



Lottie Johnson, Eskasoni First Nation

Kwe', my Spirit Name is Thunder Woman. I am Lottie Johnson, a mother, grandmother, and Traditional Mi'kmaw woman, residing in Eskasoni First Nation. I have three daughters, Charlene Canniff Redding, Karen Ann Canniff (deceased), Lynn Anne, and a son, Leo J Marshall as well as a daughter, Madeline Battiste, who I adopted the L'nu way. I am the daughter of Margaret (Dr. Granny) and John T. Johnson. My parents had a large family of thirteen, seven daughters and six sons, nine of whom attended the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School in Nova Scotia.

My earliest memories of my childhood are of growing up within the family of my mother's friend, Lottie Webber, until I was eight years old. When she passed away from illness in 1953, the loss was devastating to me as a young child.

When I returned to Eskasoni I could only speak English and I had an estranged relationship with my mother and siblings, because I didn't know or understand them. I learned to speak my Mi'kmaw language and practice my culture. We picked berries and medicines, learned how to fish and work in the woods, to cook and clean and do chores with my siblings. My mother told me that the Indian agent threatened to cut her family's ration if her school-aged children were not sent to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School.

I first entered the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School (IRS) at the age 10 with one of my younger sisters. The following year, I returned to the IRS with my two younger sisters and two younger brothers. I was able to stay home for two years and helped to care for my ill grandmother, Jane Paul, until she passed away in 1958. I was returned to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School until age 16. I went on to complete high school at St. Joseph's Convent in Mabou, Nova Scotia. My childhood memories of the residential school experiences have had an impact on my life in many ways.

At the age of 19, I moved to Boston and began my life in the fast lane, 'living on the edge,' while surviving on my own. I met and married my husband and had two daughters. A young mother in a tumultuous relationship, I left my husband and later divorced him. My own family was separated as a result. Although I began to learn more about Traditional ways, I continued to indulge in alcohol and drugs to numb the pain—until 1979. I always worked to support myself and when I worked for the Boston Indian Council, I was sober and wanted to face the past and find a way to heal and move forward.

After my sister passed away in 1980, I recognized that I needed to renew my relationships with my mother and family. I soon moved back home to Eskasoni where I learned that my mother was an example of strength and hope. Her love for everyone and our Mi'kmaw culture, language and spirituality, set an example for me. In 1982, I began upgrading my education. I remarried my second husband and had my son, Leo. I returned to school and graduated from the University College of Cape Breton with a Bachelor of Arts in Community Studies in 1991. I began my career with Native Alcohol and Drug Addictions Counselling Association (NADACA). My roles included Data Entry, Field Worker, Social Work Aide and Traditional Teacher for the Journey of Healing Program for Residential School Survivors and finally, a Certified Addictions Counsellor.

Throughout my life, I have had many life coaches and through cultural renewal and embracing my spirituality and resiliency I have gained the ability to heal and reconstruct my life. In my work, I shared with many others the many teachings, wisdom and understanding that I achieved on my own healing journey. At the age of 70, I retired from NADACA, but I continue to share wisdom, guidance and the traditional ways of healing to support others in need.

I worked with Nora Bernard as board member for the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School Association (SIRSA) from 1995-2007 to develop the lawsuit against Canada and the Church on behalf of Shubenacadie IRS survivors. Our lawsuit was joined with the Baxter National Class Action lawsuit in Ottawa, representing 80,000 survivors in Canada. In 2006, we won the largest Class Action Settlement Agreement in Canadian history worth \$5 billion to date.

I was appointed to the Indian Residential School Survivor's Committee of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) from July 2009 to June 2015 as the Atlantic regional representative. I was proud to represent the survivors—to be witness and provide advice, and to attend each of the seven National Regional TRC events. It was an honour to share the TRC Closing Ceremonies and witness the historic Release of the Final Report and Recommendations to Canada at Rideau Hall with my daughter Charlene and Shubenacadie Residential School Survivors.