

Jane Linda Orr

A SHORT AUTOBIOGRAPHY – PART 1

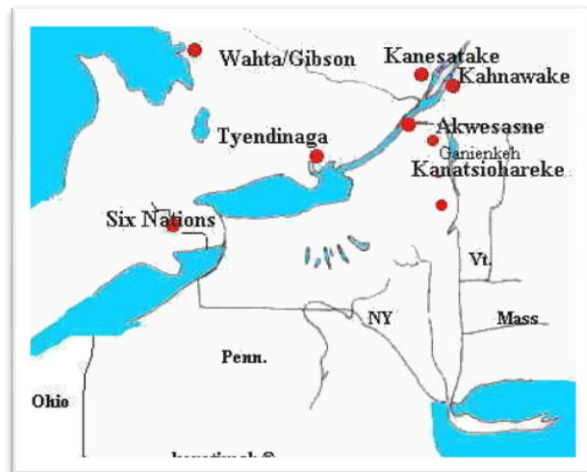
I was born June 8, 1950 in Detroit, Michigan, where I grew up. My father was 100 percent Mohawk Indian from a reservation at that time called Caughnawaga, Quebec, Canada, which name was changed to Kahnawake. My mother was three-quarters Micmac Indian and the rest are English, Irish and Scottish. She was born and raised on the reservation called Restigouche, New Brunswick, Canada.

When I was a little child, just three years old, I was taken away from my mother and father, which was part of the genocide at that time. My mother was able to get me back from the Italian people who raised me for five years, but she was never to try and get back a boy and girl that were adopted out and was warned if she tried she would be put in jail. My father died as an iron worker in Cleveland when I was a teenager.

I was a child who was raised in the Catholic Church and school and I believed in God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. My relationship with God was close. I loved singing so much as a little child that my mother would have to yell at me to stop singing in the middle of the night when everyone was trying to sleep. I was a very bright child and was in the first four in my class to get high marks. I think if I had good homework skills, I could have been the highest but we were not allowed to take home books and thus no homework. As I grew to be a teenager, I rebelled against the church and found fault in it, so that I could sin, but my love for God was intact.

By the time I had four children I had left a situation and moved into an empty house. This was the big turning point of my life. All we had was our clothes. I needed everything so I went searching. All the churches and organizations did not provide emergency furniture or items for the household, so I went to the Indian Center in Detroit and they gave me a phone number for a Sister Jean DePerno. I called her and felt instantly at ease and felt she had the answers to all my problems. We spoke for hours and she assured me that my house would be furnished in no time. It was. She also told me that I should visit her church and that many Native American Indians are members there. In my mind's eye, I could see Natives with their Native garbs in a church of which I could not conceive. Of course I had to go and see for myself. It was not what I expected because the Natives there, reminded me of the Mexicans in the Catholic Church that I attended as a child, so it was not an unusual sight. But I fell instantly in love with the place.

I didn't know anything about The Church of Jesus Christ¹, but it didn't matter to me. I couldn't get enough of the experiences that were told in their testimonies and I would invite myself to their homes just to hear more. I was consumed with the love I felt there and wanted more, and couldn't wait until the next Sunday so I could go to church. One Sunday, before Christmas, I joined some of the congregation on the podium to sing Christmas carols and I was singled out to sing a song alone. I was frightened and trembled as I sang and clung to the book for strength to get through it. From then on, I was called many times to sing with the same feelings but with another feeling that joined of falling into the song. As I sang, I would imagine myself in the presence of God, singing with the angels and I would fall into a euphoric mood and would lose my place and not know what was the next word or musical note. I would pray each time I had to sing so that my song would



¹ The Church of Jesus Christ, world headquarters in Monongahela, Pennsylvania

edify those who heard and would touch their hearts. I also had to keep a book to keep my finger on the next line so that I wouldn't lose my place. I realized the Lord was blessing me whenever I fell into that euphoric mood. This was the beginning of my life.

One night I was worrying how I would support myself since I was on welfare, and what I would do when the children grew and left home. I realized it was time to go back to school and be an example to my children. At the time I was doing odd jobs for extra money, being a gofer for a contractor who renovated homes. I was very much interested in electricity and how it works. So I studied a GED book and took the test and passed. Then I applied for my tuition waiver with the Native band to go to college. I went to Henry Ford Community College for three years and received my Associate's Degree in Electrical Science/Electronic and Robotics. I missed only one day of school which was hard for me to miss when I was taking calculus. The time when I didn't have a car to go to school, I rode my bike 14 miles even in winter, so that I would not miss a day.



Henry Ford Community College

Three years after I graduated, I was hired by Detroit Edison. I think I when I was hired, I was geared for failure because I was a double minority for their quota. I struggled through their program as I found a lot of prejudices working against me to fail. One day I was told that I knew as much as any one who was going through the program and to not give up. It was what I needed to hear and in three years, I passed the program to become what is called an AA operator. I had to learn everything about the electrical system and the equipment related to it and how the relays operate to make the system work and to know the various make, model and operation of the equipment connected to the electrical system including all the switchboards and relay operations and to be able to read all the diagrams, schematics and blueprints of all the stations involved and everything that is in the station, including the building itself. All this was meant for the community to receive a continuous source of electricity for their homes and businesses.

During that time of studying for the electrical job, I was laying in bed thinking to myself, what if? What if God called me now? What would our conversation be? I could imagine that he would say; Linda, you have tried a lot of things in your life, and there is not much you are afraid of. But you didn't try me. And I could see that God would turn me down. I didn't want that to happen, so what was I afraid of? I thought of the men and women in the Church and how they appeared to me as saintly, and I thought I couldn't be that way because I grew up so brash and tough-thinking. And the wrong way was a natural way of life for me, thinking it was right. I knew I had to start like a little child learning how to walk and that I knew I would fall many



Detroit River Belle Isle

times learning how to walk. With that analogy, I spoke my feelings that I would be getting on my knees many times asking for forgiveness of my sins. I was baptized September 11, 1983, in the Detroit River Belle Isle by Evangelist Joe Milantoni. I was asked at the river's edge if I believed in the Bible and Book of Mormon and I said yes even though I never had read the Book of Mormon. I had no clue what was in it, only that Jesus visited the Native peoples in this land many years ago. But in my heart, I believed it all to be true and I planned to find out what was in that book someday.

[Watch for Part 2]