

My father (Clarence Napoleon Robideau) was taken to the Mission School in Spirit Lake North Dakota (see attached - photo with classmates ca. 1932) along with many of his seventeen siblings, although he didn't recall attending classes together in any given year.

As a young boy, my father would tell me stories about how 'mean' the nuns were to the kids but that he generally 'stayed under the radar and avoided punishment' when most were being disciplined for speaking their language or crying to go home. He ran away from the school when he was 15 years old, lied about his age, and joined the Navy during world war II. He was posted on a sea-going tugboat and was discharged shortly after turning 18-years old (1945). He heavily drank most of his life and would sometimes speak to me in the Dakota language (but only when he was drinking). You could say he was a functioning alcoholic who worked hard (when he worked) and died of bone cancer at the age of 79.

Where he never married my mother, he did marry a woman from the Lummi reservation (near Bellingham Washington) who treated me as her son (they were married 35-years before she passed away).

I spent most summers and several school years with them on Lummi and in Seattle Washington and I still have a lot of extended family on the reservation (but have not returned for more than 25-years). My father inherited a plot of land on Lummi (from my stepmother when she passed away) - and I inherited this land along with an additional plot of land on my father's reservation - Lake Traverse (Wahpeton-Sisseton) reservation in South Dakota. He always wanted to take me back to Sisseton to meet and know our family there, but we never made the trip.

Where I only knew eight of my father's siblings (his mother and father had 17 children), those that I did know drank heavily and had serious socialization issues (problems) that prevented them from moving on or achieving much in their lives (except for my aunt Ida "Robideau" Stiffarm - she was straight and narrow and the kindest person I ever knew). Many of my father's siblings died young - either drowned, succumbed to cancer, or were killed in alcohol-related accidents or ailments.

My father, along with his siblings, were a lost generation that never found their way home.

Rodney A. Robideau
Sisseton Oyate
Dakota band of the Sioux Nation



Sr. Coleman

1938