

Emily Buermann with a story about her Great-grandmother's Most Beautiful Day

As told by Emily Buermann

White Earth Indian Reservation, Minnesota

Introduction: This story was collected as part of a collaborative effort to record the state of American lakes, rivers, and waterways as well an attempt to uncover what water means to Americans. Listen to other stories recorded by the [Minnesota Humanities Center](#) for the Stories from Main Street project, an initiative created by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service for its traveling exhibition "Water/Ways."

Story Narrative:

“Hello. My name is Emily Buermann, and I was born and raised in Becker County on the White Horse Reservation. I was given a water story to preserve for my generations, and I think it's a story that should be shared. My great-grandmother was born September 8, 1918 in a wigwam on the shores of Basswood Lake at Wild Rice Camp. She was born ... Her birth name was (foreign language 00:00:36). That translates to She Flies Across the Water.

As she grew older, she was given an English name, and that name was Isabelle Cordelia Bagley. She was later married to (inaudible 00:00:57) and she is buried under the name Cordelia Hatland. I was given her story to tell because she once told us what she thought heaven was like.

We asked her, ‘Grandma Cord’ we called her Grandma Cord. ‘Grandma Cord, if heaven is your most beautiful day what's heaven going to be for you?’ I thought she would say the day we moved into the house, a house with a real roof and a real floor or a real stove, or the day we got a car and didn't have to ride in a wagon anymore. Or I thought maybe the day we got air conditioning or electricity or running water. But she chose ... She said, ‘Heaven is going to be fish camp.’

I said, ‘What do you mean, fish camp?’ She said fish camp is where they went in the summer. They would move the wigwam and they would put it on the shores of the lake and the kids ... All day long the kids would play and swim and they would gather berries while their parents went fishing and gathered the fish. Then they would preserve the fish so they had something to eat in the winter. Fish camp in the hot summer.

I said, ‘Okay, the humid summer, all the mosquitoes, grandma, all the wood ticks, all the everything, the mosquito bites and sleeping and thunderstorms in a wigwam, and it's going to be fish camp?’ She said, ‘Yes.’ I said, ‘What about strawberry camp or what about maple sugar camp, where you got to eat candy? Once a year you got to eat candy. Or was it like hunting camp, you know, where it was warm with the fire?’ But

she insisted that it was going to be fish camp because kids could run free and they could be in the water.

She said, 'Heaven is going to be when you're hair smells like lake water. Heaven is going to be when your hair smells like lake water and you got sunburned on your shoulders and your cheeks and the smell of fresh fish frying and roasting over the fire and salt in your hands because you were helping preserve the fish, and it meant that your family was going to have food for the winter and everything ... The sun was shining and the sky was blue and everything was going to be okay, and that was fish camp and that was heaven.'

Asset ID #3892

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