My Grandma was a Medicine Woman; A Hundred Roots (2 Poems)

Tara Williamson
Fleming College (School of Law, Justice, and Community Services)

My Grandma Was a Medicine Woman

Lorraine Williamson (nee Swain) with Tara Williamson

She was a good medicine woman

People would come
From the States
Across Canada

They would bring her tobacco
  Material
  Blankets
  A gift

And you had to accept those gifts
Never no money exchanged for medicine

I remember
One year
Brandon Fair
In those days you put up tents

We were right next door to him
Camping
He had a brother
He had a sister
His parents had passed away

He came over
Grandma was making bannock over the fire

Because he was Cree
And she was Ojibwe
And the only two English words she knew was
Yes and No
He learnt the language
He started explaining

He had lost his parents

He said to her

Will you become my mom?

In a heartbeat

She said

Yes

She had just met him.

Five minutes.

That was the way she was.

She was a good medicine woman.
A Hundred Roots

Vina Eva Swain with Tara Williamson

My mother, Kaapiidashiik,
made a medicine,
holds a hundred things,
A hundred roots
Together.
A hundred roots.

For a good heart.
Even for TB.

My grandmother made that,
and my grandfather,
and my aunty,
and my mother

But it was lost when they died

People would come,
give material,
give what you have
(money was scarce)

Together.
A hundred roots.

For a good heart.
Even for TB.

Four, five, six ladies
Crush, pound, shred it -
Make that medicine!
Make that medicine in a big bundle
Make tea

Oh yeah, my mother used to make lots!
The one that made it got lots
But all these ladies fix it too
And pass it on to somebody that wants it
Just like a drugstore!
They had a big feast after they make that medicine.

Everything!

Rice puddin’ and meat,

Bannock, hot bannock

In the summertime

They sit outside

Have a big feast for the medicine they made

To say thank you

To cure the people

To keep them strong

And pray the medicine to work on them

Together.

A hundred roots.

For a good heart.

Even for TB.