

# Good Seed

## MANS's First Nation Teacher Links Her Conversion and Mission to Adventist Education



**SEEDS OF TRUTH** were planted in the life of Ramona MacKenzie during her elementary school days while attending Thunder Bay Academy in Ontario for Grades 1 through 6. Today she teaches Native Cultural Studies at Mamawi Atosketan Native School (MANS). Her Ojibway heritage provides a natural connection to the K–12 students at Canada's mission school in Alberta.

“Going to an Adventist school was the best thing that happened to me in my childhood,” says Ramona. “The environment was safe, so even if I was sick, I went to school.” That same tenacious attendance continues to be the pattern with Ramona's First Nations students and throughout MANS, principal Gail Wilton observes.

Sometimes we overlook the worth of our Seventh-day Adventist schools, but it was in an Adventist elementary school that the seeds of truth and change were planted in Ramona's life. At an early age Ramona was deeply touched by the Adventist understanding on the Sabbath. During her tumultuous teen years, she refused to attend churches of other faiths because they did not honour the Bible Sabbath. Her convictions remained dormant for several years and were even clouded by some less than stellar choices along the way, but she never forgot what she had learned in those early years.

### Education the Key to Change

By age 17, Ramona knew that she had to make some changes in her life. She accepted an invitation to live with an aboriginal Christian friend who led Ramona to express a pivotal heartfelt prayer to God and begin to live a life in Christ. “From here on, things began to change,” Ramona relates. “Education became the key for me.”

Ramona recognized and appreciated the diversity that she had experienced in her Seventh-day Adventist community. She proudly claims two families—her birth family and her “Christian family” that includes former teachers from Thunder Bay Academy. She has taken the good from each family and now extends the torch of Christian education to others. “Becoming a Seventh-day Adventist has been a huge blessing,” says Ramona.

Prior to pursuing an education degree, Ramona spent two years in South Korea on a mission assignment. She graduated from Canadian University College (now Burman University) in 2008 and taught in Port Hardy, B.C., for two years. In September 2013, Ramona accepted a position to teach Native Cultural Studies at MANS.

### Building Bridges and Mentoring

“I am responsible for helping the students connect who they are in their culture and how to relate with other cultures in their life journey,” says Ramona, who sees each day as a bridge-building experience. Ramona's cross-Canada life experiences have connected her to numerous key people who now help her mentor MANS students to make positive life choices.

Ramona smiles broadly and confidently as she reflects upon being able to continue the cycle of love, prayer, and dedication that she received. “I'm living a dream!” she beams. ■

*Linda Steinke writes for the Alberta Conference education department.*