



Judy Klassen

Lives in Steinbach, Manitoba

Aboriginal Heritage: Oji-Cree

Received RBC Award in 2008-2010

*Education: Final year earning a BComm, majoring in
Aboriginal business from the University of Manitoba*

Judy Klassen has a message for any woman who wants to go back to school: "I did it and so can you!"

After running her own Laundromat on her Manitoba First Nations Reserve for five years, she pursued a long-held goal to attend university. "I grew up knowing I had to get a degree," she says. Then as a small business owner, she came face-to-face with her community's poor economy and believed a university education would help her understand the related issues.

"At first I thought I only had one goal but my education became like a big oak tree with branches of endless possibilities." Such reflections extend beyond Judy's own experience: "Core values that were taken away from us as Aboriginal people can now be blended with many good systems that are in place in this society. We can create something new and unique for our people. That's what I hope to do."

It hasn't been easy for Judy. As the mother of six, commuting from the reserve to university was difficult. Moral support from her parents and children -- including her eldest who is attending university with her -- helped greatly, as did the RBC Award. "It closed the gaps, especially for last minute babysitters and other emergency money," she says. Then in the summer of 2012 Judy worked for RBC. She is now thinking about becoming a manager for one of RBC's northern branches, though her professors are encouraging her to become a parliamentary assistant, upon graduation. "So many doors have opened...more than I thought possible," she admits. "I can't wait till I get my degree and see where it leads."