

# The money pit: an Indian band's story

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*SAMSON CREE RESERVE HOBEBEMA ALTA-Tamara Okeynan's wooden cross gradually darkened in the sun, from white to grey. Then one day it was gone, lost somewhere in the wild grass, maybe even buried when a grader widened the road.*

No one even slows to look any more. The cars speed by, each raising a rooster trail of dust that hangs in the prairie sky.

Almost a year ago today, Tamara was born on the side of the road to a woman who didn't have a car to drive to hospital, or a telephone to call for help. Death came within hours.

## HAVES AND HAVE-NOTS

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Tamara's death was news. It was

news because the Samson Cree Reserve, where she was born is one of the richest in Canada. Based on pure mathematics, it would be hard to understand how anyone on the reserve could sink to the depths of poverty that afflicted Tamara's parents.

In 1996, the year before Tamara was born, band revenue exceeded \$97 million--including more than \$47-million in federal and provincial funding. Millions more came from the reserve's oil and gas hold-

ings, plus a hefty investment portfolio that includes real estate and a trust company.

In theory, that money belongs to every person on the reserve, to be shared equally.

But that's not how it has played out. Instead, Samson Cree is a community divided by politics and money.

On one side, there are people such as Tamara's family, living in poverty. Nearly 80 per cent of the

*(Continued on page 14)*