



NATIVE WOMEN'S  
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES  
AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA



# Storytelling: Delores' Story



For years, communities have pointed to the high numbers of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has been honoured to work with families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls to share the story of their loved one. As part of the storytelling process, families' are also invited to share their experiences with the justice system, media, victim services and other institutional and community supports.

Storytelling is a way of teaching and learning. The stories shared by family members are intended to raise awareness, educate, and promote change. They have been told to honour the daughters, sisters, mothers and grandmothers that have been lost to violence and remember those still missing. This is what their stories tell us.

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The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) is honoured to work with families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls to share the story of their loved one. To view all of the stories shared, or for more information this work, please visit NWAC's website at [www.nwac.ca](http://www.nwac.ca).



# Remembered on Standing Buffalo:

## Delores Whiteman's Story

Delores "Lolly" Marie Whiteman was born on May 12, 1945, on the Standing Buffalo Dakota First Nation in Saskatchewan. Her family members have not seen or heard from her since the early 1980s. Delores's daughter Laura has been searching for her mother since the late 1980s, but has yet to find any answers.

Delores is the only child of Lena Whiteman, a single mother who died of tuberculosis when Delores was only two years old. After her mother's death, Delores lived with different relatives on the reserve where poverty, violence and alcoholism were common.

Despite these hardships, Delores searched for happiness in her life. Family and friends recall that Delores was always smiling, had a great sense of humour and was the life of the party. As a youth, Delores attended Lebret Indian Residential School, where she escaped the violence and alcoholism of the reserve. However, Lebret was not a place where Delores would have found the nurturing and guidance she needed to fulfill her dreams of becoming a nurse or working with children. Her experiences in residential school may have contributed to her decision to leave the reserve in 1962.

Around this time Delores became pregnant with her daughter, Laura. She delivered her in the Grey Nuns' Hospital in Regina. It must have been a difficult delivery, as the doctor had to use forceps. Delores kept Laura for almost one year, not much less time than she spent with her own mother as an infant. Delores was living in an apartment in downtown Regina when she had a visit from her grandfather, Paul Whiteman and his wife, Amelia Episkinew. They told Delores that they would keep the baby. They asked her to wait and said they would come back for Laura. When Delores's grandparents returned after a few days the apartment was empty and both Delores and Laura were gone without a trace. Laura was placed in foster care at this time. This was during the era known as the "60s Scoop," when it was not uncommon for "Indian" children to be removed in order to be placed with "white" families.

Very little information is known about Delores's life after she left Regina. Some family members recalled hearing rumours that Delores left for Edmonton, Vancouver or Toronto. Some even said they heard she went to the Northwest Territories. Other relatives reported that she had stayed in touch, writing letters postmarked from Edmonton in the late 1960s. She also visited her cousin on Piapot First Nation in 1963 or 1964. The cousin remembers Delores's visit with her new baby, Laura.

Although it was thought she was using another name, no one remembered what the name was. Relatives who lived in Vancouver reported that Delores had been visiting them and in fact left one of the old ladies, Mrs. Redman, with a photograph of herself and three children. When Laura spoke to the family, they remembered that she told them she was with a man and was visiting “from California.” That photograph depicted Delores with two Caucasian children and a small baby that appeared to be First Nations. One other relative has consistently stated he remembers hearing that she went to the Seattle area.

In 1987, Delores’s daughter Laura returned to Standing Buffalo Dakota First Nation after discovering this was her home community. After speaking to relatives and community members, Laura began to realize that her mother had not been seen or heard from in a very long time. In fact, many on the reserve seemed to have forgotten about her. Determined to locate her mother, Laura began to search phonebooks and the internet, placing thousands of calls across North America in search of her mother. She continued to talk to relatives and community members to gather some information about Delores’s life and disappearance. After several years of futile searching, Laura contacted police and attempted to file a missing persons report and to place a missing search with the Salvation Army. However, she was told repeatedly that as an adoptee she could neither file the missing persons report nor have access to information about her mother. She was told that because her adoption was a legal one, she was no longer considered to be “her daughter.”

In 1995, in response to these barriers, Laura asked Chief Mel Isnana to file a missing persons report in Regina. He agreed to do so without hesitation, yet it appears police still refused to take Delores’s disappearance seriously. There was no progress on Delores Whiteman’s case from 1995 to 2005, as police maintained that there was no substance to Delores’s case and therefore no reason to conduct a search.

Police inaction has forced Laura to conduct her own investigation, speaking to relatives, conducting private and online searches and pressing for a thorough investigation. In 2005, after the Robert Pickton case broke in Port Coquitlam and the Downtown Eastside, Laura contacted the Missing Persons Task Force to report her mother as a possible victim. Having known that she was in Vancouver and having heard speculation that she may have been working on the streets, Laura felt compelled to make this report. RCMP contacted Laura and had DNA taken to do a cross-check on the remains. Nothing was found and the RCMP felt that their thorough investigation turned up nothing that indicated Delores was missing or in harm. In fact, there was no information that could be found on Delores except that she was last seen and “seemed to be doing okay” when she was at the police station in Edmonton in 1987. This was a new piece of information for Laura and in following up on this information she discovered that the file had never been investigated in Regina when it was filed in 1995. Instead, it had been immediately transferred to Edmonton where it sat until 2005 when the Vancouver Missing Women’s Task Force requested it. When the file was returned to Edmonton, Laura contacted the Edmonton police only to learn that key information in the file is either missing or has been destroyed.

Like piecing together a puzzle, Laura began to collect information about her mother’s life and the circumstances leading up to her disappearance. Although many of the police officers she spoke to claimed that they did not have a reason to search for Delores and believed that she did

not want to be found, Laura feels that this is not the case. In one instance an investigator asked Laura, “Why are you looking? What, exactly, is it you hope to get out of this meeting?” As Laura says, “no matter how bad things are you always want to go back...home.” Laura has received support in posting her mother’s information with the Vancouver Missing Women’s website, where Delores’s photograph and information is part of the collage of faces of missing women and the Doe Network. As well, many relatives and friends have searched for “Lolly,” but without any new information or leads it is difficult to know where to look.

Despite this, Laura continues to search and continues to wait for answers. She often attends traditional ceremonies, smudges and prays to discover the truth about what happened to Delores. She still believes that one day the answers will come and that is why she will never stop searching.