



Olive Patricia Dickason

Honorary Doctor of Letters

Born in Winnipeg, Olive Dickason is widely acknowledged as the key figure in making Aboriginal History serious study in Canada's academic world.

She has had to face much adversity in her life and, throughout, she has persevered in the roles of student, journalist, mother, scholar, elder, and role model.

After losing everything they owned during the Great Depression, her family moved to the Interlake region and then Northern Manitoba to live off the land. A 12-year-old Dickason, her sister, and her mother took on the roles of trapping and fishing, providing food for the family.

"Living in the bush as I did during my adolescent years, I very soon learned that survival depended upon assessing each situation as it arose, which calls for common sense and realism," says Dickason. "You neither give up nor play games."

Encouraged by mentor, Father ("Père") Athol Murray, Dickason decided to finish high school in Saskatchewan, prior to pursuing post-secondary education. She completed a BA in French and Philosophy at Notre Dame College, which was an affiliate of the University of Ottawa.

Dickason first became aware of her Métis ancestry as a young adult upon meeting some Métis relatives in Regina. Honouring her ancestors properly became a goal that would give her future academic work the deepest personal meaning. But before that, she entered the workforce.

She began a 24-year career in journalism at the *Regina Leader-Post* and subsequently, worked as a writer and editor at *The Winnipeg Free Press*, *The Montreal Gazette*, and *The Globe and Mail*. She promoted coverage of First Nations and Women's issues, becoming the Women's Editor at both *The Montreal Gazette*, and later *The Globe and Mail's* daily newspaper and magazine.

At age 50, Dickason decided to continue her education, entering the Graduate program at the University of Ottawa. She had to struggle with faculty preconceptions regarding Aboriginal History – including arguments that it did not exist – before finally finding a professor to act as her academic advisor.

Dickason completed her Master's degree at the University of Ottawa in 1972, at the age of 52. She went on to successfully defend her Doctoral Thesis, entitled *The Myth of the Savage*.

Dickason then authored *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from the Earliest Times*, the most definitive text on the subject at the time, and still widely in use.

Dickason taught at the University of Alberta from 1975 to 1992, and is currently an adjunct professor for the University of Ottawa.

"My experience with the Canadian university system has been a very positive one," says Dickason. "University totally changed my life, from fishing and trapping in the bush, to becoming a newspaper reporter and finally, a professor. Its openness to students in all walks of life made possible things I had only dreamed of."

Just part of Dickason's formal recognition includes being inducted as a member in the Order of Canada, and earning a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Aboriginal Achievement Foundation.

The University of Winnipeg is delighted to present Olive Dickason with an honorary Doctor of Letters.