Dave Boda, 44, grew up in Petoskey, Michigan. His mother, a nurse, and his father, a machinist, had eight children, with Dave and his twin brother being the fifth and six children born. Dave is a member of the Grand Traverse Bay Band of Ottawa Chippewa. Dave is currently a senior at Northern Michigan University majoring in Aviation maintenance with minors in Welding and Native American Studies. In a recent presentation in his NAS-295 Special Topics, History of Indian Boarding School Education class, Dave discussed what life was like at boarding school. His story is one that can be related to by many other Native Americans who grew up away from home at boarding schools.

Dave’s older siblings attended a local Catholic school and Dave attended public school in Petoskey. In his senior year of high school Dave and his mother decided to send him and his younger sister to an Indian boarding school. Dave’s mother can tell the story of what boarding school life was like because she was a student at Flandreau Indian Boarding School in Flandreau, South Dakota. She was comfortable in the decision to let Dave attend the same Indian boarding school that she had. The system had undergone changes for the better since Dave’s mom had been a student. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) offered to pay the cost of flying Dave and his siblings to South Dakota. Dave’s mom accompanied him on the plane ride along with three other students from Michigan.

Dave recalls that it was a difficult time getting used to the routine at the school. The days were regimented with school work, industrial training and chores. He states, “A typical day would start at 6:30a.m. with the morning wake-up being sounded across the intercom system. Then we had an hour and a half to get dressed, make our beds and be at breakfast. Breakfast was from 7a.m.-7:30a.m. with class starting at 8a.m.” The curriculum covered general academic studies such as English, Mathematics, U.S. History, which we had Native content. Mathematics, Lunch time came at 11:50a.m. and lasted till 12p.m. It was time for industrial training. Training ranged from topics such as automotive and welding to sewing and culinary classes. Classes typically went until 4p.m. which gave students an hour before dinner. Dave recalls, “We did not have much free time because when we were not in class we were doing our chores, mainly cleaning the floors, mopping, buffing and waxing.”

Flandreau had about 1,000 students enrolled at the time Dave and his younger sister attended. Classroom sizes were twenty students per one teacher. The majority of teachers were Native Americans who had also grown up going through the boarding school experience. There were grades 9-12 offered at the school as any other typical high school. Dave says there were not the outbreaks of diseases as one might hear about when boarding schools were new and students died but there were the typical colds that got passed around. Dave also remembers that the food was not very good at school. Persirable items were bought cheaply and the meat that was served was very fatty. Leftovers from the week were too expensive to obtain so students made due with what the school provided. The school allowed the students to hold some traditional ceremonies. Dave says that being away from home and his family made him homesick but having his sister at the school did help. He kept in touch with his mother and siblings back home by writing letters. Spending Thanksgiving and Christmas at the boarding school also contributed to his homesickness.

Dave graduated from Flandreau in 1981. He states, “I didn’t feel more of Indian or less of an Indian when I left the boarding school.” Dave went on to Southwestern Polytechnic Indian Institute secondary education in Albuquerque, New Mexico for four years. There he received a certificate of completion in electronics. He plans to graduate from NMU in December of 2007 and start working in the aviation industry. For Dave, as for many other former students, a boarding school education was a springboard into higher education and a better life.

For my NMU Native American Studies Service Learning Project this nihin, we planted an okosimaan gitigaan (Pumpkin Garden) for the following reasons:

- * Using the medicine wheel as a tool for the stages of a garden (in which we also planted a four-colored flower medicine wheel in the center of our gitigaan)
- * Learning the difference between heirloom and hybrid ministaakaan (seeds) and about several pumpkin varieties (we also planted native, heirloom sunflowers)
- * Composting (And yes, there is a word for “compost” in Ojibwe—oonwiwewin – neenawanikiwewin)
- * Installing a zhinghah (balsam) weather stick for predicting fair or foul weather
- * Making a “scare-away girl”, oshaakaanikiwewin (since traditionally, it was the women and girls in the Ojibwe culture who scared away the crows)

We used Ojibwewin garden terminology throughout our six workshops and each child went home with an Ojibwe garden glossy. Even during our snacking times, of wholesome food and drinks from the Marquette Food Coop, we carried on conversations using the language when it was known.

Throughout heat waves, hailstorms, and drought our little gitigaan has been growing, but we’re not counting our okosimaan until they’re harvested. From this experience, I can see that new “seeds” have been planted in the children. It seems that they have grown closer and have more respect for Maamaa Aki now. I can see it in their smiles when they are in the garden. We are hoping that this little gitigaan will be the beginning of a larger community garden.