



Amazing Montanans—Biography

Minerva Allen

Storyteller and teacher Minerva Allen was one of Everall Fox's teachers in high school. Everall is now the Academic Dean of Students at Little Big Horn College. He remembers asking her, when he was in high school, how the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine kept warm in their lodges, especially in below-zero weather, before electric or gas heat or even wood stoves. "I remember her saying that on top of having a fire pit in the middle, they would also insulate the inside of the walls with hides or blankets. On the outside, they would line the outer walls with pine branches or boughs to act as further insulation."

It was in this setting, with children burrowed snugly under robes and furs, safe from dangerous, freezing cold, howling wind and deepening snow, that the ages-old custom of

Montana Indian storytelling frequently took place. The elders and other grown-ups told ancient stories to their children both to entertain them and to teach them about the history of who they are, what they believe, and what is important to always remember and pass on. Minerva absorbed the storytelling custom from her grandmother, mother, and aunts. She became a very, very good storyteller by sharing her stories and information over and over, with her own children and grandchildren and with students, such as Everall. She also tells her stories at gatherings, workshops, and meetings of teachers. She will never stop telling stories to people. She knows that stories reveal the history, languages, customs, and cultures of Montana Indians. By sharing and teaching them, they will live.



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Photo courtesy of Minerva Allen

Minerva spent many years of her life preparing to be a teacher. She studied in Michigan, Utah, and Montana, earning both a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree. One of the academic areas important to her is early childhood education. She went on to be involved with certifying both Head Start and day care teachers, in other words helping make certain that the people who want to teach young children are very well qualified to do so. She also taught at

(continued)

many different levels in the Hays/Lodge Pole Schools. Regardless of her students' age levels, they heard her stories.

There are not many people left in Montana who can speak the Montana Indian languages of Assiniboine and Gros Ventre. Minerva is one of the few who can, and like her story telling, she has continuously shared her knowledge of Native languages and promoted bilingual (speaking more than one language) education. On the national and state levels, people who are responsible to help schools plan what students should learn highly respect her background, skill, and knowledge in the areas of bilingual education, English as a second language, and reading. It seems she is always giving something back to her community and to the state of Montana. She also shares her knowledge of plants and herbs, used in traditional Montana Indian ways for medicine, her doll collection from various tribes, writing poetry, and how to make and play Assiniboine games.

Minerva Allen loves to tell stories about Inkdomi, the Assiniboine trickster character who fools people and animals for his own purposes, but always gets punished for his selfish actions. You can read the story "Inkdomi and the Buffalo" in the book *How The Morning and Evening Stars Came To Be*. Here is the beginning of that story:

"Once, long ago, while Inkdomi was on a journey, he saw a herd of buffalo. He had been walking for two days without anything to eat and was very hungry. Inkdomi began to think how he could kill one of the buffalo. Finally, he had an idea. As he walked toward the buffalo, he started to cry. ..."

If Minerva could tell you the rest of this story, she would want you to enjoy it, remember it, and share it.

"My goal is to leave for the new generation stories, history, and culture about their people and to feel the beauty of life and its surroundings."