



Margaret Elizabeth Labobe, Lennox Island First Nation

I was born on November 9th, 1954, the daughter of John P. Labobe of New Brunswick and Florence Mitchell-Labobe, Lennox Island, PEI. I have three siblings, Charlotte, Harry and my half-brother, Johnny “Cool” Mitchell.

I was eight years old when the three of us went to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School. We were the first ones to arrive in 1963, and we were so scared and confused. I remember we were permitted to have our baby brother stay with us on the girls’ side for a few days, until other children arrived and he had to go on the boys’ side. I was always concerned about my brother and sister. All the students were assigned a number while there and I was number 9. We had to learn Catholicism and our lives were very regimented; every minute of the day was accounted for and “God forbid,” if you stepped out of line.

I remember after our first year was done, our parents did not come to pick us up, because my parents were drinking while they were waiting for us and were put in jail. We had to stay there until we got our parents out of jail, so we could go home. When we went back to Shubie for the second year in 1964, I was used to the regiment by then. That was the year that we met Johnny Cool Mitchell, our half-brother. My sister Charlotte got sick and had to go to the hospital in Halifax for heart surgery and she was still there when school got out for the summer. My brother Harry and I came back home for the summer, while Charlotte stayed in Nova Scotia, to be near the hospital for treatment. We did not associate with anyone and kept to ourselves because we were scared to do anything wrong and did not want to be punished. I was missing my sister Charlotte so much. Everything changed so much at our house and our parents were drinking a lot more.

My sister and I were back together in Shubie School after the summer of 1965. I guess I was over protective of my sister Charlotte, especially after she had surgery and soon I was one of the “bad girls” for standing up to Sister Helen Patrick and any of the students who would try to bully her.

My siblings and I were among the last students to attend the Shubie School, which closed in 1967. Our parents had already separated before we came home, so our Mom was not there and everything changed drastically. We came home to live with our Dad. I was in grade six by then and I was so angry at my Mom for not being there for us and I confronted her at the time. I had a lot of anger built up inside me. Everything went downhill for me at that time. I was alone, my brother and sister weren’t around and I was also angry with my Dad. I was rebellious and did not get along with anyone. I was not a nice person for a long time and I took out my anger on everyone around me.

At the age of 14, I was vulnerable and alone, without guidance or nurturing, trying to take care of myself. I got involved in a relationship with a man who was 10 years older than me, looking for love and someone to take care of me. I had my first daughter, Loretta, at age 15 and another daughter, Brenda, at 17. Several months later, my children were taken by Sister Mary Dean at Summerside Social Services and placed in foster care. She said that we had to get married before our children were returned to us. I was forced to get married to get my girls back! I stayed in an unhappy relationship and I had my son, Gerald, three years later in 1976. I did not have any parenting skills to raise my children and I didn’t have anyone to turn to for help.

I was in a very unhappy relationship for seven years, where alcohol abuse and family violence were very much a part of our lives. There were no offers for me to go to a transition home with my children or legal advice about what I could do about my situation. I was told that the only way they could help me was to take my children away. I loved my children and I had to let them go. I blamed my husband for losing my family and for my alcoholism and I finally left him because of the violence when I thought I would die. I decided to seek treatment and sober up because I knew I had to change to go on living.

I sobered up and was able to move on for a while, but my new relationships fell into old patterns and I began to drink again. I had two more children during this time. Living with alcoholism and family violence were constant in my life.

A few years later, I met another man who cared for me and we were together for 10 years. He drank and eventually I began to drink again. One night, I blacked out and tragically, violence was the end result, but this time I was the one that was charged. It was then that I lost myself and my relationship with someone that I loved. He survived the assault and I was charged and sentenced to 18

months of house arrest and I had to stay away from him. A few months later before my sentence was completed, he got sick and was in the hospital. I could not go to see him before he passed away from his illness and his death was added to all the losses in my life. I stopped drinking soon after his death. I believe he visited me in Spirit once, to let me know that everything was okay with him on the other side.

As a survivor of residential school, I began to get involved with the Aboriginal Survivors for Healing program with other survivors. I attended weekly Talking Circles and healing ceremonies, sweat lodge ceremonies and began to learn about myself and learned to live a sober life. I started working with counsellors and dealing with the alcohol abuse and family violence issues and my past experiences. It was traumatic to have to deal with all the losses in my life and to understand where my anger was coming from. My children were all grown and I was a grandmother and I had to get myself back. I learned about forgiveness and to love myself. I was able to help others on their healing journey, to understand this hurt and suffering. We kept coming back and supporting each other and developed great relationships within our group during the ten years of the project and continue to keep in touch and support each other today.

Today, I am in a healthy relationship with a nice man, who is very caring and is sober and is very supportive of me. He was an only child, and never had children of his own and he enjoys spending time with me and my family, my children and grandchildren and great grandchildren.

My legacy that I am making is that my children have not followed in my footsteps and follow their own path. I am happy that I have been able to heal the hurts in my life, so I am capable of enjoying my growing family and sharing in their lives. I do not take my blessings in life for granted.