

# “THE PAST IS THE PAST” OR IS IT? — A LESSON IN WHY HISTORY MATTERS

*An original skit by Melody Martin-Googoo*

## **SETTING:**

March 22, 1999, A Pizza Shop located in downtown Sydney, Nova Scotia.

## **CHARACTERS:**

**JESS**—Plays a neutral sort of fellow.

**JOHN**—A male character whose great grandfather lived through the 1940s. His opinion is that the government was doing their job to “take care” of the Mi’kmaq.

**MIA**—A female character who thinks more liberally, she feels that the policy of Centralization was wrong and unjust.

**KIRK**—This character agrees and goes along with John.

**DONNY**—This character agrees and goes along with Mia.

**NARRATOR:** The date is March 22, 1999. A couple of older kids are hanging out at a Pizza Shop in downtown Sydney. The five kids pool their money together and order a large pepperoni pizza with extra cheese. They sit around waiting for their order when a newspaper headline catches the eye of one of the kids, the headline reads: “Mi’kmaq Applaud Apology: Cape Breton Mayor Apologizes to the Membertou First Nation.”

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**JOHN:** (makes a snorting “Pffft” sound) Check this out, the Mayor apologized to the Indians for movin’ the Membertou reserve from downtown to that place it’s at now.

**KIRK:** What are we apologizing for now?!

**JESS:** Yeah, what do those Indians want now?!

**DONNY:** Ohhhhh, I know what that is, I learned about that when some guest speaker came to my school in October. We played bingo or trivia or something like that. Anyway, one of the questions asked about... (thinking to himself trying to remember)

**MIA:** I know! I know! Centralization! (smiles to herself)

**JESS:** Centra wha?

**JOHN:** Centralization, that’s when the government stepped in and took care of the Indians living in Nova Scotia. We gave them free land, free houses, free food, everything.

**JESS:** Huh?

**MIA:** (laughs) No man, the Mi’kmaw people lived all over Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, PEI and I think maybe even Newfoundland. They like, totally lived off the land, they hunted and all that stuff. SO the government thought it was a good idea to put them on two reserves in Nova Scotia.

**DONNY:** Indian Brook and Eskasoni.

**MIA:** Yeah, Indian Brook and Eskasoni, anyway, ummm what was I saying??

**JOHN:** You were saying something about the Indians living all over the place.

**DONNY:** No, not ALL over the place, well, yeah I guess they did. They travelled with the seasons, they set up camp where their food supply was and stuff.

MIA: AS I WAS SAYING! (looks at the others to stop interrupting) First of all, they were NOT given free houses, land and food. You remember who lived here before we got here don't you? Second of all, they were not Indians, they are called the Mi'kmaq. The name actually means "the people" or "the family."

KIRK: You-are-such-a-nerd.

JOHN: Yeah, you're such a nerd. (playfully punches her shoulder)

MIA: (laughs at her friends) I am NOT a nerd, I just know my stuff. You should too, this is a part of our history.

JOHN: All I know is that the Membertou reservation was located near downtown. My grampy told me that the Indians were always hanging around town, they were just bummin' around. It looked bad for business.

MIA: They weren't just bummin' around town. They used to go downtown and sell their baskets and crafts and stuff.

JESS: Did we order extra cheese on our pizza? (nobody really pays attention to him because they are beginning to get into a heated discussion)

MIA: It wasn't until the government wanted the land that the Mi'kmaq were usually settled on that something happened. I mean, they wanted to put the Mi'kmaw people as far away from the white settlement as the law in Nova Scotia would permit.

JOHN: I'm sure there was lots of land to go around. You said that the Mi'kmaq lived off the land so why would they want to stay in town anyways?

KIRK: I heard that a lot of the Mi'kmaw people were poor and they were living in such poor houses that some houses were unfit for living

in. SO, the government was helping them. The government built them brand new houses and gave them land. They should've been grateful!

DONNY: Grateful?! The houses they built weren't even built right. They were practically mere shells of what a house should be. The lumber wasn't even the right kind, they weren't even insulated.

JESS: What does insulated mean?

(they all look over at Jess and shake their heads)

DONNY: Nova Scotia winters are freakin' cold! One time my grandma told me when she was a kid that she woke up in the middle of the night and there was like frost built up all around her nose—that's how cold it was! She could've gotten frost bite.

MIA: Awwww, poor her. She could have frozen to death!

JOHN: Oh please! The Indians built fires in their teepees and I'm sure they could've heated their houses up somehow!

MIA: Wigwams! They lived in wigwams NOT teepees!

JESS: I think our pizza's ready. You guys want pop?

MIA: You know, the government promised the Mi'kmaq stuff so that they would move. Some people didn't move anyway, I think like two families refused to leave the Kings Road settlement. I think that's what the apology is for.

DONNY: Did anybody stop to think of WHY the Mi'kmaq were so poor? They lived off the land, they travelled and set up camps with

the seasons. They were totally in sync with their world. Geez man, remember our grade-six teacher told us about the uses of an eel? They would use the eel skin for a band aid or something to fix a sprained ankle.

JOHN: Gross! That would've stunk.

JESS: That was harsh dude.

KIRK: (laughs) Eel skins?! Why would you have to use eel skins when we had our own smart doctors and hospitals to take care of that?! Actually putting the Mi'kmaq onto reserves would have helped them with finding real doctors to help them with stuff. They coulda had free health care.

MIA: Oh my gosh you guys! I can't believe you! The Mi'kmaq had doctors! They may not have had a degree in medicine but they knew how to use plants and stuff for healing. Their people knew how to find and use medicine, they were doctors too.

KIRK: I guess you've got a point, but still.

JOHN: It reads here that over 75% of the Mi'kmaq in the province of Nova Scotia were in favour of Centralization.

DONNY: Yeah, but 75% of what? 75% of like, 20 people interviewed? That's outrageous, 75%?! Please! (rolls eyes and throws hands up in the air)

JOHN: Speakin' of doctors, those Mi'kmaw people in the 1930s suffered from a lot of diseases like TB.

DONNY: Yeah, diseases that other people brought over!

MIA: Exactly! Like I was saying, they lived all over and gathered medicines so when they got stuck on reserves that was practically taken from them. The land they lived off of was being encroached upon. The towns and cities that

Mi'kmaq lived near just wanted them out of the way so they could do what they wanted with the land.

JOHN: My grandfather told me that those Indians were lazy, useless and responsible for their own conditions.

MIA: (gasps) HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT?

DONNY: I can't believe we are having this conversation.

JOHN: Just sayin'—the past is the past. Let it go.

MIA: I think your grandfather's view is a total stereotype. It's racist to think that way! If you look at statistics, I'm sure you will find that the majority of (makes a quote gesture with her fingers and sarcastically says) "Indians" were hard workers, and sometimes his or her present conditions were just due to matters totally out of his or her control.

KIRK: Geez, chill out Mia, quit taking this conversation to heart. It's only a conversation. It's not like you're Mi'kmaq or anything.

JESS: Yeah, it's not like you're Mi'kmaq or anything.

MIA: Oh be quiet. I don't have to be Mi'kmaq to care about the injustices of our past.

JOHN: Anyway, I know that Centralization wanted to put the Mi'kmaq onto two reserves: Indian Brook and Eskasoni. It just made it easier for the government to control the Mi'kmaq and the government wanted to take care of them. They offered them houses, farm land, farm equipment. I wish my ancestors were offered free stuff.

JESS: Ha! Your ancestors came from the planet Mars.  
(John playfully punches Jess in the arm)

DONNY: The government promised the Mi'kmaq those things but as usual, those promises were broken!

JESS: My mom's old boyfriend was from Eskasoni and I went there once for a powwow or something and that place is pretty big. There's like tons of houses and big hills and water, but I didn't notice any farm land???

MIA: Bingo! Think about it. How can you farm on land that's rocky or hilly or even swampy?

DONNY: But still, it was a total plan to destroy the Mi'kmaq Nation. But don't worry, the Centralization policy failed. It was a total failure.

KIRK: Or was it?

(John goes over to hug Mia)

JOHN: You know I love you?!

MIA: (giggling) Shut up!

JESS: Can someone ask that dude to warm up our pizza?

