibwe or English names, their allotment numbers were sequential. Jack and Fred Auginash were names they would adopt and need for the reservation.[12]

Jeanette Jones: Carlisle Daughter, Single Mother

Jeanette Jones surely felt that assimilation followed her home from boarding school to the Red Lake Reservation. In the early twentieth century, Indian families on reservations existed under a cloud of surveillance, especially regarding sexuality, marriage, religious belief, ceremonial participation, and labor. The family home was a site of inspection. Working the Ojibwe economy was discouraged—unless it was adjusted in ways so that it could be managed by the nation-state.[13]

All sorts of financial activities also came under the scrutiny and regulation of the U.S. government. Indian agents, school officials, and missionaries were incessant players on reservations, unapologetically interfering in the public and personal lives of American Indians. They sought to control nearly every aspect of Indigenous existence, from how they prayed or danced or worked to what language they spoke. On a diminished land base and without access to many of their traditional resources, my grandparents and other Ojibwe learned to negotiate a miserly reservation system managed by a small number of white men who had access to a large bureaucracy. It was those white men who mediated the bureaucracy and meted out, coin by coin, veterans benefits, wages from family members working in Depression-era government programs or the military, and Aid to Dependent Children and other forms of welfare. They also controlled nearly all access Indian people had to information about those programs. Jeanette learned of this authority early through boarding school, since superintendents there had managed every penny of her meager student funds.

My mother liked to tell the story of how her father came to meet the much younger woman who would become his wife and to put down roots permanently at Red Lake. It began with Jeanette's father, David Jones, who was born in 1886, just two years before Fred himself. One of a handful of Red Lake students to attend Carlisle, David was a strong athlete, and he later played professional football with Jim Thorpe—a point of family pride. Jones returned to the Red Lake Reservation to settle down with Edith Helen Iceman of Ponemah, and on November 17, 1905, my grandmother Jeanette, or Kaybaykezhigoke, was born in her small village. Sadly, Jones would raise Jeanette alone after the death of his young wife five years later. Jones was of the same generation as Fred, and the two men became friends sometime when Fred visited Red Lake in the mid-1920s. Fred Auginash spoke only Ojibwe, and nearly everyone on the large reservation spoke the Ojibwe language in their daily lives.[14]

By this time Jeanette had returned from the government boarding school at Flandreau, South Dakota. My mother always characterized her parents' courtship as old-fashioned in an Ojibwe sense, and as an unlikely romance, since Fred was so much older (and shorter, at 5 foot 4!) and he was Jeanette's father's friend. She was pretty, tall and slender, in addition to being bilingual in English after several years of education.

In Ojibwe communities, it was not unusual for love affairs

The Oorang Indians, a National Football League traveling pro team, October 29, 1922. Jim Thorpe is fifth from left in the back row; David Jones is third from left.

resulting in children to be born of short-term relationships. Both my grandparents had prior relationships, Fred with Chegahkeyaushequ, an older woman at Mille Lacs who died in childbirth, though they had no surviving children, and Jeanette with James Beaulieu of Redlake. He was the father of Amelia, who was a two-year-old toddler at the time of her mother's marriage to my grandfather. But any relationships outside of a Christian marriage were strongly discouraged by missionaries, and people were monitored by government agents on reservations as part of Americanization policies. Along with boarding school education, legal and Christian marriages were required of reservation families and were at all times to be upheld over customary Ojibwe partnerships and kin structures.

Jeanette Jones's first pregnancy was a topic of conversation and innuendo on the Red Lake Reservation. Not by friends or family, who did not consider motherhood in young adult women unusual or "trouble," but rather by the government's intrusive Indian Field Service and school employees. Yet James Beaulieu had a complicated personal history, and so Jeanette's pregnancy was viewed as a potential broader problem for the government employees at Red Lake. On April 2, 1926, five days before Jeanette gave birth to Amelia with her grandmother serving as midwife, the principal of the Cross Lake School in Ponemah wrote to his colleague on the reservation, the school superintendent.

> Ponemah, Minn.,
> April 2, 1926
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> Dear Mr. Burns;
>
> I respectfully report that Jeanette Jones whose father lives near Redby Minnesota is at her grandmother's place near Mequom Bay in an advanced state of pregnancy. This girl returned from Flandreau South Dakota Indian School last summer having finished her three year term there and stayed with her father, David Jones, near Redby Minnesota. She got into trouble there, she states with James Beaulieu of Red Lake Minnesota. Mr. Parkhurst and I saw this girl February 28, 1926. She said she did not want to marry James Beaulieu and that she did not want to go to the hospital for care when confined.
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> This James Beaulieu was called before the Federal Court in Fergus Falls Minnesota at the May 1924 term for some offense against a girl at Red Lake. The other man in the case of Red Lake I cannot recall his name, got a sentence and this James Beaulieu was permitted to go. Now, he is in this affair. This girl has not been here on this side [of the lake, in Ponemah] for years until after her pregnancy, then came here for her grandmother's care. I understand this James Beaulieu has been in other affairs with Red Lake girls the past summer.
>
> Of course I presume under the law with both the parties single all that could be done is to make them get married. In the case of married men getting girls into trouble something severe should be done.
>
> The mere fact of some Inspecting Official making a report is getting nowhere. We all locally know what is going on. No one can convince me the Government cannot handle the matter and get some results if it is gone after in the proper manner.
>
> Very truly yours,
> Oliver Beekman, Principal.[15]

Jeanette's first pregnancy resulted in the birth of my wonderful aunt Amelia, my mother's oldest sibling and, despite a twelve-year age gap, the one to whom she was closest. The reservation school's principal uses the familiar intrusive tone, officious and meddling, of assimilation policy. His palpable paternalism toward Jeanette, an attractive and sexually active woman, makes it all the more satisfying for me to gaze into my grandmother's youthful resolve, finding in her personal agency and a desire to have control over her own body. She rebuffed the offer of a

government hospital. At twenty-one, Jeanette chose for her first midwife her Ojibwe grandmother. For her three pregnancies to follow, Fred Auginash served as "midwife." In later years she did not choose a home birth, and my mother, Florence, was born in the hospital at Red Lake in 1938. My mother once explained to me that Grandpa Auginash knew how to comfort his wife during labor, had a special technique of lifting her on his shoulder to speed the birth, and grew to be expert at delivering their children.

A month before her twenty-third birthday, Jeanette entered into the kind of legal and Christian marriage demanded on reservations in the early twentieth century, marrying forty-year-old Fred Auginash on October 14, 1928, before the Episcopal priest Julius H. Brown. Perhaps she wished to avoid the kind of scrutiny her first pregnancy provoked. Even so, Ojibwe practices for establishing marital partnerships were taken into considerable account, particularly the ritual of gifts. Family lore says that once Fred observed the tall and lovely Jeanette (my mother said she was "standing by a tree"—it is hard to avoid trees at Red Lake), he entered into negotiations with his friend and fellow widower, David Jones. Apparently he had resources, as he soon offered horses to Jeanette's father, who still used a horse and sleigh for transportation across the frozen lake during the 1920s. My mother, who recorded her interpretation of their courtship and marriage, wrote that Jeanette was "very beautiful, loved to laugh, [with] very soft smooth skin." She reported, "My Father came to visit often and was attracted to my Mom. He asked my Grandfather to marry her. He brought her Dad money, food, canned meat, blankets, a dancing outfit, a load of wood, two horses and chickens."[16]

Their "legal" marriage took place later, in the fall of 1928. I have the weathered copy of their marriage certificate, signed by witnesses including Jeanette's cousin, Mary Jones, and indicating they were married in the village of Redby. Despite the legality of their union before a reverend of an approved denomination, their

relationship, labor, and even personal intimacies merited further scrutiny by reservation officials, who continued their interference for decades.

My uncle Richard was born in the summer of 1929. An unusually annoying birth announcement arrived in the reservation superintendent's office later that year from St. Paul, Minnesota. Once again, the topic was "27374-Jeanette Jones," and a letter disclosed that she had given birth to an "illegitimate child." The official wrote, "I am referring to the attention of your agency Jeanette Jones of Redby who gave birth to an illegitimate child, Dick Auginash, on June 14, 1929. The alleged father is Fred Auginash, age 36, of Redby." Six months after the birth of their first son and more than a year after Fred's marriage to Jeanette, he was compelled to produce his marriage license for Superintendent Burns, who wrote back to St. Paul, "the alleged father of Dick Auginash informed me in the office this morning that he had obtained a license at the Clearwater County Court House, Bagley, Minnesota, to wed Jeanette Jones about two years ago, and that Reverend Julius Brown, the Episcopal minister at Redby, Minnesota, had officiated."[17]

But Fred Auginash's word, even an actual certificate of marriage in his possession, was not evidence enough of his son's "legitimacy" or his own legal marriage. Fred Auginash was an Ojibwe man, and even more to his discredit spoke Ojibwemowin. This granted him a dubious reputation and rendered him incompetent over legal issues on the reservation, even the most mundane matters involving his own wife and family. Superintendent Burns would only set the record straight with a reliable, non-Indian witness, the reverend who had conducted the marriage. Burns wrote, "I have not had an opportunity to discuss the matter with Reverend Brown, but will do so at the first opportunity, and request that he make proper return and clear the record in this case." Until then, Fred Auginash was only an "alleged father" and husband.[18]

A Political Refugee within Minnesota

I like to imagine my grandparents' happiness at the beginning of their life together, especially Fred's. He must have been grateful for Jeanette and to find friends, family, and a new home among the Ojibwe at Red Lake, for he was a political refugee within Minnesota, a permanent exile from Big Sandy Lake. Now, Fred had not only a wife and step-daughter Amelia, but a trusted father-in-law, and, at the relatively late age of forty-one, he became a father to Richard, his first son with Jeanette. For the rest of his life, young children would be a constant presence. Even Reverend Brown came through on his behalf, vouching for their marriage.

As a wife and husband married in the church, despite Jeanette's "illegitimate" daughter and Fred's prior wife in the "Indian custom," they now had access to financial resources available to Indians on reservations. Family members recall that our grandparents first resided on Green Lake, the "Copper City" neighborhood in the small village of Redby. Reservation records from the early years of the 1930s indicate a growing family and busy working lives for both Jeanette and Fred, but also a relentless poverty. In the spring of 1929, when $50,000 in tribal reimbursable funds became available on the Red Lake Reservation, Jeanette and Fred were early applicants for a $150 loan to begin construction of a new home. Superintendent Burns, who a year before doubted the validity of their marriage, now commented on their eligibility for the loan program, obviously convinced in the interim that a legal, Christian marriage had indeed taken place. In fact, his recognition of their union now made Jeanette and Fred Auginash desirable applicants, qualifying them for a loan on the reservation:

> Fred Auginash is a Chippewa Indian, enrolled at the Cass Lake office. His wife is a member of the Red Lake Band. They have made their home, for some years, on the reservation. He does woods work a large part of the year. They seem to be without a home, and desire the loan to purchase lumber at the sawmill and other building material with which to construct a home on the reservation. I feel that the chances of repayment are very good; the home is very much needed; and I recommend the loan be approved.[19]

Our relatives remember that the Auginash family home I recall, the house across the river where my mother grew up, was built by Grandpa Fred and Tom Mason in the early 1940s. Jeanette, as a Red Lake band member and the source of her and Fred's many descendants' citizenship on the Red Lake Reservation, including my own, would be the partner responsible for securing a home site. Her husband was not eligible because he was a member of the Sandy Lake band and had taken an allotment on the White Earth Reservation. Not until October 1943 was Jeanette's "grant of standard assignment" for a later home issued, described as a tract of land "Lot No 1 in Block 25, Lots 19 and 20 on the Bank of Mud River in Redby Village on the Red Lake Indian Reservation."[20]

Red Lake is unique among the Ojibwe lands in the United States as a unalloted reservation, where land is held in common. There is a contentious history behind this status. The Nelson Act of 1889, which demanded that the Ojibwe in Minnesota sign away and give up "all title and interest in and to all the reservations" in the state, save the White Earth and Red Lake Reservations, led directly to this reality. Red Lake leaders were forced to drastically reduce the size of their homeland in 1889, yet they resisted the fast-track to dispossession under the guise of reservation allotment planned by Minnesota politicians, a policy vigorously driven by the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since land was held in common at Red Lake, Jeanette was "entitled only to the use and occupancy of the land and tribal improvements thereon" and the land "may not be sold, but may be changed for another assignment" by approval

of the tribal council. Her assignment also specified that "timber on the lot might be cut, but only for domestic use." Provisions for the future ensured that the assignee was allowed to "designate in writing a person whom he wishes to receive his assignment" after his (or her) death, provided that person was eligible.[21]

Land assignments gave consideration to situations like my grandparents', noting that when "an assignee married to a white spouse or to an Indian spouse not a member of the Red Lake Band, the surviving white or Indian spouse shall not be eligible for reassignment of the land, but shall be entitled to compensation from the new assignee." Jeanette's land proved to be of lasting importance to our family, and after her death in 1987 at age eighty-two, my mother and father built a new house for their retirement there, and my brother, Brian, still resides on the same assignment of land approved by the General Council of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians in 1943. Since then, the Auginash family considers it home, and we frequently gather there across the river in Redby, near the waters of Red Lake.

After reestablishing his life on a new reservation, Fred Auginash was able to benefit from his earlier military service. Grandma Auginash always held onto her husband's U.S. Army discharge papers, keeping them safe in a black trunk; that these faded and yellowed papers are in my possession close to a century later testifies to their genuine value to my family. The first document I can find that lists an occupation for my grandfather is an honorable discharge from the U.S. Army on November 10, 1918, from Camp Lewis, Washington, which also says he was discharged "by reason of not possessing the required degree of adaptability for military service." In that terse language used by the army, there is the briefest description of his appearance as a younger man, simply stating that he was 5 foot 4, dark haired, with dark eyes, and a dark complexion. There is no mention that he is American Indian, though race is certainly implied by his "dark complexion," nor is there an actual physical disqualification. The paper affirms that he was born in Sandy Lake in the state of Minnesota, enlisted in the army when he was thirty years old, and was "by occupation a logger." A copy of his papers certified in 1919 in Mahnomen County, Minnesota, suggests that he was either visiting his father at White Earth or residing there himself after his discharge. Fred misspelled his surname on the document, a mistake not so unusual for a person who communicated in Ojibwe and did not read or write English. This caused some confusion down the road, and as late as 1938 his official correspondence with the Veterans Administration still addressed him as Fred "Aginash." Regardless of the success or failure of Grandpa Auginash's brief military career, it served his family well, since his subsequent military pension was a reliable income in the hard years to come.[22]

The capacity of Ojibwe people for hunting, fishing, gardening, and gathering wild rice afforded them some stability during the Great Depression, even with widespread unemployment. Red Lake was fortunate to not undergo the same degree of dispossession as tribal nations whose reservations were allotted in the United States, making the Ojibwe seasonal round, so difficult elsewhere, still viable for them. In this decade of universal hardship, the Auginash home in Redby filled with children. Richard was joined by a brother, my beloved uncle McKinley, on October 5, 1930. They would be the generation to later serve in the military during the Korean War. There were a number of daughters, including Mary Jane, born on July 24, 1933, who would die after just two and a half years. Some of us remember Grandma Auginash speaking of her sorrow at the loss of Mary Jane, a story which her grandchildren found simultaneously a saga of olden days and touchingly beautiful. My aunt Anna was born September 6, 1935, and my mother, Florence, was the last surviving child, born on August 24, 1938; her birth certificate indicated her mother was thirty-one and her father was forty-seven. Two other daughters born in the early 1940s did not survive long; their deaths were to play a role in a period of darkness my grandmother experienced. The narrow lines of my mother's birth certificate lack the

space it would require to adequately explain the multiple roles that balanced out my grandparents' busy working lives in 1938, though Fred's occupation is simply listed as "laborer" to Jeanette's "housewife."[23]

The apparatus of jobs, welfare, housing, and all kinds of financial arrangements and loans that flowed through the hands of federal employees multiplied during the Great Depression. To survive this and other decades of their marriage, my grandparents needed far more than just a desire to work hard. They needed ingenuity and the skills to benefit from a paternalistic bureaucracy. In their partnership, the family financial crusader was Jeanette, a relentless advocate on behalf of her children, grandchildren, husband, and extended relatives in countless letters to local and federal agencies. She spoke her mind in personal appearances at the Indian Agency building and at the tribal council in Redlake. Sometimes she showed up in court. In this role, her boarding school education often saved her. Even a small amount of education gave Indians who spoke English a great advantage within the reservation system, and those schooled enough to write and correspond with government agencies had even more. Fred did not possess the same proficiencies as Jeanette, and therefore exercised less power. The eventual loss of his allotment on the White Earth Reservation was an ultimate symbol of his disadvantage.

A Nation of Fisher Men and Women

Jeanette's "housewife" label speaks to the expectations for female domesticity in American life and conceals the reality of her primary occupation throughout the years of her marriage to Fred, which was commercial fishing. Once it became wage work, women maintained the same access as men to participate in fishing, following the egalitarian practices associated with labor in Ojibwe society. Fishing was, undeniably, synonymous with life to generations of Ojibwe people at Red Lake. Perhaps it was even more so on the reservation, once white farmers settled

on the surrounding lands where Ojibwe families had seasonally moved for hunting and gathering before the 1889 boundaries were established.

Red Lake leaders vigorously and unceasingly defended these borders, a large percentage of which were water. In 1918, the tribe adopted a written constitution maintaining their system of hereditary chiefs while carefully confirming their separate political status from the "General Council of the Minnesota Chippewas." Throughout the 1920s, they fended off the federal government as BIA bureaucrats and politicians continued to propose that the reservation be allotted. Leaders were similarly vigilant when it came to protecting Red Lake from the state of Minnesota, each time resorting to whatever convincing argument and legal means possible in their exercise of sovereignty, since the state's citizenry never lost a desire to exploit Ojibwe resources or fish in our lake. The history of dispossession and exploitation on other Ojibwe reservations confirms that fear at Red Lake was well founded and demonstrates the necessity of political independence. Miraculously, consistent leadership and unanimous agreement in the band over what we value above all else, protecting our land and water, paid off, since the big lake's upper and lower bodies remained Ojibwe territory, apart from a small though highly contested eastern area of Upper Red Lake.[24]

During World War I the state of Minnesota entered into an agreement with the federal government and the Red Lake Band of Chippewa to produce fish on the reservation, with an objective of supplying inexpensive food to the public to cope with an era of shortages. Therefore, it is easy to mark the beginning of fishing as wage labor at Red Lake. At the war's end, the operation continued with supervision by Minnesota's Department of Conservation, and the state legislature appropriated funds in 1919 for fisher men and women to be paid in royalties for the fish they harvested. The men and women who worked in the industry formed a cooperative on the reservation in 1929, the Red Lake Fisheries Association, and eventually the buildings and equipment were

transferred from the state to the United States and held in trust for the tribe.

There are few institutions of cultural heritage and self-government at Red Lake as profound as fishing, which had been consistently organized and managed by the community for generations. Therefore, it is not surprising that Red Lake people often clashed with Minnesota's Department of Conservation, which, in addition to a poor understanding of Ojibwe fishing, held ambition to extend authority over the natural resources of tribal nations within the state. The department rubbed the Red Lake fisher men and women the wrong way and acted in the interest of Minnesotans and not the tribal nation that was a business partner, but both parties continued in the relationship through the Great Depression. By 1943 when the transfer from the state was complete, the fishery in Redby included a fish hatchery and buildings as well as a warehouse and freezing plant on the south shore of Lower Red Lake, all located a very short distance from the Auginash home. The transfer was initiated in an era when Washington encouraged tribal enterprise. Although heavy-handed management continued throughout the next period of the fishery's history, the federal government embraced more fair dealings for Indians than the Department of Conservation had earlier allowed.

The Red Lake Fisheries Association, formed in 1929, exists until the present day, and the Auginash family continues to have members. The first of our family's direct ancestors to belong were Jeanette Auginash and her father, David Jones. Minutes of the association's annual meetings dating from the 1920s through the following decades indicate a wide range of active and productive members from across the reservation, many of whom were women. While records are unfortunately incomplete for some years during the Great Depression, the name Jeanette Auginash appears on the long roll call of members attending the annual meeting in 1937, 1938, and 1939. Since the list was alphabetic, hers is also the first name on the roll. Jeanette's father, David Jones, would pass away from cancer in 1939, but later McKinley, her

second son, also begins to appear in fisheries records. In the roll call taken in 1956, 1957, and 1958, Jeanette and McKinley both appear as association members, though McKinley had likely been a member earlier following his return to Red Lake after military service. At the peak of membership, about 240 Red Lake Ojibwe were working and voting members of the association. At the same time, this number does not accurately attest to the population of Ojibwe families at Red Lake who benefitted from a member's income, because the labor of fishing was shared by so many relatives. The income paid to two hundred members likely benefitted a "thousand members of the band," according to one important tribal official.[25]

Even after commercial fishing and the establishment of the Red Lake Fisheries Association, fishing continued to be a joint family project. The métier of fishing required a number of fast and synchronized hands available to set, repair, and hang nets and retrieve them from the lake by boat. Fish camps were dynamic, multigenerational work sites on the reservation. Fishing men and women, and often their relatives both young and old, bustled at their work, quickly pulling the fish one by one from gill nets before the day's haul was transferred to fish boxes full of crushed ice and delivered fresh into the fishery for weighing and processing.

Fred was also a fisherman as a working member of a family collective. While his marriage to Jeanette afforded him some hunting and fishing privileges on the reservation, he was not eligible for membership in the Red Lake Fisheries Association. My older relatives remember the location of our great-grandfather David Jones's fish camp by the lake, though the Auginash family home in Redby was also a work site, one conveniently located right across the road from the fishery. The eldest cousin of my generation, Richard's son Gerald, was born in 1948 and adopted and raised by Fred and Jeanette, and he recalled the fish camps of his childhood in the 1950s, an era when Fred was often sick and his younger wife's fishing labor was critical to the family's livelihood. Gerald pointed out that Grandma Auginash would "bring

a few nets to set, often working with McKinley and David Jones. Ten nets was a lot in those days. Grandma fished, not Grandpa. It was a family thing. Many people helped out from across the river." A dozen nets might yield as many as three to four hundred walleye. Indeed, fishing was a way of life in every village on the Red Lake Reservation, where over two hundred men and women, including spiritual leaders, housewives, hereditary chiefs, and officers of the tribal council, had nets hanging in their yard and were members of the association.[26]

The Red Lake Reservation, for all its diversity of lakes, peat bogs, forests, and productive farmland in the west, was not a region noted for wild rice production. It was necessary for the Auginash family to meet up with Fred's White Earth father and relatives for wild rice harvesting at locations including the superb shallow waters of Rice Lake in Clearwater County. Keeping in mind that Ojibwe people had for generations harvested wild rice at Rice Lake, with our band's recurring land cessions in 1863 and 1864, 1889, and 1902, some of the best places for harvesting wild rice by my grandparents' time existed beyond the reservation's borders. In the traditional Ojibwe wild rice harvest, labor was performed by large collectives of women, and Jeanette's most frequent ricing partner was her friend Nina King. Men often helped set up rice camps and hunted waterfowl during the wild rice season. It appears these patterns would hold fast until the Great Depression. My mother, Florence, remembered the fish, wild rice, and maple sugar camps during her childhood in the 1940s, a period which often involved absences by her parents when they needed to travel to work sites for the wild rice harvest. As the youngest child in the family, she naturally had mixed feelings about the occasions when her mother and father departed from home, knowing she might not see them again for several weeks. At these times her oldest siblings were left as caretakers.

Together, Fred and Jeanette also harvested great quantities of maple syrup, and their grandson Gerald remembered that, though neither of them ever drove or owned a car, "they were

the last few people when I was growing up who had a sugar camp right in front of the house, the maple trees were full of cans, and in front of the fishery. We hauled the cans back to the house by pulling a small wagon, and they processed maple sugar in front of their house." While Jeanette and Fred also had a line of credit and shopped at Stayberg's Store and other grocers in Redby, purchasing Malt-O-Meal, white flour, and tea, for the most part they maintained their household through a steady diet of traditional Ojibwe foods. My mother liked to tell stories of times as a young girl she went shopping with her father at Stayberg's, and how he delighted in pretending to the non-Indians who owned the grocery store that he knew few words of English. A favorite ploy was to present a verbal shopping list of "mouse-o-meal" and other ridiculous items to the person behind the counter.

Jeanette had a cookstove in her kitchen and was an excellent baker, always making large quantities of sourdough biscuits and cinnamon rolls to be shared around the table with coffee or tea for those who dropped by. Ojibwe people love to laugh and socialize, and there was a daily stream of children and visitors walking the paths to and from the house across the river. It was a pleasant time when very few friends or relatives had cars and everyone conversed in Ojibwe. My mother recalled how Jeanette "loved to bake, have fresh sourdough biscuits, baked beans, and baked white fish" and frequently reminded her children "never be stingy, always feed someone food when they visit," remarking that "her friends never went hungry when they were at her home." Jeanette added a teaspoon of salt when she wanted to use her sourdough starter for biscuits, or mixed it sweeter with a half cup of sugar into "a soft liquid for pancakes." Fred appreciated her sourdough bread and, my mother reported, her knack for "making it just right for my Dad when he came home." A favorite time of day for Red Lake families arrived early, as Jeanette, Fred, Richard, and McKinley "came home from fishing in the mornings." Ojibwe work and diets were in transition, but our family relished the maple syrup and sugar, wild rice and blueberries, moose meat

and venison. Then again, the spirit of Red Lake people is often expressed through the shared labor of fishing and our enduring relationship to the extraordinary, freshly caught fish from our lake.[27]

He Mistook Fred Auginash for a Bear

The Auginash family remembers a tragedy involving my grandfather from decades ago when he was accidently shot on the reservation. I never expected to find an account of this event, especially from so many perspectives, including my grandfather's. His shooting in 1934 produced a crisis within the Auginash family and is a story best told through historical documents.[28]

William T. Kroll, Director, Division of Soldiers' Welfare, 2694 University Avenue, St. Paul, Minn., Attention of Mr. E. C. Butler, Director in Charge, Rural Relief

Red Lake, Minn.,
Nov. 1, 1934

My dear Sir:

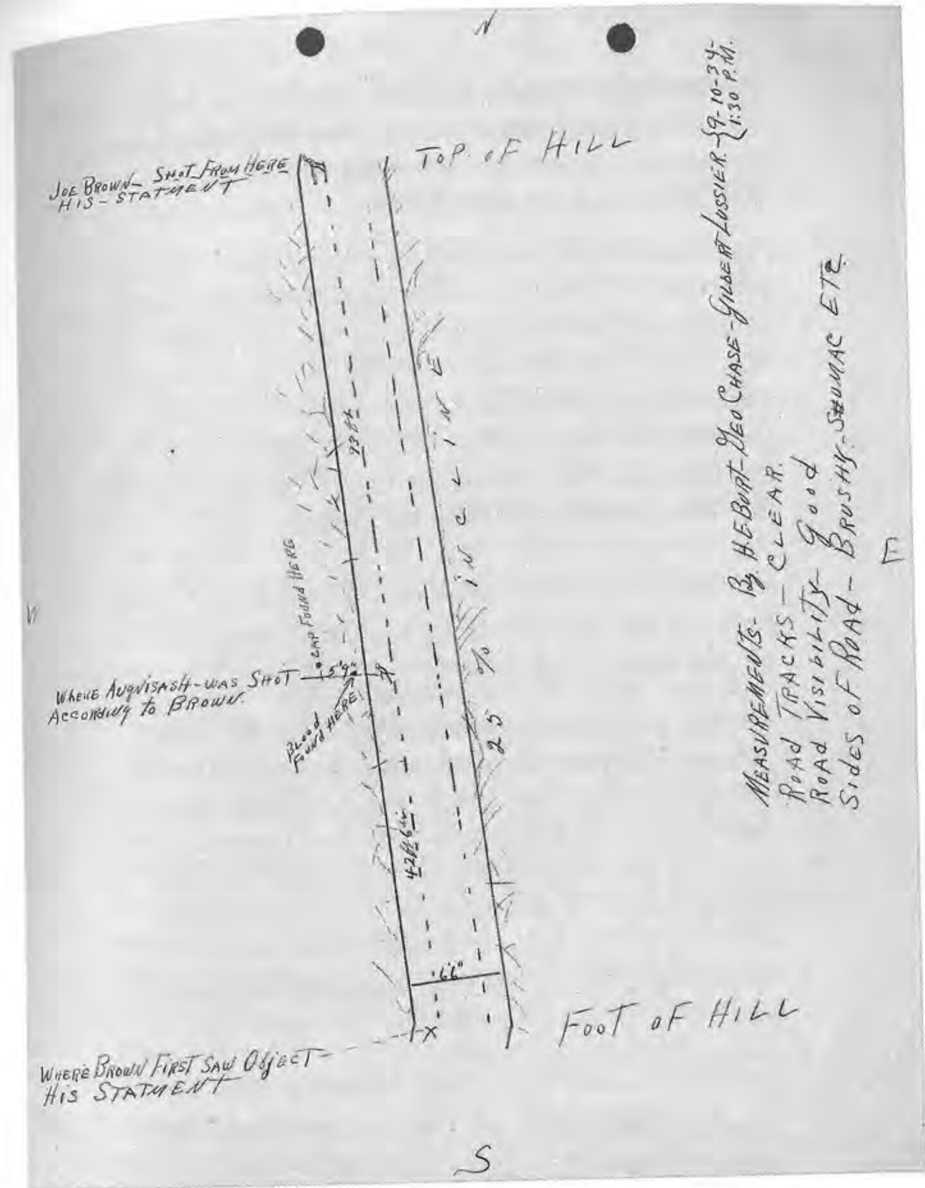
Will you please refer to my letter of September 25 and your reply of October 2; also to the formal application of Mrs. Fred Auginash, Redby, Minnesota for relief because of the inability of her husband, Fred Auginash, World War veteran, to support his family because of an accident sustained by him, as explained in the above-mentioned letter.

This family, consisting of husband, wife and three children, are in destitute circumstances. Anything that you can do to hurry along relief of some kind will be very much appreciated. Circumstances justify immediate consideration of this claim.

Will you kindly advise me by letter.

Sincerely,

Harlow E. Burt, Service Officer[29]



A sketch map made as part of the investigation of the shooting, 1934.

Statement of Jack Auginash, Rice Lake, Minnesota, father, and Jeanette Auginash, Redby, Minnesota, wife of Fred Auginash, reported to the Agency on Monday morning, September 10, 1934, and requested that an investigation be made by the Agency officials:

Fred Auginash was shot Saturday evening about 6:30 p.m., September 8, 1934, while walking on a woods road south of the Daniel Needham place, on the Red Lake Indian Reservation. The shot was fired by Joe Brown, an Indian, a short distance off the road in the woods. Joe Brown started to run away, Fred called, and he returned and assisted him to Daniel Needham's place. Daniel Needham brought him to the Red Lake Hospital.

Statement of Daniel Needham, a Red Lake Indian, made in the presence of Harlow E. Burt, Senior Clerk, Red Lake Agency, and John Smith, Agency Policeman:

Saturday evening, September 8, about 8:15 or 8:30, it was dark. Joe Brown came to my house and asked if I would take him to the hospital; that he had accidentally shot a man. I said, "Yes." The man shot was Fred Auginash. On our way home from the hospital Joe Brown and I were alone in the car. He stated that he was on his way home; that it was getting dark. He looked around, saw something coming up a hill. He thought it a bear and shot; a man hollered about 100 yards away. He went to him and discovered Fred Auginash.[30]

Statement made by Joe Brown, in the presence of Harlow E. Burt, Senior Clerk, Red Lake Agency; George Chase and Gilbert Lussier, Agency police, at the scene of the accident on Monday, September 10, 1934:

I went deer hunting about 4:00 p.m. Saturday, September 8, in the Chain Lake and lower part of the reservation. I was coming home, walking north on trail road. About 8:00 or after that evening, I stopped at the top of a hill and looked back. I saw an object following me; it was at the foot of the hill. I thought it was a deer or a bear. I watched it until close enough for me to hit, then fired. It was too dark to distinguish what it was. I fired, not knowing at what on account of the darkness, but thought it a bear or deer. I heard a man holler, in the Chippewa language, "You're killing me." I ran to him. He said, "I am going to shoot you." I stopped awhile, then came up to him. He said, "Come on, I ain't hurt so bad." I said, "Friend," in Chippewa, "I mistook you for a deer or bear." I then helped him to Dan Needham's place about 1–1/2 miles away. Dan Needham took us to the hospital.[31]

Statement of Fred Auginash, made at the Red Lake Hospital on September 10, 1934, in the presence of Harlow E. Burt, Senior Clerk, Red Lake Agency, and Joe Graves, [translator,] a Red Lake Indian:

I was walking on a trail road Saturday night, September 8, about 7:30 p.m. It was still light. I could see the road very clear. I was coming up a hill. I saw the flash of a gun about 6 feet away to my front and left. I was walking in the west track. I fell on my knee and then got up again. I was still conscious. I saw a man on top of the hill. I hollered, "You're killing me." He stopped then and hollered, "I didn't shoot you purposely; it was an accident shot." I said, "I believe you are killing me." I did not know it was Joe Brown until he came back and offered assistance. He then helped me to Dan Needham's place.

Joe Brown and I have always been friendly. There is no reason I know of that would make him want to injure me purposely.

Mr. H. R. Bitney, Supt., Red Lake, Minn.
September 8, 1934

Dear Sir:

At 8:30 p.m. September 8th, 1934 Joe Brown of Redby brought a patient, Fred Auginash, to Red Lake Hospital. He was suffering from a gun shot wound. The bullet entered about an inch in front of the lower lobe of the right ear and came out on right side of nose tearing away about half of the nose and some tissue adjacent thereto. The wound penetrates the parotid gland.

The following story was obtained. Joe Brown stated that he was out hunting deer and towards dusk he saw a dark object about a hundred yards away and shot at it. He stated he mistook Fred Auginash for a bear.

Respectfully yours,
A. E. Bostrom, Physician

Geo. B. Sjoselius, Administrator, Executive Council War Veterans Relief Agency, 6-West 5th Street. St. Paul, Minnesota

May 28, 1935

Dear Sir:

Some time last fall I had occasion to assist Fred Auginash, a veteran who accidentally had a part of his face shot off, in filing application for relief with the Soldiers Welfare office and as a result of that application Mr. Auginash has been receiving relief orders up to this time. I am returning your Order No. 1629 herewith with the request that it be made out to another trader (Roy Bailey, Redby, Mrs. S. Fairbanks, Red Lake, Berge's Store, Red Lake) since Durand and Son do not care to fill the order.

In this connection, I should like to suggest that Mr. Auginash be requested to have a physical examination at this time to determine whether or not he is still in need of relief orders. There is plenty of work at this agency now and if his physical condition permits, he should be able to support himself.

Sincerely yours,
Harlow E. Burt

Standing Strong Woman

As Fred mended from the serious hunting accident that took place in early September of 1934, he was incapable of fully engaging in his physically demanding role as a co-provider who chopped and hauled wood, hunted, trapped, fished, and harvested wild rice. The Auginash family went on welfare. I have no way to be certain if it was in relation to this initial sustained period of hardship during the winter of 1934 and 1935, which were also years when the United States moved into a long and sluggish economic recovery during the Great Depression, but at some point Jeanette decided to make and sell beer on the reservation. Jeanette was a hard-working mother, wife, and fisherwoman, and very active in the traditional seasonal economy, but she also dealt in illicit goods, and for many years trafficked in liquor on the reservation.

At the time of the accident, both Fred and Jeanette had fathers who were still vigorous and would have assisted the family during his recuperation, hopeful that he would mend before the busy fishing season commenced in spring. Once summoned from his White Earth home near Rice Lake, Jack Auginash arrived on the reservation in time to visit his son and accompany his daughter-in-law first thing Monday morning, September 10, to the Red Lake Agency, where they requested an official investigation of the Saturday evening shooting. No doubt Jeanette, along with David Jones and Jack Auginash, was very concerned about the family's welfare; Jack would have been especially anxious since his other son, John Aynemahsung, had died the year before. Not only was Fred badly injured, but there were three young children at home to consider and Jeanette had her hands full with the approach of winter. In the north country's coldest

and most extreme season, men at Red Lake normally hunted, ice fished, and ran trap lines.

It seems appropriate at this point to explain my grandmother's Ojibwe name, which was Zoongaabawiik, meaning Standing Strong Woman. For the Anishinaabeg, names are sacred and spiritually empowering, a source of sustenance throughout one's lifetime. "She was very strong about situations that would happen in our lives," my mother once explained, her way of telling me what she wanted me to understand above all else about her own mother. Florence fervently believed that her mother's greatest legacy to her was encapsulated in her frequent words, "Sah-gongish, Beshiek!" "Be strong, Florence!" Remarkably, these simple words proved to be a lifelong guide to her and other members of our family. Florence once tenderly wrote, "When I was growing up whenever I was sick I could hear my Mom saying, "Be strong, Beshiek! Even when I had my first baby I was so strong. I never cried when the pain was so bad. When I got you, Bren, she was by my side telling me the pain won't be too long and it wasn't so bad." Florence herself was born four years after Fred's accident, and she would remember an older father, one in his fifties, but always "a good hunter, fisherman, and very strong." In a small village where everyone knew of the shooting, Fred developed a reputation for resilient toughness for surviving his terrible accident, but it must have been Jeanette who urged her husband to be strong in the first few days.[32]

Not surprisingly, there is no record of exactly when Jeanette began operating an informal liquor business from her home, but she may well have added this labor at this time. The trade was modestly rewarding in the days when few people at Red Lake had access to automobiles, which, on the impoverished reservation, was the case for the entire first half of the century.

When my parents married in 1954, my father knew that his mother-in-law sold beer and whiskey. Until 1953 reservations in the United States existed in a state of prohibition, and officials at Red Lake continued to enforce a ban on alcohol until the present day, making for a permanent black market. The sale and use of liquor by American Indians before and after the creation of reservations has a difficult and complex history, and it involves a long list of questionable issues and problems relating to laws, politics, religion, trade, colonialism, stereotypes, poverty, and alcohol abuse, in addition to the fundamental pleasure of drink for many people. When faced with the fact that for years my incredibly decent and loving Grandma Auginash was a reservation bootlegger, the narrative of her working life must be weighed alongside the adversities she endured. As an heir to her endurance, I am thus obliged to measure the choices she made within her world of limited prospects.

Our village clan leader at the time our boundaries were negotiated in 1889, an elderly hereditary chief named Medwegagoonind, was the best-spoken political leader at Red Lake to argue for banning liquor on the reservation. Jeanette's eldest son, Richard, carried his impressive name, He That Is Spoken To. In retrospect, making and selling liquor appears to be one of the most thought-provoking entries on my grandmother's reservation résumé. This lone fact of her extraordinarily versatile work history helps me better understand and respect the prodigious humanity within the multiple actors involved in that illicit trade. Circumstances demanded she be perpetually resourceful in support of a family. Jeanette was an innovative survivor who defied the rules of the federal government, local churches, and the tribal code by embracing the sale of liquor, making it possible for folks to quench their thirst on a dry reservation.

Jeanette remained in the illicit liquor business for decades. Her grandson Gerald recalled that throughout the 1950s she continued to "manufacture home brew" as she recycled and filled "cast off bottles." He remembered her crock, along with the "malt mix sold in Bemidji stores" like the Red Owl grocery where they shopped. Gerald knew it was well established among the reservation community that "Grandma was a bootlegger; this was how she made a living, selling beer, wine and whiskey." She "kept

bottles of beer and liquor in a case, in a hole in the floor" which she referred to as the "cellar." While bootlegging had its share of disadvantages, a notable one being a parade of often unruly nighttime visitors, there were also rewards that earned Jeanette small freedoms. In a community where people had great predilection for nicknames, Jeanette came to be affectionately referred to by customers as Shingababokwe, or "Beer Woman."

2

The Welfare of the Family

Practicing Religion on the Reservation

The fact that Jeanette sold forbidden commodities did not preclude either her or Fred from attending local churches on the reservation, and priests and ministers often visited their home. It is nearly impossible to characterize my grandparents' religious views as anything other than hybrid, given the strong influence of Indigenous spiritual traditions in Ojibwe communities and the influx of missionaries well before their own generation at Red Lake. As at all other Indian reservations, Christian missionary proselytism is part of our history, and at Red Lake this meant especially Catholicism. The government boarding school Jeanette attended leaned toward Protestantism, and church attendance was mandated of all students.

Red Lake is an Anishinaabe community with a deep and lasting connection to Indigenous religion, and the Midewiwin continued to have great meaning for people of my grandparents' generation, even for many who called themselves church members. Any analysis of my grandparents' religious ideas is marred by an inexorable demand for Christian conformity on the reservation. Jeanette and Fred were, of course, married by a cleric of the Episcopal Church. They may have chosen this denomination out of convenience, since Reverend Brown had a church in Redby, but also because Jeanette was not Catholic. Fred regularly attended a Catholic church; their grandson Gerald stated, "Grandpa was Catholic, and took me to church with him every Sunday." When Gerald was baptized on April 20, 1948, Fred alone served as his sponsor.[1]

For Jeanette, reservation churches were institutions for charitable giving more so than for worship, allowing her to clothe her children and find castoff dresses for herself. Jeanette knew this charity had strings attached, since it was necessary to profess belief and occasionally attend church services to take part in the end reward, which was not so much salvation but a reservation paradise of used shoes, clothes, and winter coats. Jeanette was a practical Christian, preferring churches that materially advanced the well-being of her family, and Gerald pointed out the modest benefit they derived from her Protestantism, saying, "Grandma was Lutheran, and went to pick up used clothes on Tuesday at the church. I was happy to get the clothes and shoes, some of them were pretty good." On Tuesdays she salvaged the fabrics intended for sewing and for making warm quilts.[2]

My mother recalled Jeanette's Ojibwe spirituality, saying she frequently prayed and always "put tobacco for the great spirits outside under the trees." When it stormed, she covered the windows and mirrors and burned tobacco. Like many Ojibwe women, Jeanette also collected and dispensed medicinal herbs. Her private moments were often spent in the woods, since "she gathered medicine for those who needed it," noting that many visitors to their home were women requiring treatment for "cramps, hives, temperatures, stomach aches" or desiring "good luck charms," and "she was very good" at this vocation. Once a year, Jeanette and Fred visited a local woman with greater expertise, Beshiek Miller, who resided about twenty miles around the other side of Red Lake in my grandmother's home village of Ponemah. When my mother was born in August of 1938, Jeanette and Fred also turned to Beshiek Miller to name their new child, and from then on Florence shared the name Beshiek, Little Calf Woman.[3]

There was a dark period in Jeanette's life during her thirties, when she suffered a succession of heartbreaking tragedies and surely needed medicine, prayer, and healing. During the winter of 1936, their daughter, two-and-a-half-year-old Mary Jane, contracted measles, which was complicated by pneumonia, and she lingered under a doctor's care at the Red Lake Hospital from January 20 through the 25th before passing away in the afternoon. Two days later Jeanette and Fred buried their little girl at Red Lake. A few years later, on May 17, 1939, Jeanette's father passed away of cancer, and her grief, as a daughter who not only lived in close proximity but shared a daily working life with her only parent, was evident for several years. Her father-in-law, Jack Auginash, died later the same year, on July 4 in Clearwater County. Jeanette's misfortune continued when she gave birth to a stillborn daughter on May 25, 1941, and in a loving maternal gesture gave her the name Deloris Jeanette. A final daughter, Dotis Imogene, was born on May 10, 1943, and died less than two months later after contracting pertussis, her illness also complicated by pneumonia. Fred's inconsistent signature appears on her death certificate. On July 19, 1943, the war ration book that had been issued for Dotis was rescinded. These last daughters, including my mother Florence, were born in the Red Lake Hospital.[4]

Tribal Tribulations

There were also troubling signs of financial insecurity. Jeanette supplied a lengthy clothing order to the Beltrami County Welfare Board during the Depression, though in the spring of 1939 her request was turned down due to lack of funds. Adding to her distress over the personal tragedies, by 1940 Jeanette was engaged in a legal dispute with her father's widow, Mary Bush, who lived in Redby but was enrolled at the Consolidated Chippewa Agency at Cass Lake. The disagreement involved not only the house where David Jones's widow resided on the Red Lake Reservation, but whether she had "the right of inheritance to the personal property" of her late husband, which included two other houses as well as horses. Jones's widow was advised by the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe's attorney that even though she lived on the reservation, a judge for the Red Lake Court had decreed

that all her husband's property was "vested" in his daughter, Jeanette Auginash. Further, in response to the widow's inquiry as to whether she had "any remedy which can serve to set aside the decree of the Red Lake Tribal Court," the lawyer cited "*Stanley v. Roberts* (1896) 17 Supreme Court 999, 41 L. Ed. 1177," and counseled, "It appears clear that in determination of contract and property rights, that an Indian Tribe, unless congress has invaded that authority, has exclusive rights to control contracts, property rights, and rights relating to descent and distribution. In other words, we start out with the general proposition that where an Indian Tribe, duly recognized as such, has set up a tribunal or a court, that such court has exclusive jurisdiction."[5]

The Red Lake Court firmly aligned with Jeanette in the matter of her father's modest estate, and the judge in the case was the most influential man on the reservation, Peter Graves. Like Jeanette, Graves had left the reservation for schooling, but he returned to take part in drafting Red Lake's first tribal constitution in 1918. Born in 1872, Graves was a bridge between Red Lake's tradition of hereditary chiefs and the modern system of elected council and also lived in Redby, though in a home with a "study crammed with volumes on history, mostly Indian history." In one of the few existing interviews with Graves, he repeatedly discussed what today we would term genocide in American Indian history and "incidents in the history of Indian policy," including "mass extermination" and the government's practice of ignoring Indian treaty rights. While Graves had converted to Christianity as a young man during a period he spent in the East, he tired of the constant stream of missionaries invading the reservation and often told them and other visitors the people of Red Lake "had already given up enough land for God." A visionary leader and intellect, he successfully fought the government's plan still under way in the 1920s to allot Red Lake.[6]

Graves began his Red Lake career early and, in the custom of hereditary chiefs, never retired, managing business and attending meetings of the tribal council until a few weeks before his death at eighty-six. Graves's influence was everywhere at Red Lake. When the 1899 Red Lake delegation went to Washington to discuss land, water, and timber issues, sixteen-year-old Graves traveled along to serve as an interpreter. He worked his way on the reservation from school janitor to chief of police, eventually serving as judge of the Court of Indian Offences from 1936 to 1943. He continuously struggled against the liquor traffic on the reservation. For a time he was director of the fisheries. Formally, he held the title of secretary-treasurer of the tribe from 1920 until his death in 1957, the unofficial "chairman" long before the title existed on the Red Lake Reservation.[7]

Judge Peter Graves wrote to the lawyer for the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe on August 9, 1940, about the dispute between Jeanette and her father's widow, mentioning the lingering acrimony between the two women after David Jones's death and the refusal of each to "live and treat each other the same as they did while David Jones was living, but they would not agree to 'bury the hatchet' between them." Graves pointed out that Mrs. Jones initially accepted the terms of the settlement, saying, "Mrs. Jeanette Auginash claimed her annuity payment money was used by her father in building the home so the division by the court was made accordingly, which both agreed to at the time."

Judge Graves clearly elucidated the legal questions handled by the tribal court in addition to commenting on the drawn-out antipathy between the two women, but there is another compelling facet of his letter, one that sheds light on the complicated issue of religion within my own and other Red Lake families. Graves concluded with mention of the traditional Midewiwin funeral rites held in the spring of 1939 for my great-grandfather, David Jones. Jones was exposed to Christian doctrine during his time at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. The discourse of Christianity was ubiquitous within Indian boarding schools, and he apparently felt strongly enough about education to send his daughter away to school. At the end of his life, his Midewiwin funeral appears an even stronger statement of the enduring power

within the family of Ojibwe religious ideas, more so than "the white man's religion." Graves wrote,

> When David Jones died Mrs. David Jones was in the White Earth Hospital. At any rate she was not well enough to be present to look after the burial of her husband, and David Jones was buried according to the tribal custom of the Indians; his immediate possessions like guns and personal belongings were gathered and disposed of according to Indian custom so I understand David Jones wanted to be buried according to Indian custom; and certain of his blood relations looked after the burial. I know of no law that would prevent Indian custom burials on the reservation here as that is done by those who have not adopted the white man's religion.[8]

By August 12, 1940, the superintendent of the Red Lake Indian Agency declared closed the matter of the distribution of David Jones's property, and the fact that the "annuity payments of Jeanette Auginash were used in the construction of these houses" settled the matter. The reservation superintendent wrote that he had been present "at the hearing held in Indian Court, and it seemed to me that the distribution was fair, in fact, very fair and equitable." However, the property settlement did not end the enmity between Jeanette and her father's widow. As the superintendent noted, "the whole trouble is due to the fact that these two women do not like each other and continue to quarrel and fight over nothing." The disagreement may have been a legitimate grievance with a difficult woman, or perhaps Jeanette was also to blame, unnecessarily continuing the conflict even after her success in court. Regardless of Jeanette's culpability in the disagreement, her despair was palpable and continued to influence her private and public life in the 1940s.[9]

Red Lake of the 1940s was not only an Indian reservation but

an Ojibwe homeland composed of a number of small villages, especially those at Little Rock, Redlake, Redby, and Ponemah. Despite consistent pressure, the reservation was never allotted, and the government had in the previous decade finally abandoned a policy that had robbed Indian people of their land in the United States. Red Lake survived intact, even gaining back some of the ceded lands near the Canadian border. Indeed, it was the largest Ojibwe place in the United States or Canada completely owned by its original people. The population was much smaller than today, with fewer than two thousand people on the reservation. It was a friendly time, when social life revolved around the community and villagers often worked together. In the way of Ojibwe leaders, Peter Graves, driving his black car on rutted reservation roads best suited to horses, often took time to visit residents, especially his Redby neighbors including Jeanette and Fred Auginash. Later, his daughter, Mildred, would marry the oldest Auginash son, Richard. It seems unlikely that Graves, who was known to frequently utter, "All our trouble comes from this liquor," was ignorant of Jeanette's involvement in the illicit trade.[10]

Peter Graves was still a Red Lake judge when Jeanette was found drunk and arrested for disorderly conduct, appearing in the Court of Indian Offences on September 5, 1942. Since Jeanette was neither a heavy drinker nor an alcoholic, a possible interpretation of this episode is that the deeply personal losses in her life had become unbearable. In her mid-thirties, she must have been an anguished person, haunted by the deaths of two daughters and with a melancholy so deep there seemed no end or resolution. Still, she continued to work with Fred. Her older children, Amelia at sixteen and the boys just a few years younger, had reached an age when they would have joined in not only household labor but also fishing activities. It appears that Jeanette's grief temporarily overshadowed the good life she had built with Fred and their young family. On the reservation, binge drinking was a respite, a way to temporarily allow the soul to muddle through the

complications of poverty, intrusions by government, and all the misery produced by early death and despair. It is not clear if Judge Graves or a colleague handled her case, since the judge's name is absent from the following court transcript of her hearing.

Judge:

Q. *What is your name?* **A.** *Jeanette Auginash*

Q. *Are you a Red Lake Indian?* **A.** *Yes.*

Q. *How old are you?* **A.** *36.*

Q. *I have a complaint here signed by Frank Gurno, Chief of Police—about 6:30 p.m. Saturday the above defendant was picked up by police in the village of Redby drunk. Was lodged in jail and was released when sober.*[11]

Q. *Are you guilty or not guilty?* **A.** *Yes.*

Q. *Were you drunk?* **A.** *I wasn't very drunk.*

Q. *Where did you get your liquor from?* **A.** *Some boys gave it to me.*

Q. *Where did the boys get it from?* **A.** *They got it from town.*

Q. *Did you buy this beer?* **A.** *No, they gave it to me. I never have any money to buy beer.*

Q. *Were you very drunk?* **A.** *No, not very.*

Frank Gurneau, Red Lake's chief of police, also made a statement regarding Jeanette's arrest: "She stopped us in copper city and said she wanted us to go and arrest some boys that wouldn't give her beer. We told her to get in the car and she refused to and started calling us all kinds of names. She was so drunk that she could hardly walk."

Jeanette's hearing concluded with a strong reproach from the judge, though Graves or any other person from the tight-knit reservation would have probably known of her recent setbacks. The judge scolded her with the comment, "You were so drunk that you didn't know what you were saying," yet he did not in the end sentence her to jail. To this very public humiliation Jeanette

simply replied, "I don't know." And despite his conclusion that "I think you are guilty all right," the judge ended the hearing with only a reprimand. Red Lake's Court of Indian Offences put Jeanette on probation for ninety days, but the judge warned of a future sentence of "jail for 30 days" and admonished her by saying "if you want to go to jail, just get drunk again."[12]

My mother, Florence, was far too young to have been aware of her mother's arrest for disorderly conduct. Throughout her life she expressed deep devotion and respect for both of her parents. She considered hers a warm, good-humored, and unconditionally supportive family and always experienced the greatest comfort in their presence. Binge drinking seemed to permeate nearly every family on the reservation, and Florence acknowledged the apprehension she felt during times as a child when she "would be afraid of my parents drinking beer." Though responsible for only a small part, Jeanette would help spread this plague.[13]

Fred's Welfare Fraud

Jeanette and Fred persevered, working and raising their family throughout the 1940s, always getting by through their established pattern of patching traditional Ojibwe forms of labor like ricing and fishing and other wage work with Fred's military pension and benefits and Jeanette's liquor sales. One difference appeared to be an increasing reliance on the welfare program Aid to Dependent Children. Jeanette, like many reservation residents, also worked several hours a week at the Redby sawmill, earning thirty-two dollars a month, probably at an office job. Redby was the site of a new mill in 1924, though sawmills had operated at Red Lake since the nineteenth century, eventually moving away from teams of sawyers in the woods to a new era of power saws. Land for the mill was leased to the United States for ninety-nine years, and in early decades the majority of workers were, for reasons peculiar to U.S. projects on Indian land, non-Indian. Red Lake's

population was entirely Ojibwe, yet jobs continued to bypass the reservation and its people. The work force at the Redby sawmill was indigenized during the 1940s, benefitting the Auginash family, since Fred also found employment there. Once they returned from Korea, Richard and McKinley were also hired at the mill.[14]

On the Red Lake Reservation, a social worker with a small two-person office connected Ojibwe families to the programs available through the Beltrami County Welfare Board, located in Bemidji, approximately thirty miles from the nearest reservation boundary. Caseworkers visited the Auginash home in Redby. On April 1, 1948, the agency superintendent gave a favorable report about the family to the county board, supporting their Aid to Dependent Children application for consideration. He spoke well of Fred's work history, while Jeanette's labor went unmentioned: "Mr. Auginash has a very good work record and the family have been quite conservative in their spending. Instead of putting their money into a car they have bought furnishings for the home to an extent which makes their home quite a bit above average in that respect."[15]

When the Auginash family first began to receive ADC for a short time in 1948, their household included the children Anna and Florence, ages thirteen and ten. After fewer than three months, their ADC was suspended under accusations of welfare fraud. Fred was granted a hearing, and his official statement appears below in English, though it is important to keep in mind that he spoke Ojibwe and this amounted to an interpretation of his ideas. Still, the issue at hand was clearly stated: "Without official board action the Executive Secretary suspended my case on the basis that I had sufficient fishing income. As a matter of fact I am not well enough to fish this year. My wife did a little in June. Her net income was only $15.00 out of a total check of $31.36."[16]

The day of Fred's statement, the social worker for the Beltrami County Welfare Board also wrote him the following letter outlining the reasons for suspending the family's ADC.

Dear Mr. Auginash:

We find that you are doing commercial fishing this year and because of the fishing income, we find it necessary to suspend your assistance grant as of July 1, 1948.

If after the fishing season and bonus time are over you find yourself in need of assistance you may apply for reinstatement. Application for such reinstatement should be made before the 10th of the month so the grant, if eligible, can be made effective on the 1st of the following month.

An itemized account of your income and expenditures should be kept during the season and should be available for the social worker when you reapply. Our past experience with commercial fishing shows that the income will be sufficient for your needs and you would be ineligible for aid during the fishing season.

We think that it is commendable that you have availed yourself of the opportunity to become self-supporting even though for a short period of time. We are deeply appreciative of your efforts to earn enough income for your budget needs through the fishing season.[17]

Notes from the Red Lake Agency in 1948 indicate that Fred had been hospitalized at the Cass Lake Indian Hospital for a week, returning home on July 4. Shortly after, Jeanette paid a visit to the agency, concerned about her husband's pending application for disability as a veteran and further clarifying that he was able to do very little work during his illness. She had tried to carry the slack, and records mentioned that "Mrs. A. has been fishing." As Fred's official statement confirmed, Jeanette had received a first check of $31.36 on July 2, of which she gave half to her cousin, who had helped her fish while Fred was sick and hospitalized for "high blood pressure." Further, notes at the agency suggested Fred "will not be able to work for many months—if ever." With the balance of her paycheck, Jeanette had purchased clothing,

but still the family owed Stayberg's Store in Redby for groceries. Jeanette and Fred had received a first ADC grant in May for seventy dollars, but the amount was not enough for them to cover what they had already purchased through their line of credit. The Auginash family's debt had risen to $130, and the first ADC check had gone directly to the store. Earlier in the spring of 1948, Jeanette and her children had received grocery, fuel, and clothing money "for relief from tribal funds" totaling $100.80, though once again her husband was ineligible since he was "not a Red Lake enrollee." In September, Jeanette would also benefit from $150 in a tribal per capita payment.[18]

Following Fred's statement explaining his recent inability to work, where he pointed out his wife's paltry fifteen dollars in fishing income, Fred and Jeanette, under threat of prosecution, agreed to pay back the agency for the welfare money they had received from Beltrami County. The document of July 8, 1948, shows Jeanette's flawless signature second after Fred's unsteady handwriting. The statement was witnessed by the social worker: "We, Fred Auginash and Jeanette Auginash, herby agree to reimburse in full the Red Lake Agency for any relief issued on this date or later at such time as Mr. Fred Auginash receives his veteran's disability compensation. We understand that if we do not do so we are liable to prosecution in the Court of Indian Offences."[19]

Later that summer, in August, when the Indian agent called on the Auginash family, he found Jeanette home alone with the children. She reported that Fred was gone, that he was frustrated with the reservation and had "told his clan he was not coming back" to Red Lake. The agent immediately checked with Stayberg's Store in Redby and was relieved to learn that before departing Fred had put down the full amount of his recent check on the family's account. Clearly Jeanette had not represented her husband's real intentions to the agent. She knew the complete story—that Fred had only taken a vacation from the reservation and had already joined up with his White Earth relatives in Clearwater County for the ricing season.[20]

Jeanette's greatest desire in the early 1950s, according to my mother, was "to have her sons come home safely from the Army in Korea." In addition to worry about her sons, Fred, in his sixties, was in declining health and Jeanette too was recovering from an unspecified illness in the summer of 1949. It appears that in April 1948, after eighteen years, Fred had ended his job at the sawmill. Their two sons in the U.S. Army could no longer help their parents with fishing and other labor; Richard was stationed in distant Seattle and McKinley similarly far away in San Francisco. In 1949, the Auginash family's monthly income totaled $117. Fred received sixty dollars per month from the Veterans Administration, in addition to fifty-seven dollars in the form of an Aid to Dependent Children grant for his two daughters, in sixth and eighth grade. Jeanette, the inventive problem-solver, petitioned for a family allowance of fifty dollars per month to be taken from her sons' military paychecks, though it would be months before that issue was resolved. Further, Jeanette requested that the agency investigate the possibility that one of her sons could return home from the army in order to help out the family. At the time, the Red Lake superintendent agreed with her proposal, resulting in a flurry of official letters. He pointed out the agency's position, saying, "We feel that a discharge for one of the boys is very essential for the personal welfare of the family. Since both parents are now in poor health, such essential tasks as carrying water, splitting wood and shoveling snow are impossible for them." Further, he described the Auginash family's situation and present needs:

> The family live in a three-room house, which is well kept, clean, and neat but it is not modern and has no plumbing facilities, whatsoever, and the family must secure their water some distance from the house. Mr. Fred Auginash, father of the boys is in very poor health and he is unable to do even light work. During the past two months, Mrs. Auginash found herself in failing health and it appears unlikely that she will recover fully for many months.

Two children stay in the home, Florence, born 8/25/38, and Anna, born 9/6/35. The younger will be in the sixth grade in Redby, and the other will be in the eighth grade at the junior high school in Red Lake. Besides the boys there is only one other sibling. She is Mrs. Amelia Lussier, a housewife residing in Redby.[21]

The matter of the military family allowance grew more imperative when in 1950 Jeanette and Fred gained custody of their first grandchild, Gerald, who was Richard's two-year-old son. In April of that year Richard was stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, prior to a stint in Alaska, and the agency wrote to him, saying, "Your mother advised that the boy has insufficient clothing and she does not have the funds to purchase any. We suggest, therefore, that you make a direct deduction from your pay and send it to your mother for the support of your son." By September, Richard had voluntarily increased an initial monthly allotment to his parents from twenty-five to forty dollars. With the escalation of the U.S conflict in Korea, neither Richard nor McKinley would return to the reservation until after their military service, and McKinley, in particular, was deeply entangled in the combat burden of war.[22]

On the reservation, it was often the case that grandparents became caretakers for their young family members just as ailments or chronic illness made an appearance. Still, women like Jeanette seemed eager to take on this very demanding role. When Jeanette's relative Mattie had a daughter on May 29, 1951, Jeanette soon became the full-time foster parent of her newborn girl, and an agreement was reached in the Court of Indian Offences by November, the same month Jeanette turned forty-six. It appears Mattie was leaving the reservation for relocation and to find work in California. In 1952, with Richard and McKinley both safely home from the war, the Auginash household budget consisted primarily of Fred's monthly sixty-three dollars in veteran's pension, supplemented by ADC for food and clothing for Anna (seventeen), Florence (fourteen), Gerald (four), and Barbara (one). Five years later, Jeanette would need to petition the reservation superintendent for twenty-five dollars from the "Individual Indian Accounts" for general living expenses for Barbara. In 1957, Jeanette and Fred achieved an important goal when they filed a petition of adoption for their grandson Gerald, which was approved by the General Council of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians on August 4, 1957. Jeanette was fifty-one and Fred sixty-nine. On the document, Jeanette's elegant signature followed Fred's simple X.[23]

Gayaashk of Illinois

Something about my father reminded Grandpa Auginash of a gull. My mother suggested it was not at all because of his fair skin but rather his long neck, like the herring gulls of northern Minnesota, and neither she nor Grandpa Auginash possessed this interesting feature. Gayaashk was what the Auginash family first called Vernon David Child. These early conversations, of course, took place before my time, but still they represent what I have been told about the beginning of my parents' relationship and

Fred with Florence and Gerald, about 1950.

subsequent marriage on November 27, 1954. I have always considered my mother to have been shockingly young at the time, a mere sixteen to my father's relatively mature twenty-seven. However, to her new in-laws in Illinois, the most sobering detail of their son's choice of wife was not her age as much as her race.

That my parents ever met at all, let alone fell in love and married, is an unexpected story involving postwar mobility in the United States. In 1952, Vernon drove his green Fraser car to northern Minnesota to visit some distant relatives with the surname Mistic, and he worked for them a short time on their farm, which was adjacent to the southern border of the Red Lake Reservation. He had no background in agriculture other than a home garden plot, since his family in Illinois owned Child Motor Sales, a small business selling and repairing automobiles. My father had been drafted from his small town toward the end of World War II; made it as far as San Francisco, where he was stationed when he learned of the atomic bombs being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; and had attended some college on the GI Bill by the time he met my mother when she was a young teenager. He was bookish and always liked to point out various constellations and their Latin names, hence Grandpa Auginash's other nickname for him: Astronomy, as in, "Gagwejim *Astronomy* ji-wii-amwaad adikamegwan," or "Ask *Astronomy* if he would like some whitefish."[24]

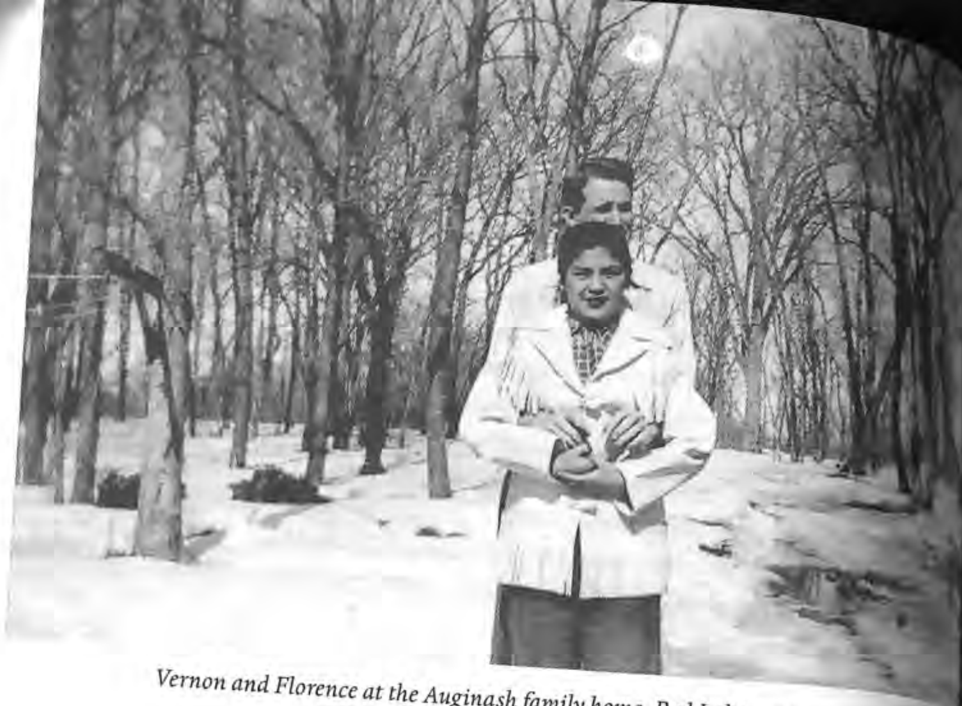
My father was shy and quiet, considerably more stoic than my boisterous Ojibwe family, and deeply philosophical. He was, without question, the gentlest white man the Auginash family had ever met. Vernon studied English and history in college and was on his way to being a teacher. He carried around large anthologies for taking notes, though he was also an athlete. Early in his career he would combine teaching English with duties as a high school basketball coach. Life in downstate Illinois had cultivated in him a love of baseball and the St. Louis Cardinals, which he would one day pass on to his two children. From a family where every member had arrived in the Midwest from the north of England (and I have heard Yorkshire compared to Texas for

its rural ways), he was the iconoclast as the only non-religious socialist. Until he left for the army, he had lived with his parents, Paul and Mabel Child, and his older brother and younger sister in the small Illinois town where both sets of his English immigrant grandparents also resided. The three siblings were redheads.

Once Vernon dared to drive his Fraser a few short miles across the boundary line of the Red Lake Indian Reservation, one of the first friendly young people he met was Florence, still a high school cheerleader. She was a contrast to him in every way possible—outgoing, pretty, funny, and rarely taking time to read a book. My mother remembered their first meeting as taking place in the winter of 1952, and she was immediately attracted, not so much to my father but rather to his "green Fraser with an Indian blanket on the front seat." The Navajo blanket was a souvenir from Vernon's wanderings in the West after the war, years when he wrote the following postcard home to his parents: "I came back to Tucson and I'm working as waiter-houseman at the Lodge on the Desert. I couldn't find anything to do in L.A. and union cards were too high in San Diego." Florence also suggested that when it became clear Vernon wished to marry her, her parents strongly approved; "My Dad and Mom liked Vernon," she said simply. Looking back in later years, Florence had mixed feelings about her readiness for marriage, suggesting that her parents and Vernon appeared to move very quickly and "they were talking about marriage, geez." Nevertheless, for the rest of her life she would consider her most important birthday to be "when I turned 16, so I could marry Vernon" and when "he asked me in March around his birthday we got engaged."[25]

Her Name is Florence

But before he married Florence, Vernon had to contemplate the place of an Indian wife in his own family. A few days before his birthday and engagement in 1954, he wrote a letter to his younger sister in Illinois, ruminating on what might be in store for him if



Vernon and Florence at the Auginash family home, Red Lake, 1954.

he married a young Indian woman, especially one from a poor family. Fortunately, my aunt Constance Finch held on to this very special letter for over forty years, eventually giving it to me in June 1996, the same month my father died. The letter is striking to me for several reasons, not least of which was the timing of its arrival in my own mailbox. It is incredibly charming to me to read a letter with the very first mention of my mother's name to my father's family. But the letter also reveals the innermost thoughts of a young, white, midwestern man at mid-century, one who is contemplating marriage to a woman of another race: in his words, "I know my situation is very unusual." Though he was a young man of twenty-six, I recognize my father immediately—I see the ethical sensibilities that guided his decisions, and his gentle turn of phrase.[26]

Cass Lake, Minn., c/o Morris Landing, Route 2

Dear Connie:

I received your letter today and was very happy to get it. I read it before the other three letters I had,

as I wasn't sure who it was from. I feel that it was the most comforting and complimentary letter that I have ever received, and I am grateful for such thoughtful consideration.

When I wrote to this girl this morning (her name is Florence) I told her I considered myself very lucky to have a sister like you and a family who is so considerate of my welfare. You mentioned that mother was somewhat hurt at my not talking about things this summer or before I came up here. This summer there wasn't anything to talk about. I just knew her then.

I suppose it would be easier for you to accept her if she were white. Or would it? It's very hard to see another's viewpoint on that. She seems no different in that respect than anyone else to me. She is rather dark—though not exceptionally so. She has long black hair and I'm sure she would like you very much. I would like to be home, and I may be soon. I know my situation is very unusual, and sometimes I don't know what to do. I've often thought—like sitting at home on Sunday with everyone there—what would it be like? Do you think that she—if we were ever married—could be just like Shirley or Jerry [his siblings' spouses] in the family? Or would that be possible? It might seem very strange.

You see, she has never had much. She has told me at times that her folks think about her sometimes when she gets ragged. Her conditions have been pretty hard in many respects. If she had clothes like you or anyone else has, she would think it was out-of-this world. She told me the other day that she never expected to have anything or anyone, so what could you do with a girl like that, especially if you love her. It seems funny I suppose. I'll write again.

With love and thanks,

Vernon[27]

While on the one hand this is a very beautiful and sensitively rendered letter, my father's thoughtful words also indicate he was preparing for family disapproval—perhaps a cool reception of his "very unusual" marriage to Florence. In the small town to which Vernon always imagined returning, everyone was white and attitudes on race appeared fixed and well established. Moreover, in the 1950s intolerance was openly expressed, laws banning interracial marriage were upheld, and ideas of white supremacy and racial hierarchies compelled most Americans to strongly disapprove of marriages between whites and individuals of different races.

There were additional burdens to interracial couples in the 1950s in the shape of societal expectations, prejudice, and perhaps even law. Since the late nineteenth century, American Indians were included in a dozen state's laws prohibiting them from marriage to whites. Vernon's home state of Illinois was not one of these, since it had repealed all laws prohibiting interracial marriage in 1874, though the topic reemerged in an early twentieth-century controversy. Historian Peggy Pascoe argued that laws prohibiting interracial marriage were deeply embedded in U.S. history and "a project of white supremacy" and "America's longest-lasting form of legal race discrimination," even outlasting school segregation. Pascoe also dispelled the notion that measures meant to prevent interracial marriage steadily declined in the United States, pointing out that miscegenation laws actually escalated during the course of the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, the laws were bolstered by marriage licensing forms and procedures that as part of vital statistics asked applicants for information on race, a practice "which helped weave race and white supremacy throughout the American racial state."[28]

My mother's skin color, "dark—though not exceptionally so," would matter to the Child family but was not an issue to Beltrami County when she submitted an application for a marriage license in 1954. Florence Auginash and Vernon Child applied for a license in the city of Bemidji, but the forms they filled out did not ask them to declare their race, and Minnesota was in the

minority of states for having no history of miscegenation law. In addition, Florence was free to marry since Minnesota statute allowed "every female person who has attained the full age of 16 years" to be married, making even parental consent unnecessary. Their original marriage certificate was signed by two witnesses, Jeanette and another individual who may have simply been an employee at the courthouse, since the ceremony took place in front of a municipal judge in Bemidji. My father recalled that Fred signed documents at the time with an X, and even though he was present for the ceremony, he was not an official witness. Florence remembered the pink dress she wore that day and that afterward Vernon took her and his new in-laws to dinner, the joyfulness of the occasion somewhat overshadowed in his memory by the offense of his first experiences with the de facto segregation of Bemidji businesses in the 1950s, when Snider's Café was one of the few dining establishments to serve Indians.[29]

The Child family was working class but wealthy in comparison to Vernon's in-laws on the reservation. Through his marriage to Florence, Vernon brought the Auginash family some desperately needed resources and labor, even if he did not make formal offerings like those Fred had presented to David Jones in the 1920s, when my grandfather settled the Ojibwe obligations for establishing marriage with numerous gifts. Vernon had a reliable car and knew how to maintain it, which was no doubt incredibly helpful, and while he was never a hunter or fisherman like Fred, McKinley, or the men and women of Red Lake, he was willing to cut wood, haul water, paint, fix windows, run to the hardware store, or purchase groceries. From working in his own father's business, which also combined a gas station and auto repair shop, Vernon was handy, and to his credit he had a strong work ethic and appreciated physical labor. Vernon tackled their every home repair with enthusiasm, and Jeanette and Fred welcomed Vernon to the family. Despite their own versatile occupations and all-around hard work, in addition to significant contributions from their elder sons, Jeanette and Fred continued to struggle in

poverty on the reservation. Their only financial security came in the form of Fred's steady pension check, now up to seventy-eight dollars a month. To Fred, Vernon's appearance on the reservation and marriage to his fun-loving daughter surely appeared as a stroke of luck.

Vernon had an additional talent. His college education and comfort with official business allowed him to set off in search of Fred's allotment. Fred insisted to his son-in-law that he owned land in Clearwater County, and according to the rolls of 1913, a man named Nahwahjewun indeed had allotment number 4830 on the White Earth Reservation. By the mid-1950s, the land would have only increased in value, and as an aging man with a young family, he needed the income. Vernon had heard Fred's entire story and knew of his original dispossession from Big Sandy Lake. It was always tragic to my father that, after searching through courthouse records, to his great regret he had to inform Fred that the land in Clearwater County had been seized by the state of Minnesota for nonpayment of taxes—taxes that were illegal in the first place. Nearly three decades after Fred's death, Minnesota and the U.S. Congress finally negotiated a settlement with the heirs of nineteen hundred allotments through the terms of the White Earth Reservation Land Settlement Act of 1985. It would be a few more years before my mother and her siblings received a small cash sum for Fred's allotment, since by that time Jeanette had also passed away.[30]

Another Accident and Aftermath

As Fred Auginash had decades before, Vernon found a genuine friend and ally in his Ojibwe father-in-law. Their bond continued a few short years, until Fred's death in 1957 and during which time the older man was often sick. Still, their relationship was of lifelong meaning to Vernon. Throughout the 1950s, Fred was in declining health and likely worried about Jeanette's future, especially with young children still in the household. As early as 1951,

Fred had been hospitalized several times, diagnosed by a Red Lake physician as having "conditions which disable him," including "hypertensive cardio-vascular disease, borderline diabetes, chronic osteo-arthritis of the spine, and a large post-operative hernia." At the time, his family hoped to take him to the Veterans Hospital in Fargo, though the senior physician at Red Lake "warned the family that this hospital may not wish to accept a patient with chronic disease," noting that "Mr. Auginash is, of course, unable to do much in the way of activity at his home and states that he feels better while in the hospital. This, of course, is to be expected. However, being essentially a chronic case, we hesitate to admit him here for prolonged care. We do not, however, object to admitting him for shorter periods to get him over some particular situation."[31]

Gerald Auginash would always remember Fred's appearance in his sixties, describing his grandfather as "short, hunched over, bowlegged" and saying "he always walked with his hands behind his back." Further, he noted that Grandpa Auginash "always wore long wool socks in winter, and something he called his 'squaw rubbers' on his feet, he also wore wool pants, buttoned up shirts, long johns and suspenders." He recalled that Fred "spoke Ojibwe" and was toward the end of his life "a grouchy old guy, though after church on Sundays he always enjoyed playing cards with his friend Al Morrison." Gerald easily summoned his memories of the day Grandpa Auginash died in 1957, an unusual summer for him as a nine-year-old boy since he was enjoying new friends, warm weather, and a few months of freedom with his uncle Vernon, who was working in Illinois. Gerald had taken a particular liking to Vernon's father, Paul Child, who was kind to children and made a point of telling him that he had access to the soda pop and candy bars sold in the gas station and garage. Gerald remembered the somber phone call they received from Florence, who was at home with her family on the reservation. After learning that Fred had died, he and Vernon immediately packed the car and left for northern Minnesota.

Jeanette and Fred Auginash with grandchildren Brian Child, right, and Wendell Cook, about 1957. This is the last picture of Grandpa Auginash.

The cause of her father's death always made Florence terribly sad, and I was in college before she gave me an anguished account of how Fred died of an accidental poisoning. It was a simple story. Prior to the events surrounding his death, the fact that Fred insisted on speaking Ojibwe with his wife and children was always a positive statement of cultural pride for my mother, one that I enjoyed hearing. Florence often told me that whenever as a girl she returned home from school speaking English to her parents,

her father would always gently reprimand, in her words, "now say that to me in Indian." My mother recounted that Grandpa Auginash had recently been to the doctor and received two identical bottles of medicine, one of which was a topical liniment intended to relieve arthritis. He awoke very early one morning in late July, just a few days before the council was to finalize Gerald's adoption, and, unable to read the label, drank the wrong bottle of medicine. Vernon and Gerald arrived on the reservation in time to observe his body being taken from the house through a window, a Midewiwin practice, followed by four days of ceremonies, the family in the end blending these Ojibwe traditions with his burial in the Catholic cemetery. Two brief notes from the Red Lake Agency during the summer of 1957 mention that "Fred Auginash died 7–26–57 of metaylsalicylate poisoning" and "Jeanette receives money from the Veteran's Administration."[32]

After Fred's death, Jeanette received a reduced pension from the Veterans Administration amounting to sixty-seven dollars per month for her and Gerald, and she continued to receive $17.50 in ADC, since she still had custody of toddler Barbara. "After Fred was gone, we depended on McKinley for wood in the winter. He had a truck, chainsaws, and he would bring the wood over. I split wood and carried it inside," recalled Gerald, describing the main concern of reservation households in northern Minnesota in the days of wood stoves. When Gerald reached his teens, the family often resorted to a different strategy for winter survival: he spent the season on the reservation with his father, Richard, as Jeanette visited her married daughter in Illinois. By the time he was in high school, they were still surviving through Jeanette's fishing and liquor sales and Fred's pension, and as Gerald recalled with hollow laughter, "Sometimes I had to cut down a tree after basketball practice" just to heat the house.[33]

If marriage marks the beginning of a new life, it was especially so for Florence, since she had limited experience with white society. Naturally, she worried that she would not find acceptance once she left the reservation, and thus her first impressions of the

unfamiliar ways of her husband's family were exceptionally significant. As the year turned to spring and warmer weather, they headed south in the green Fraser, and "We went home to Illinois to see his parents for the first time." After a long car trip from northern Minnesota, the couple arrived in Vernon's small town to find his mother outside working her garden, wearing a large straw hat to protect her graying red hair and fair skin. The Child home in western Illinois was simple and modest, with a large green yard of apple and cherry trees, a path of long winding vines of concord grapes, and patches of asparagus and strawberries in addition to the vegetable garden. Directly across the street was a well-built, two-story Victorian home with a wide front porch and swing—all constructed by Vernon's grandfather, James Child, around 1910. Vernon's elderly grandmother Elizabeth still lived there with her daughter, Amy, who tended the English flower beds and walnut trees. The Child women gave Florence and Vernon an affectionate and very warm welcome home.[34]

In the following days, Florence would be amazed at her mother-in-law's bounty of fresh food and considerable cooking skills, in a household where every noodle was lovingly made by hand. She noticed that Mabel was a superb housewife who adored cooking for her family but hated to clean up the kitchen afterward, and so Florence enjoyed helping out with the dishes and in this way they formed a bond. It was easy for Florence to return Mabel's genuine affection. Still, I suspect every family has a weak spot, an imperfection that disturbs or concerns some members more than others, and with the audacity to show up on holidays.

Florence's new father-in-law, Paul Child, while never ceasing to be a pleasant gentleman, would remain more distant, far more conflicted about his son's marriage than his wife. This tension would grow into a weak spot in our larger family relations—only in an ideal world is it enough that a fine, young couple comes together without bias—and racism hurts even those you love. I always knew the weak spot. As a young girl in elementary school, I remember Grandpa Child's occasional discourses on race and

attempts to add up my own blood quantum in a way that was satisfactory to him, never failing to point out my English ancestry. His deepest hope rested in genealogy, and if my mother had even one European somewhere in the family tree—he thought perhaps a wandering Frenchman in the Great Lakes—the balance would tip in his favor. He even knew that Jeanette, whom the Childs always referred to rather formally as "Mrs. Auginash," was enrolled as a "full-blood," and so it was that my late Grandpa Auginash became Grandpa Child's more likely candidate for this French ancestor.

Paul Child was never—if this is even possible—an *obnoxious* racist, though he held views on race and white supremacy entrenched among his white, working-class generation. Like his wife, he was the offspring of fairly recent English immigrants, the first in their families to be born in the United States. Our talks on race took place in the 1960s, and since I knew Grandpa Child was born in 1903, he appeared to me sadly behind the times. His ideas never bothered or persuaded me since I knew he was wrong and I always liked being Indian.

These early and unfortunate conversations gave me a deeper understanding of racial struggle in the United States, but the weak spot in my family also accounts for my optimism, especially regarding the ability of good people to eventually attempt to overcome difference. In another historic car trip, in July 1962, Mabel and Paul visited the Auginash family and our Ojibwe homelands on the Red Lake Reservation. The events of that visit form some of my earliest childhood memories and are among my few strong recollections of Grandma Child. Not long after the trip to northern Minnesota, Mabel suffered a debilitating stroke from which she never recovered, passing away in the summer of 1965. As Mabel and Paul's youngest grandchild, I grew especially close to my grandfather during her long illness. He remained a widower for the rest of his life, until his own death at eighty-eight. Grandpa Child was the security blanket of my childhood, and I never doubted his kind heart or devotion to me or my brother. To

borrow a phrase from my father's letter, I have always considered myself very lucky to have a family so considerate of my welfare. The respect that grew between members of the Auginash and Child families after 1954, despite early years of uncertainty, now appears permanent.

In later years, and well after Fred's death, my father rarely referred to Grandpa Auginash by name, instead calling him "the old man," but in an Ojibwe sense, where it is a sign of deep respect. I learned about Grandpa Auginash from both my mother and father, and now from writing this history of his work and marriage. My mother liked to tell a little amusing story of the time Jeanette and Fred visited her in Illinois, when she was newly married and my father was working as a schoolteacher in another small town. Vernon drove the family from northern Minnesota, stopping at a restaurant along the way. Florence ordered fish for her father, hoping he would like a familiar dish. She always laughed remembering how he ate the fish and politely saved the tiny dish of tartar sauce for dessert. My father's most endearing story about Fred took place later in this memorable visit, when Vernon was back at work. He happened to glance out the schoolhouse window during class and was very surprised to see his father-in-law picking up paper and cleaning the school yard, wanting to be helpful at Vernon's place of employment. I still wonder about the nature of their relationship because communication was imperfect, yet it is finally clear to me they had created a mutual respect from their shared belief that labor is the best way to care for and express your love of family. When my father retired and built a new house with my mother on Jeanette's land across the river, he frequently spoke of his memories of Fred, and always with great emotion. As a former teacher with an appreciation for good literature, he once told me how much the character of Eli in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, one of his favorite books, reminded him of "the old man."

Jeanette died on February 1, 1987, three full decades after Fred's death, though she was seldom alone, always spending time in the company of friends, relatives, and grandchildren, a number of whom she raised. More than a matriarch to our large extended family and her twenty-nine grandchildren, she was simply the edifice upon which everyone else's peace and happiness rested. In my ignorance while growing up, I never once thought of Grandma Auginash as having an occupation. I certainly observed her working, doing tasks that might be simple today, like laundry, but that were an ordeal in a home without running water. Throughout the 1960s, Redby residents continued to haul their fresh springwater home from the fishery in large milk cans. Grandma Auginash did not have a bathroom or running water in her home until she moved into an apartment building for the elderly on the reservation during the 1970s. Soon after, on her land across the river in Redby, a HUD house with just three rooms but all the amenities was built for her. Looking back at her younger life and my grandparents' marriage, I now see what a force Jeanette was in that relationship and to her family's survival on the Red Lake Reservation.[35]

It is a challenge to even try to represent the full extent of Jeanette's and Fred's labor, or to demonstrate the daily strategic decisions that shaped their reservation existence, but by placing some of our family's stories and reminiscences alongside tribal records, government archives, and other documents, their incredibly productive working lives come into greater focus. The following chapters investigate changes in labor practices on the reservation—fishing, healing, and ricing—activities that were and are essential work of the Ojibwe people. I am proud to think of Jeanette as a fisherwoman, one of her many roles.