



Andrew Joseph Lafford

I was born in 1948 in Sydney, Nova Scotia, to Benjamin Lafford, Bayfield and Helen Marshall, Membertou. My parents had eight children, six boys and two girls. My grandparents were Andrew Marshall and Mary Susan (Alex). I am also a descendant of Hereditary Grand Chief Benjamin Paul, known as Louis-Benjamin Peminuit. I am proud of my family history.

During my early childhood, our family moved among Eskasoni and Maine and Boston where my father could find work. In 1960, we moved back to Eskasoni and my father got sick. We lived without running water and heat. As children, we tried to help Dad with chores to get the water and wood. The Indian agent refused to help my dad with support for his family when he was sick and couldn't work. My mother had left us with our dad and went back to Boston to seek employment and she got sick after she got to Boston. The Indian agent told Dad he had to send his children to the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie before he would get help.

My five brothers and two sisters and I were taken to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School for 5 years between 1961 and 1966. During our first year there, our mother passed away in Boston. We were told she died in Boston, but we could not attend her funeral and did not know where she was buried. It was a very difficult time for us as children. We had no hope for reuniting as a family again and were drifting apart with each passing year. We survived the physical and emotional abuse, including the threats from the supervisors to wash out our mouths with soap for speaking our language. They did not succeed in taking away our Mi'kmaw language. Our parents spoke and taught us to speak the old Mi'kmaw language. Our Mi'kmaw language is sacred and our prayers from the heart are powerful. I have witnessed the power of our prayers and Mi'kmaw language in ceremonies.

The main lasting residential school impacts that I have endured is living with the trauma of abuse for over 50 years and the loss of connectedness to my community when I came home. We were not taught about forgiveness and we carried the hurt for many years. I quit school at 16 and went to work to help my dad. Indian Affairs did not help us when we returned to our communities. Even today, many survivors do not feel connected to their communities. Our own people treated us poorly and labelled us as bad, damaged children. They threatened to send their own children to the 'Ressie' as a form of discipline. It was hard to make a life after the residential school and many survivors left their communities, like we did, to try to make it in the world outside our communities. Many survivors have returned to our home communities to live.

I reflect upon my experiences at the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School as helping to prepare me for my life and hardships and making me the strong person I am today. I had to rely on my own strength and resilience and abilities. When I got out of the residential school, I was prepared to learn to make my own way, work hard and build my own reputation, by my own integrity and principles. I worked hard at many jobs and learned many skills and I was fortunate to have help from relatives and others along the way. I worked at three jobs in Boston when I was young and that kept me too busy to get into any trouble.

I have respect for the women who are protecting the waters—the Water Walkers carrying the Sacred Water. They are teaching about the destruction that fracking and mining has done to the waters and our Mother Earth. It is a traditional role of women to protect the water. According to our Treaties and policies, the Government do not own our unceded Mi'kmaw territory. My son, Dale, was charged during the Elsipogtog protest for trying to stop the SWN Corporation and New Brunswick government and police from harming the people who were standing up for all people, the animals and the lands and waters, according to our Treaties. I am interested in politics and making my own decisions. We have to go back to our own ways of governance.

A message I would like to share with the young people is to listen to your grandparents and Elders. Learn all that you can so you can understand their legacies, and, one day, pass on their wisdom to the younger generations. It is time to learn

about Native Spiritual ways and experience the ceremonies and the teachings that will help you to live good lives. Their wisdom will help you to keep our language and our way of life alive as you create your own legacy. Wela'liq.

