

# Centre preserves languages

Last week my niece Lynda invited me to visit her in Cleveland. She works for the Cleveland Plain Dealer, their daily newspaper. After many years downtown, they have finished building on a new 60-acre site in the suburbs.

The building was recently completed and even President Bill Clinton was invited to the opening. He came too. The owners must be very important people.

After the U.S. president and the other big wigs had had their day, the ordinary employees were given a giant picnic and tour of the new plant.

It was to this that I was invited by my niece. Each employee could invite members of their family. My niece took eight of us.

Besides me, there was my sister Gladys Butler and her granddaughter Heidi Beaver, another sister, Alice Maracle, a friend Al Sault, Lisa Yellow Eagle, and Lynda's little grandson Donovan whom the family calls Baby Cong.

Our little group was representative of several First Nations. Al Sault is a Mississauga Ojibway. Lisa Yellow Eagle's father is a Sioux (Soo) and her mother is a Navajo (Naw-vaw-ho). The rest of us are Six Nations Iroquois.

When I learned that Lisa



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could speak Navajo, I asked her how to say "hello." She said something which sounded to me like "yuh-tay". I may or may not have it right.

Lisa at 18 is a year older than Lillian and in August is going to attend University of Colorado. She intends to major in psychology.

In her spare time my niece Lynda is trying to keep the American Indian Centre going in Cleveland. She is the acting director.

The centre was originally started in 1969 by Russell Means who was a co-founder of the American Indian Movement. Lately many of its programs have been discontinued for lack of volunteers.

An emergency food program to distribute food to the needy is one of the last ones left.

The centre is very close to collapse. The former director Jerome War Cloud has left Cleveland for South Dakota.

My niece is also active in civil rights action for native people. In a couple of weeks she is going to a protest march in Washington, D.C. A few people from Six Nations will also be going to show solidarity with their brothers south of the border.

Meanwhile, back at the Cleveland Plain Dealer picnic, thousands of us gaped at state of the art printing presses four stories high. Then we sat around listening to various types of bands in huge tents while we ate ribs, chicken wings, salads and watermelon.

There were also jugglers and clowns making animals out of long thin balloons and giving them to children.

All of the food, drinks, rides and other entertainment were free. The best part was that we did not have to sit and listen to speeches like the big wigs had to do at their official opening a few days before.

*Our Town is an Expositor feature which provides a forum for news and views from some of the smaller centres in the region. George Beaver is a freelance writer who lives on the Six Nations reserve.*