



Mary Hatfield, Pictou Landing First Nation

I am the daughter of the late Joseph and Ella Nicholas (née Francis) of Pictou Landing and one of their 16 children. My father was a WWII veteran. My mother and my uncle, Jimmy Nicholas, were survivors of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School (Shubie School), so we were descendants before we became survivors too.

I attended the Shubie School with 12 of my brothers and sisters, entering in 1959 and being discharged in 1964. The residential school deprived us of our language and culture and family and all the things that our grandmother taught us.

One of my fondest childhood memories was coming home from Shubie School in the summertime and staying with our grandmother, Mary Prosper, and being free to roam all around the community. She was fluent in Mi'kmaw and English and was a translator. She used to take us out on the land all around the reserve, at As'ek, and Asek'quonek, and teach us to gather food and plants for medicines, while picking blueberries, cranberries, chokecherries, tea berries, apples, and mayflowers. I remember she would sit us down when we got home and tell us, "You are not in Shubie School now, you don't have to speak English here. Speak Mi'kmaw." I used to love to braid her long hair and she was the only one that had an icebox and we would get ice after we finished the work we did with her. After the summer, before we returned to Shubie School, my grandmother, said to us, "Now that you are going back to Shubie School and you have to speak English again to the Aklasi'e'w, I want you to know that just because you can't speak Mi'kmaw through your mouth, you can keep it up here, in your head, in your thoughts." She wanted us to keep our language with us in our minds and think in Mi'kmaw. This is why I am still a fluent Mi'kmaw speaker today and I always looked up to and respected our Kiju for that.

I remember the first day I arrived at Shubie School. There was Clara, Susie Anne, Sakes, Anthony and me, sitting on the steps waiting for the ride to come to take us to the residential school. We were all dressed up in new clothes. My sister, Susie Anne, threw roofing nails on the driveway hoping that the car would get flat tires and would not be able to take us away. As soon as we arrived there, we were stripped of our new clothes, thrown in the showers and doused with de-louse powder. I thought the children were all black people because they were very darkly tanned and did not realise we were all the same. I was so afraid and glad I had my sisters with me.

The nun would not let us speak Mi'kmaw. We were all given numbers and every item was marked with your number and we were punished when we lost anything. The older girls who were in charge of us could sometimes be as abusive as the nuns were. Sometimes, when I got into trouble, Sister Gilberta picked me up by the cheeks and I got strappings and was put in the dormitory. I had to learn to fight back to defend myself. I felt like I was incarcerated at six years old.

After I was discharged from the residential school, I attended Trenton Middle School and New Glasgow High School, which was also run by the nuns and we were treated just as bad there. Many of my friends could not speak English and I was a translator for them, just like my Kiju did on the reserve.

In the 1970s, I went to Truro to live with my sister Catherine and attended high school there. I met my husband, Alan Hatfield, through his brother who I went to school with. We were married on May 26th, 1971, and have been together for 46 years. We have three children, Kim,



Derek and Michelle and eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. I am very proud of my family and love them very much.

After living off reserve for 26 years, where it was a struggle at times to get by while raising our children, we decided it was time to move to Pictou landing in 1993. I felt like a gypsy, moving around and feeling unsettled. Nora Bernard motivated me to make Pictou Landing our home, when she told me, "Tus, you should move back to your reserve." I knew I needed to reconnect with my family and community and my culture and teachings. We have been home for almost 20 years. When we first moved home we lived in my nephew's trailer. Eventually, my husband and I were the first to build on Eagle Road, where our present house is. This land was once cottage country owned by non-Natives before Boat Harbour happened and the mill paid them to move out and compensated them for their cottages and loss of their lands. Pictou Landing community had to sue the mill and Nova Scotia Government for the damage to our lands and waters by Boat Harbour pollution. The compensation did not include the impacts on the health of many people in my community who have suffered from illnesses and cancers for over 50 years.

I have raised three of my grandsons, two are now on their own and I am still busy raising my 16 year old grandson, Carter. He keeps me pretty grounded and busy with his activities such as hockey, lacrosse and Traditional dancing and speaking to students about Mi'kmaw culture and educating them about residential school. As a grandmother, I am teaching and doing a lot of what I did not get to do with my own children, through Carter. He is a good role model for his siblings and cousins and he is living a traditional lifestyle. I think it is important to encourage children and grandchildren to stay grounded to help them to succeed.

I recently retired as the Maternal Child Health Worker at the Health Centre in Pictou Landing. I also worked at the school as the Mi'kmaw Language teacher and a special needs worker at the school for many years until I had a heart attack about 10 years ago. I also worked with the Survivors of Residential School for three and a half years to help them on their healing journey, dealing with their issues, building relationships and trust while supporting one another. I continue to do volunteer work with the survivors and families and helping to fundraise for them and I am happy to help to bring our group together for celebrations and community events.

