

WAKE SERVICE

Friday, March 28, 2025 5:00 pm
Margaret Henderson Parish Hall,
Opaskwayak, MB

FUNERAL SERVICE

Saturday, March 29, 2025 1:00 pm
Church of the Redeemer,
Opaskwayak, MB
Presider: Rev. Charlie Lathlin
Music Ministry:
Russell Cook Memorial Singers

INTERMENT

Emmanuel Cemetery, Opaskwayak, MB

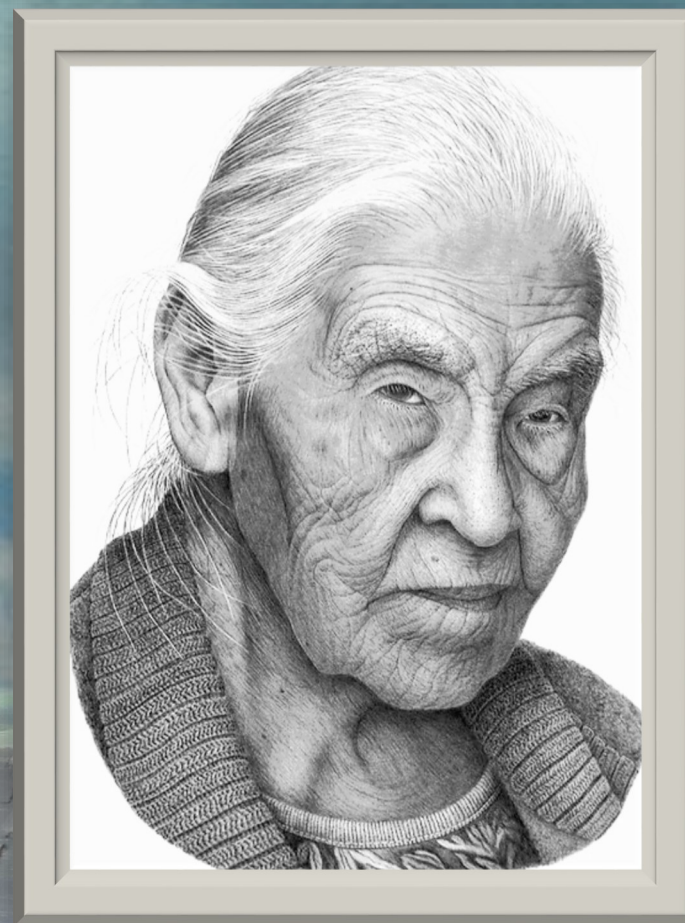
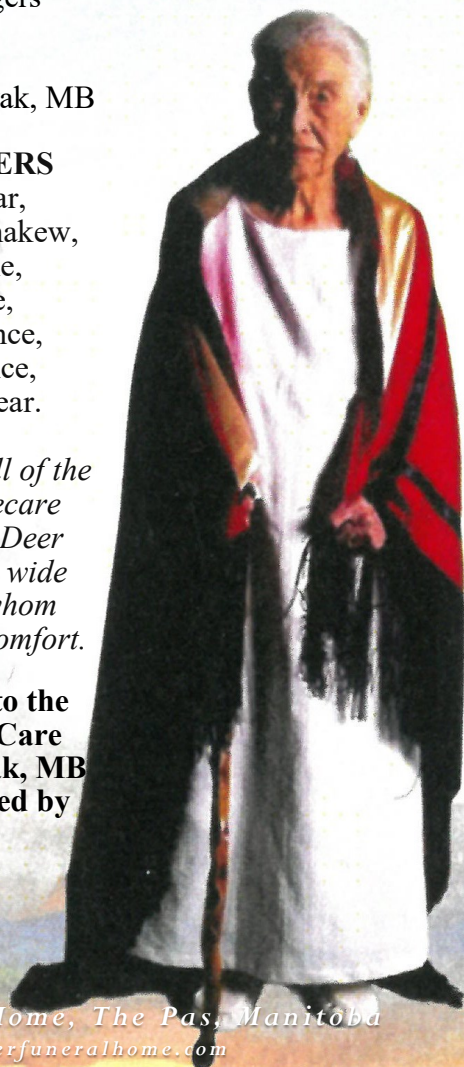
HONORARY PALLBEARERS

Helen Burgess, Belinda Bear,
Sharon Stevenson, Donna Ahenakew,
Ruth Madill, Maya Fontaine,
Anik Aubin, Leslie Spence,
Monica Spence, Dawne Spence,
Sekwan Spence, Laura Spence,
Christine Spence, Beverly Bear.

The family would like to thank all of the caregivers including her homecare nurses, the Prime Program at Deer Lodge, and kind visitors in her wide network of support, some of whom regularly delivered meals and comfort.

In lieu of flowers, donations to the Rod McGillivray Memorial Care Home, Box 10790, Opaskwayak, MB R0B 2J0, would be appreciated by Ruth's family.

Front: Ruth Elizabeth Spence by Gerald Kuehl
Front: Family Cabin by Ruth E. Spence
Inside: Ruth's last painting—untitled
Back: Ruth's portrait from the Human Rights Museum in Winnipeg



In Loving Memory of
Ruth Elizabeth Spence
(nee Bear)
February 11, 1918—February 22,



Hemauer Funeral Home, The Pas, Manitoba
www.hemauerfuneralhome.com

In Loving Memory of
Ruth Elizabeth Spence (nee Bear)

February 11, 1918—February 22, 2025

*"Let our hearts be calm. Hear our prayers,
O Great Spirit, as we bow before your presence."*

Ruth Elizabeth Spence (nee Bear) was born on Monday, February 11, 1918, on the Little Red River Reserve (Montreal Lake Cree Nation), 40 miles northeast of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

"Bette" will be greeted in heaven by her parents William Bear and Nora (Roberts) and her husband Ahab Spence. Bette is also predeceased by her sisters: Mary, Florence, Dorothy, Charlotte, Mabel and Grace and brothers; Edgar, Gordon, Allen, Leslie, Edmund and Clarence; and by her husband Ahab and children William, June and Byron.

Bette, her siblings and Ahab were all fluent Nehiyawewin speakers.

Mom is survived by three of her six children: Janet Fontaine (her caregiver of 20-plus years), Bruce Spence, Barry Spence; son-in-law Claude Aubin; generations of grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren. She is also lovingly remembered by her daughters-in-law, Wendy Murray and Barbara Bowes.

Bette was unique. She endured tuberculosis and survived hospitalization from ages 5 to 11 in Prince Albert and Fort Qu'Appelle (SK); attending day school at Little Red River Reserve then moving on to the Brandon Indian Residential School. Bette was born with limited vision which later became complete blindness. This did not deter her from taking the steam train to Toronto to attend Deaconess House following high school. She memorized the lectures because she could not see the chalkboard and her determination served her belief that education was a lifelong pursuit. Her academic life continued, and in 1979 Bette achieved her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Manitoba.

In Prince Albert, Reverend Ahab Spence lent a hand to a woman who had tripped – he had just met a Bear. Grandpa Spence and she married, and despite Bette having been told by her doctors to have no children, she and Grandpa Spence welcomed six children, and were happily married for 60 years.

Bette made homes for her family in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario, from Stanley Mission, Little Pine, Paynton, Wilkie, Battleford, North Battleford, Sioux Lookout, Saskatoon, Regina (twice), Ottawa, to once more moving back to Winnipeg to live out the rest of her days.

Bette had multiple careers besides being a homemaker with cooking, baking, expert sewing and first aid skills. In Stanley Mission, Bette kept the home fires burning from her early days, when her husband used to leave to visit the trappers, to being in cities, small towns, and reserves. Like most minister's wives of her day, she assisted in taking the lead role in youth auxiliary groups in numerous Anglican congregations. She was also house mother at the Pelican Lake Residential School, youth counselor at Dales House Regina, community developer for the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, Native Student Advisor at the University of Manitoba, resident elder and Social Animation and Linguistics coordinator at the U of M, women's elder at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (before it was called the First Nations University of Canada), a storyteller, a lifelong artist, a voice actor for the Royal Saskatchewan Museum in Regina and delivered the opening and closing prayers in Cree in the First Nations film which welcomes visitors at the National Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg.

Bette prepared for her final departure by taking communion days before leaving on her heavenly journey.

Thank you to our mother for waiting until her 107th birthday to give kind words to the grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and to blow out candles on her cake. She lived her life in wonder at nature and the gifts of the Creator.

Rest in Peace. You are home now.

— her last painting ...

RES 14 June 2019