



Mary M. Strong, “Waubcomegook”— meaning “the first fall of snow”, 73, Lake Vermilion, died Sunday, Aug. 30, 2015, at Essentia Health in Duluth. She was also known to many as Margaret or “Muggs.” Mary was of the Bear Clan and member of the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa. Mary was born in Nett Lake on October 11, 1941 and lived most of her life on the Nett Lake-Vermilion Reservations, residing in Duluth for a time. Earlier she worked for Reserve Mining where she was their first female heavy equipment operator. She then made her career working 21 years for MNDOT (Minnesota Department of Transportation), stationed in Hibbing, Virginia, and retiring in Cook, where she was the 1st “snowplowing grandma” for the State of Minnesota. Her strong work ethic was known to all. Mary was successful as one of the first vendors at the Land of the Loon Festival in Virginia and Blueberry Arts Festival in Ely. Her three generation family business, Vermilion Native Crafts, thrived because of her beautiful beadwork. She made sure the knowledge and skill of beadwork were passed on to her grandchildren. Her commitment to leading found her serving on the Elder’s Committee, Conservation Committee, the Lake Vermilion Pow Wow Committee, State Minority Focus Board, and the Bois Forte Reservation Business Committee. Mary was also the Home School Coordinator where she was a strong advocate for education and equal treatment of Native American children. Mary also was well known on the Pow Wow Trail. She was a jingle dress dancer, maker and designer, and part of the Pow Wow Golden Girls who traveled across the country to attend many pow wows. She was one of the last Strongsville women. Mary was not afraid to tell it like it was, and she would not back down to anyone. Though she was known for her “tough as nails” character, she also has a good sense of humor and had the wonderful ability to make everyone smile and laugh. She lived for wild ricing. Her family fondly recalls her strong presence at ricing time -a “rice-hog” passion. She and her brother, Minge, were legendary top wild rice pickers. She also loved gardening, taking cruises and blueberry picking. Her family and friends will always remember her blueberry pies and pancakes. Mary will be sadly missed by all who came to know her. She is preceded in death by a son, Carl James Dagen on February 8, 2009; 3 brothers, Gerald Chicag Sr., Faron Chicag and Ken Strong Sr.; 1 sister, Sara Kochie; and her brother-in-law, Robert Boshey. Mary is survived by her children; Denise Pieratos of Lake Vermilion, Carrie Strong of Lake Vermilion, Cheryl Milbridge of Roseau, Tracey Dagen of Lake Vermilion, Kevin Strong of Lake Vermilion and Kelly Strong of Duluth; 3 siblings, Phyllis Boshey, Gaynard Strong and Rodney (Lisa) Strong; 19 Grandchildren, 18 Great Grandchildren, and numerous nieces, nephews and many friends.

SERVICES: Tribal Rites will be at 10:00 AM Thursday, Sept. 3rd, at the Vermilion Reservation Wellness Center-Tower. The Wake will be after 5:00 PM Wednesday at the Wellness Center. Gilbert Smith will be the spiritual leader, assisted by Gene Goodsky. Honorary bearers will be: Jim Merhar, Bobby Joe “Archie” Deegan, Robert “JR” Moyer, Dale Boshey Sr., Neil Strong and Jayson Strong. Interment will be in the Vermilion Cemetery. Arrangements are with Mlaker Funeral Home in Cook. To sign the online guest book, or to send a condolence to the family, go to: www.mlakerfuneralhome.com.