

Hi! I'm Clara Christensen

I live in Keewatin,
Ontario, Canada

BY MELVIN LEAVITT
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From her backyard, Clara Christensen, 11, enjoys a view pretty enough for a calendar page. Her home sits on the brink of a hill overlooking Lake of the Woods, a vast sheet of clear water that reaches south into the United States and west into Manitoba. In summertime the sun glitters on the water. In winter the lake shines with snow-covered ice.

The lake and surrounding woods are a dreamland for an active, outdoor-loving person like Clara. She swims, rows, fishes, hikes, and camps in the summer. In the winter she enjoys skating, snowmobiling, cross-country and downhill skiing, and sliding down steep hills on carpet blocks. Winter temperatures dip as low as -40°C at night, and snow lies between four and seven feet (1–2 m) deep. And yet fall and winter are Clara's favorite seasons.


This rugged outdoor girl has many indoor interests as well. She enjoys




reading, knitting, and playing the recorder and piano. She has set a goal of learning to play all the hymns and Primary songs. Clara has a soft heart and delights in nurturing both people and animals. She often babysits her cousins, and when real children aren't available, she mothers her collection of dolls. Cats are another great love. Lilo, Hero, and Hope adore her and often sleep on her bed. Noah's ark is her favorite scripture story because of all the animals. When Clara grows up she wants to work with either babies or cats.

Whatever she does, she will do it well because she sticks to a task until it is done right. This quality has pulled her through some tough challenges. Clara was diagnosed with childhood apraxia of speech. This means that although she knew what she wanted to say, the signals became scrambled somehow between her brain and her mouth so she couldn't speak clearly. Clara has spent countless hours learning how to move her jaw, lips, and tongue to make sounds properly and blend those sounds into words. This has been very hard work, but with her parents' help, she has practiced relentlessly and continues to do so. She now speaks well, though some words still require a great effort.


Last year the children in Clara's



I love my cats, Lilo, Hero, and Hope, and my dog, Puff.



This is my Grandma Caroline. She's my Primary teacher.



Please meet my sister Josie and my mom. My sister Carly is away at college.

grade-four class were assigned to give four-to-five-minute speeches. Clara chose to give a speech on the Holocaust, which she presented as if she were a girl in a concentration camp. When she first rehearsed her speech, it took eight minutes and 40 seconds to give because many of the words were hard to say. She practiced it over and over. The speech slowly grew shorter as she learned to say the words fluently. She finally presented the speech in four minutes and 40 seconds, and her classmates chose her to represent them in front of the whole school. When she did, the entire student body broke into wild applause. Many of them



**I like ice-skating and knitting—
but not at the same time!**



and her progress seemed miraculous. “The principal was crying,” Clara’s mom recalls. “Clara’s grade-two teacher was crying. Her grade-four teacher was cheering. It was such a victory—one of the greatest moments of my life!”

What did Clara learn from the experience? “Keep trying,” she counsels children everywhere. “Never give up.”

Of course, prayer was also a vital part of Clara’s triumph. She has great faith in Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Primary, home evenings, scripture study, and her parents’ teachings have helped. Her older sisters have made a difference too, both through their good examples and their reading materials. As soon as Carly, 18, and Josie, 15, turned 12 in their turn, they began putting *New Era* Posters on their mirrors. Clara has also memorized seminary scripture mastery scriptures and learned President Hinckley’s six B’s with her sisters.

Her father is the branch president, and her mother is the Young Women president, so Clara stays involved in branch activities. The Kenora Branch is small during fall, winter, and spring. In fact, Clara is usually the only member of her Primary class, which is taught by her grandmother, the Primary

had known Clara since grade one,

president. But in the summertime, when thousands of tourists

pour in to enjoy Lake of the Woods, the branch fills up with visitors each Sunday. Clara basks in all the wonderful new friendships. The family stays close to the Church all year long by attending stake activities in Winnipeg, Manitoba, some two and a half hours to the west. Coming home at night, they often see the northern lights dancing in the sky.

Clara also stays close to her extended family. On Christmas Eve cousins and uncles and aunts all sleep over at Grandma’s house. They eat, sing,

hang stockings, set up a nativity scene, hear the Christmas story, and kneel together in prayer. Christmas morning brings hot chocolate, hot cross buns, and gifts. On Christmas night the families meet again at Clara’s house for dinner. On Boxing Day (the day after Christmas) there is a progressive dinner with different dishes at the home of each family.

Clara has grown up inspired by the beauty of nature, the warmth of family love, and the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. All these influences are reflected clearly in her face and her spirit. Even on the coldest day of winter she warms the lives of those who know her best. As her mom says, “Thank goodness we have Clara.” ●

**I enjoy music, and I play
the piano, the recorder, and
the glockenspiel.**

