



### **Georgina Doucette, Eskasoni First Nation**

My Spirit Name is Grandmother Turtle. I am Georgina Doucette, the daughter of Michael R. Denny and Mary Bella (Herney) Denny, of Eskasoni. I am one of nine children: Irene, Jessie, Ruby, Uphemia (Bee), and Roy (Jake); my other siblings, Leona, Mary Rita, and Matthew, passed away in early childhood. We travelled around with our parents—young children of migrant workers, picking blueberries and harvesting potatoes in Maine, where we lived during the Depression. My mom got sick with cancer, and six months after surgery, she passed away. After this, my father moved back to Eskasoni with his children.

I was eight years old when my father took my brother Roy and sisters, Jessie and Ruby, and me to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School. I was there from the age of 8 to 16 years old. I lost my language during that time. Another terrible tragedy struck my family, four years after we lost our mom. Our dad was killed by a drunk driver on his way to work in Burlington, Vermont. He and another man were hit as they got off a bus. My siblings and I became orphans!

We came out of residential school very messed up. We had been through so much as children and youth. There were two very destructive forces that impacted our lives: the abuses at residential school and the abuse of alcohol. When I was seventeen—a year after I was released from the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, I married Noel Albert Doucette on May 28, 1960 in Eskasoni. We were married for 39 years until his passing in 1999. We have nine children, 70 grandchildren and 40 great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandson! Now that is what I call “a legacy.”

My spirituality was all that I had to rely on—the Creator listened to me. At Christmas in 1986, my niece gifted me a yule log with a candle on it and on January 1, 1987, I lit that candle and began to pray. I prayed to the Creator for the help and support that I needed to stop drinking. When that candle burned out, I sobered up for good. I taught myself to sew and began to make quilts. My brother Jake gave me a belt buckle with an 8-pointed star on it that inspired me to learn to make 8-pointed star quilts. My healing started as I discovered my gift to sew and to create beautiful quilts and Mi’kmaq regalia. I learned to sew by hand and created a giant quilt of diamonds, clubs, spades and hearts! It occupied my mind and my hands, instead of drinking. I couldn’t stop sewing until it was almost as big as the living room! I called it my Sobriety Quilt. I gave it to my husband to donate to the Church Committee for their raffle. I have donated many quilts to Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselling Association of Nova Scotia (NADACA) and to others who needed them for healing. I have now been sober for 28 years!

I opened my own business called, ‘Mi’kmaq Dream Quilts’ and have received many awards and recognition for my work. Whenever I finish a creation, I feel so much pride in our Native culture and my spirit is uplifted. I have created many beautiful things, but the most sacred is the jingle dress that I made for my granddaughter, Rebecca, so that she could dance at her school.

In reflecting on my past, I realized that there was so much good living that was lost to pain and suffering from childhood experiences and the unhealthy ways of coping with the past. I am amazed that I survived and I am thankful for the resilience and strength that the Creator gave to me to overcome the abuses and tragedies in life and the impacts these have caused to me and to my family. I attended traditional ceremonies and healing workshops and training programs that have helped me to learn to accept myself and I believe that the Creator accepts me as the strong Mi’kmaq woman that I am today. I have applied these teachings and knowledge to help me to apologize to my children and family and to help us to heal. I have so much love for my family and my people, and I want to share this knowledge and wisdom, which I carry with respect, courage, honesty, humility and truth.

Our cultural revival began 27 years ago, with Doucette, Lafford, Lewis, Poulette, and Denny families as well as Shubie School survivors. We started the first Eskasoni powwow and worked hard to take back what we had lost. Many of us sobered up at the same time and have remained very close friends. At age 72, my advice to the young people is to embrace life and our cultural teachings to help you to heal and learn to love yourself as the Creator loves you. You cannot get back the wasted years. “Life is not to be taken lightly. It is what it is. Make it your best life!” Wela’liog.

