



SHIRLEY MORRIS

My name is Shirley Morris (nee Stephens). My parents are Daniel Paul and Rita Rose Stephens (Howe). My grandparents are Ernest John and Bridget (Maloney) Howe, and Paul Stephens and Maggie Prosper. We have family connections in Eskasoni, Potlotek, Membertou, Millbrook, Pictou Landing and Sipekne'katik. I married my husband, James Morris in 1983 and we have been together for 40 years. We have six children, Ashley, Lucina, Stephen, James, Jr. and Van Christopher. My oldest daughter, Renee, passed away in 2013. I am a grandmother to 10 grandchildren.

Our family lived in Millbrook next door to my grandparents, until we moved to Boston, Massachusetts, in 1956. In Boston, we met up with my Aunt Nancy and Uncle John Bernard and their family. We attended St. Patrick's school in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and the nuns there were really nice to us. In 1961, my cousins were taken to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School and I missed them. They came home and told us that we should come to the 'Ressie' when they returned. I asked my Dad and Mom if I could go to school with my cousins. My mother didn't want us to go, but finally they agreed to send us there. I thought we would all be together in one room and they made it sound like it would be fun for us to all be together to go to school. My parents were trying to save up to move back home to Millbrook. We found out what it was really like. I realized later that my cousins probably felt they needed me there for protection.

When we returned home from the residential school, we lived in Millbrook with our parents until our father died in 1967. Soon after, my mother moved her family to Boston to be closer to her sisters.

I began drinking in the early 70's and it had become a problem for me—as it was for many survivors. I was coping with many things, including the residential school impacts and life experiences. I undermined the opportunity I had to attend the Northeastern University in Boston to take a science program as a prerequisite to get into a nursing program. I opted to go Maine and I ended up in Indian Brook, afterwards. I was still trying to figure out what I wanted to do.

I stayed in Indian Brook for a few years while I attended Truro Business College and excelled in my program and finished with honours in less than a year and graduated in 1971. I worked for the Union of NS Indians as a clerk and learned the finance program and office procedures. Then in 1974, my daughter Renee was born. I left Indian Brook to go to Manitou College in Quebec, but that didn't work out and I quit school and moved back to Boston to get away from drinking and that environment.

I found a job at the Boston Indian Council, teaching entry level employment and secretarial skills and personal development to women. I enrolled in the Bunker Hill Community College in the Medical Secretarial Degree program, a two-year program that I completed in one year and graduated with honours in 1980. We were ready to move to my husband's community of Eskasoni, where we raised our family.

In 2001, I returned to the workforce and worked for Native Alcohol and Drug Counselling Association (NADACA) for 13 years. I worked for the Journey of Healing project until it closed in 2013. I read and researched more and gained a better understanding of historic trauma and how this impacted our people as I was going through my own healing process. I developed and implemented healing programs to help the survivors and families in our communities. I enjoyed my employment with NADACA and my work with survivors of residential school and their families in helping promoting healthy lifestyle choices and holistic healing.

My life now is easier and I get to see my grandchildren every week. My children are wonderful parents to their children. They are better parents than I ever was, although I did my best. Over that last two years, I was working and travelling back and forth to Millbrook and Boston as my mother was very sick. It was very difficult to deal with the passing of my daughter, Renee and my brother, Michael and my mom in the past few years. I am in a better place now.

My advice to the young people is to learn as much as you can, even from other people's mistakes. Make strong family connections to help you through hard times. Know that you are special and God put you here on this Earth for something good, to live a good life. Believe in yourself and know that anything is possible. Wela'liog.