



### **Genevieve (Jenny Rose) Johnson**

I was born on May 20th, 1958, to Caroline Johnson and Charlie Francis and we lived in Pine Tree, Pictou County, Nova Scotia. We lived in a tarpaper shack in the woods, where the winters were hard, but my parents made baskets and axe handles to trade for necessities to make ends meet. During the summers, my family were migrant workers and we survived on what we gathered from our gardens and from nature. My dad hunted and fished and trapped. I attended the Pine Tree Elementary school for the first years and walked to school from our home in the woods.

I attended the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School from 1965-1967. I remember when my parents and I took the train to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School and they left me in the care of the nun. They told me it was a good place and I would learn to be somebody. The nuns put me in the tub and scrubbed me with tar soap and cut off my long hair. I did not understand English and the older girls told me not to speak Mi'kmaw or I would be beaten with a strap. I became a scared, nervous, quiet child, who tried not to be noticed and I learned not to trust anyone. I learned to pray and I learned to clean. I would hear the train whistle at night and pray that my mom was coming to take me home.

I stayed with my parents and grandmother Madeline Julian, at Pine Tree for the summer after my first year in the Ressie, and I returned to the residential school on the last year before it closed for good. I have a picture that my mom took of me dressed like a nun. I use to pretend that I was a nun and worked for God, but after my experiences there I knew I did not want to become a nun.

A year after I returned home to Pine Tree, my mother got sick and had to go away to the hospital in Halifax. Soon afterwards, my father also got sick with cancer and had to take me to stay with my aunt Martha Julian in Millbrook. In 1969, my dad passed away at the Camp Hill hospital. My mom was discharged from the hospital to a nursing home for a couple more years, so I continued to live with Aunt Martha until I was 13 years old. I met my older sister Janet Redding for the first time when she took me home to live with her family. We went to visit our mom in the nursing home, and she did not even know that my dad had passed away. We took her out of there and she went to live with my grandmother in Indian Brook, and then my gram came to take me home with her too. I went into foster care when I was in high school at Hants East. I was an anxious youth and did not fit in, and I missed too much time before I quit school. At 18, I got pregnant and had my first child, my son Stephen, in 1976.

My son and I moved in with my mom when she got a house in Indian Brook. We did not have anything when we moved in, but we were happy. I went back to school for upgrading to get my GED and found a job as a waitress at the Abenaki Motel in Millbrook. My second child Chester, was born in 1980 and my third son William, was born in 1981. I returned to work while my mom took care of my children and did everything else. She did the cooking and cleaning and ran the household.

I was totally lost when my mom passed away on May 29th, 1984 after a courageous battle with cancer. She was 62. Then exactly one year later, my gram passed away at the age of 83. The ones I loved left me and I realized just how much my mom and my gram did for me to help me raise my family when I had to do it alone as a single mom.



Before there was a program in my community, I used to volunteer to care for my friends and relatives who were sick and wanted palliative care at home. I decided to get my certification in adult care and make this my profession. I have worked in this field in Truro and Indian Brook from 1985 to present.

My fourth son Lloyd was born in 1991 and we moved into our new home in 1993. My only daughter, Theress was born in 1995. I am so thankful for my children and I have been blessed with seven grandchildren: Lauren, Drake, Deacon, Brady, Gabrielle, Lloyd Jr., and Jeremy. The most amazing experience in my life was being there with my youngest when she gave birth to her first child.

Over the years, I attended healing programs with the survivors of residential school and sought out my teacher, the late Dave Gehue, who helped me to move on in my life in a positive way and regain my sense of wellbeing and identity as a Mi'kmaw woman. When I came to him, I was like a lost soul and following a destructive path. I count my blessings every day and have so much gratitude for all that I have come through and all I have been given. My parents taught me the values of sharing and caring for others. We need to work on reviving our cultural teachings so that our children and grandchildren will learn to take care of us when we need them. I still go to check in on the Elders and take them out shopping and to socialize. I would like my grandchildren to grow up knowing these cultural values and teachings, to help them to live a good life and do good things for others and be proud of who they are as Mi'kmaq.

