



### **Roy (Jake) Denny, Eskasoni First Nation**

My name is Jake—I use the nickname I received at the residential school. I am the youngest son of nine children of Michael R. and Mary Bella (Herney) Denny of Eskasoni. My parents were migrant workers and we lived in Maine when I was a young child. We did not have a lot and times were often tough, but we were happy being together.

When I was four years old, my world changed, when my mom passed away from a brain aneurism in Maine. My dad brought our family back to Eskasoni and we lived with our maternal grandparents, Esther and John Herney, who helped him to take care of us for a little while, until my father had to work in the States.

Shortly after moving home, our dad took my three sisters and I to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, where we attended for eight years from 1951-1959. I remember my first day at the school as the youngest child there and I was so scared that I was allowed to stay on the girls' side with my sisters for the first few nights until I got used to being there. Then I was taken over to the boys' side where I only knew one boy, King Fan (Albert Doucette) who I had met in Maine. I was grateful that the nun told him to teach me the ropes and he helped me to learn the routine at the school: I learned what to do, when to do it, and what not to do, so I could avoid the beatings. He also told me when I could sneak speaking Mi'kmaw. We were like robots.

In 1954, while we were in the residential school, my dad was working at a carnival in Vermont and he and another worker were hit by a drunk driver and killed. It was devastating to lose my dad and to be orphaned at age seven. When I was discharged from the residential school at the age of 13, I went back to Eskasoni and stayed with my grandmother. She went blind after my grandfather passed away and I was her helper. I learned to work in the woods, bring the firewood, chop kindling, and haul the water before I went to school. I worked in the woods in Eskasoni—worked for my booze, as I began drinking alcohol at the age of 13; it did not take me long to become an alcoholic. Later, I went to trade school in New Glasgow to be a machinist.

In 1966, I went to Boston to work like many survivors, but soon my drinking took me to live on the streets in the South End of Boston. I tried to improve my life by joining the US Army at 21, but I did not last long before I was court marshalled for going AWOL. I had a hard time dealing with authority figures as the regimented lifestyle reminded me too much of the residential school in Shubie. I did well in boot camp and finished basic training, but did not do any further training; whenever I got leave I used to go to Boston and drink with my friends. While on leave in Boston, I decided not to return to Augusta, Georgia for training and changed my ticket to Augusta, Maine and went to visit my sisters. I worked with my brother-in-law to make enough to go home to Eskasoni to visit and then went back to work in Maine. When I returned to Boston, I was caught by the Army and charged with AWOL. It was quite a journey, it seemed like everything I did, I had no plan. I got a lawyer to prove that I was a Canadian citizen and did not have to fight for the USA. I was released from the Army and went back to the streets of Boston to resume my drinking; the only way I knew to dull the pain of losses in my life. I fit right in there; we shared the booze and the misery and I witnessed many things and lost many friends while on the streets.



In 1977, my good friend, Eddie Lou Paul, a counsellor with the Boston Indian Council (BIC) helped me to get sober. I knew him because we used to drink wine together when he was younger, and it was really incredible that he was the one that helped me get off the streets. He took me to the hospital and helped me get to AA meetings and into the Tecumseh House. I was in pretty rough shape and it took three years to finally get clean and sober. Another friend at the BIC, Steve Sam helped me to get my driver's license. I got a job as a driver for the community van, transporting Elders and youth and children to programs. The BIC was a good place to be and they helped a lot of people. I went back to school and got my GED.

My fondest memory was driving down to Washington, DC, along with five other van loads of our people from the BIC on a caravan to the Longest Walk. We all walked into Washington, DC, on the last day of the Longest Walk on July 15th, 1978. I felt so proud to see all the other Indians there from everywhere walking through the city together. I was so thrilled. It made me proud to be an Indian man and to know who I was. Ever since that day, I have been on the good Red Road and I have helped others along the way.

I moved back home to Eskasoni in 1983. After I sobered up, I met up with Barbara, the woman that I had left behind when I was a young man and was drinking too much. I had come full circle and finally married the woman I loved and started a family here and made a home. I was on a rough road, but I survived it with a lot of luck and a lot of love. I am very happy now. Today, I am a proud Mi'kmaw man, husband, father, and grandfather and I have so much to be grateful for in life. My two sons are doing well, living a good life here in Eskasoni and following the traditional way of life. Sulian is a fisherman and Michael R. is a mental health counsellor. They are both drummers and singers. My oldest son Matt lives outside of Rhode Island where he works and raises his family and is doing well. We have four grandchildren.

I connected with our Creator and that is what helped me the most. I am a Sundancer, dancing in South Dakota and Buctouche, NB, and my experiences have left me with a lot of humility and gratitude, knowing the Creator watches over me. I think everyone has to have something to believe in to get them through the worst of times and to appreciate the best of times too. Wela'liq.

