



Nishnawbe Aski Nation  
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## **NEWS RELEASE**

Tuesday September 5, 2017

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **NAN, DOWNIE FAMILY, MOURN PASSING OF AGNES WENJACK, MOTHER OF CHANIE "CHARLIE" WENJACK**

**THUNDER BAY, ON:** Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler and the Downie family expressed heartfelt condolences following the passing of Agnes Wenjack, mother of Chanie "Charlie" Wenjack.

"We were saddened to learn of Agnes' passing and our thoughts and prayers are with the Wenjack family and the community of Marten Falls First Nation," said Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler. "Like many families whose children were lost to the Indian Residential School system, Agnes waited a lifetime for an explanation of why her son's brief life had to end the way it did. She never received an answer, but we pray that she found some comfort having lived to see Chanie's story immortalized as a catalyst for reconciliation, and a lasting tribute to all Residential School students who never made it home."

Agnes Wenjack, 89, passed away on September 1 at Geraldton District Hospital. Visitation will be held this evening from 7-9 p.m. at Fawcett Funeral Home. Funeral service will be held Wednesday at 11 a.m. with interment to follow at Pinegrove Cemetery.

Twelve-year-old Chanie died on October 22, 1966 after fleeing Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School in northwestern Ontario. Travelling on foot in an attempt to make the 1,000-kilometre journey home to Ogoki Post, his body was found on October 23 along railroad tracks approximately 60 kilometres from the school near Kenora, Ontario.

Chanie's story received national attention following the 1967 Maclean's article "The Lonely Death of Charlie Wenjack". Interest was renewed last year by famed singer Gord Downie, who commemorated the 50th anniversary of Chanie's death with his "Secret Path" multimedia project, launched in Marten Falls last year with members of the Wenjack family.

"On behalf of my brothers Gord and Pat, and the entire Downie family, I send our condolences and love to the Wenjack family on the recent passing of Agnes Wenjack," said Mike Downie, a documentary filmmaker and co-creator of the Secret Path. "May her strength, love and devotion help guide and comfort you on your life's long journey."

Secret Path includes an album, graphic novel and animated film depicting Chanie's short life, and has received rave reviews and awards. Proceeds will be donated to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba. The Wenjack family also helped launch the Gord Downie and Chanie Wenjack Fund supporting reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples.

Last month, NAN Chiefs mandated the renaming of the Oshki-Pimache-O-Win Education & Training Institute to "Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute" to honour Chanie, the Wenjack family, and the Marten Falls community.

For more information on the Secret Path project: [www.secretpath.ca](http://www.secretpath.ca)

To view the Chanie Wenjack Heritage Minute: [www.historicacanada.ca](http://www.historicacanada.ca)

To donate to the Gord Downie and Chanie Wenjack Fund: [www.downiewenjack.ca](http://www.downiewenjack.ca)

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