

Children at Oka innocent victims

OHSWEKEN — Six Nations band councillor John Peters and Betty Doxtater, a public-spirited young woman from the reserve, have not forgotten the Mohawks at Oka.

Last summer they helped organize several food caravans to the Kanesatake reserve when the Quebec provincial police and the army tried to starve the Mohawks into submission. Now they are involved in making sure the Mohawk children have a merry Christmas.

Soon after the Surete du Quebec unsuccessfully stormed a barricade near Oka Quebec, they threw up a cordon around the whole reserve.

The Mohawk barricade was a protest against the town of Oka's plan to build a golf course and condominiums on land which the Mohawks used as a cemetery. It also involved the cutting down of a fine stand of old pine trees. The pine trees were also on land which the Mohawks had never surrendered.

As more police arrived, the cordon around the reserve was used to harass and delay the residents.

The standoff began on July 11 and continued all summer. It became impossible for people to go to work and a high percentage of them lost their jobs.

The hardest hit were the most innocent victims — the children.

One of the key negotiators in the summer-long crisis was the petite Kanesatake resident, Ellen Gabriel. She and several other Mohawk women are currently on a speaking tour, sponsored by the United Church of Canada.

It would be very presumptuous of us who have only read newspaper reports to dispute what Ms. Gabriel has to say. She was right in the middle of the turmoil from start to finish.

Dec. 7/90
George
Beaver



In Hamilton last week, Ms. Gabriel said: "The issue in the standoff was not guns or warriors. It was the land. It always was the land but somehow, that got lost during the standoff and the media focused on the warriors and the Canadian government's propaganda."

In regard to the Mohawks demands she stated: "Our only demand was that once

the barricades came down the Canadian government would commit itself to negotiate a land claim settlement. We did not make any demands involving any other community. That was Canadian government propaganda. All we wanted was to save our pines."

Ms. Gabriel said that they were freedom fighters, not terrorists. "We have jurisdiction on our land and we have a right to defend our land and our lives and that's what we did. We were willing to die for our beautiful pines," she added.

She also reminded the audience that the Mohawks did not fire the first shot.

Because of the police barricades many Kanesatake Mohawks were unable to work on neighboring farms during the summer harvest.

Now they are not eligible for unemployment insurance. Again the innocent victims are the children.