



Profile Of A Caregiver: Jacqueline Leech *by Cassandra Van Dyck*

Jacqueline Leech has a bright outlook on life. A Tseil-Waututh elder, she spends much of her time speaking to interviewers and the public on behalf of her community. Jackie holds a wealth of knowledge and has spent most of her life caring for others.

When asked who she is and what her family is like, she responds without hesitation. “My name is Jacqueline Leech, my maiden name is Thomas. I have three sons, six granddaughters, two great-grandsons.” It becomes clear very quickly that family is an integral part of who she is. Jackie’s house is filled with pictures of her family and mementos. Her diploma and awards of recognition are laid out on the dining room table, each solidifying examples of her work ethic and value to her community. She explains her accomplishments with pride, but spends the most time describing her loved ones. She shares pictures of her wedding day and large family photographs on the wall, telling stories about each person pictured. She has a calm and strong presence, and not more than a minute goes by before her mouth breaks in to a smile and a chuckle quickly follows.

At different times in her life, Jackie has been a care-giver for children, family members, her husband and her son. When she was 60, she decided to enrol in Gateway Careers’ Home Care Diploma program. While attending school, Jackie was diagnosed with colon cancer. Thankfully, she didn’t need chemo-therapy and was able to return to school after surgery. “So that was a challenge,” she says of the experience. “So, then I got over that and went back to school. I always tell people I did that so I wouldn’t have to be a grandma babysitter.” Jackie breaks in to laughter. “I tried to get a job but of course you’re 60, who wants to hire a 60 year-old person? But Pyramid did hire me. The second week I was called and told to go to a house to do bed transfers - three in a row, one right after the other. I phoned the coordinator and told her if you do that one more time I’ll quit. I’m too old to be transferring three people. And she said, ‘But you’re the only one who can do it!’ So I said, what are you doing with the other ones?! How are you training them? They’re all younger than me!” Her mouth breaks in to a smile and she laughs again, throwing her arms in the air. It’s not that she isn’t aware of the hardships in her life; it’s that she chooses to focus on the humour and positivity that surrounds her. Her outlook on life is infectious.

Perhaps part of the reason Jackie has such a positive outlook on life is because of the support she receives from her community. She says she does not struggle with asking for assistance, though she acknowledges that other people she knows may. Jackie and her family have help with everything from health care needs to garden maintenance. “[The band] really helps you with everything. They keep phoning over here to see if you need anything... they even come for the elders to do our lawns and cut the bushes. This community is so easy to get to – the lab is

right up the road. We're fortunate. If we lived up north, can you imagine if we had to come down here?" Jackie lived off reserve for 60 years.

"I looked after children right after I finished school in my younger years. The principal of the school told me some people were looking for a live in housekeeper to look after the children and take care of the house so that's what I did. Three boys, can you imagine? And I had three boys. The younger one couldn't say Jacqueline so he used to call me 'Queenie.' I was fixing and changing all the beds, so I used to put it all on the stairs and we'd slide down. Did their mother ever get after me! We had a little fun." Jackie smiles at the memory and laughs again.

Jackie takes things in stride. When asked how she takes care of herself, she laughs and says that sometimes she yells, "...but they're used to that!" She shrugs and explains, "Sometimes it gets frustrating... but why worry about it? Because if you worry about it, it gets worse! I learned that years ago – don't worry. I was talking to my son once and I couldn't remember something. He came up the stairs and said, 'Haven't you heard that song? Don't worry, be happy!' So that's what I do every now and then'.