



CHARLOTTE LABOBE-MORRIS

My name is Mary Charlotte Labobe-Morris, but everyone calls me Charlotte. I was born on October 29th, 1955 in Tyne Valley, PEI to Florence Mitchell and John P. Labobe. I have three siblings: my sister, Margaret Elizabeth Labobe, Charlottetown, PEI, and my brothers, Harry Gilbert Labobe, Lennox Island, and the late “Johnny Cool” Mitchell.

I still have good memories of growing up with my parents on Lennox Island in my early years, before residential school. We had a happy home life. My parents did not drink alcohol at that time and we were cared for very well.

It was after alcohol entered our home that things changed in the most negative way. It seemed that alcohol was taking over our community and my parents began to drink too. In grade one, our non-Native teacher also came to school drunk and she used to put a gun on her desk. She was mean to us and it was reported that she drank alcohol and brought a gun to the school. Not long after, we were sent to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School. My parents had begun to drink then and when we were taken away, everything went downhill after that.

I remember when they first took us to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School—I was eight years old. We were the first children to arrive and Sister Gilberta let us keep my baby brother on the girls’ side with us until other children came. When they took Harry to the boys’ side, he went kicking and screaming all the way. We met our half brother Johnny Cool at Shubie School. I do not remember too much about the first year at Shubie School; maybe it was because I was sick a lot during that time.

In the summer when we came back home, I remember that my mom and dad were drinking heavily and we did not have any structure at home and were left on our own a lot. We were fortunate that our relative, Elizabeth Mitchell, used to come over and take us to her house during the summer and take care of us.

During my second year at Shubie School, I had to go to the hospital for tests and treatments and then in the summer I was admitted to the Children’s Hospital for heart surgery. My siblings went home for the summer without me. When I was released from the hospital after surgery, I was fostered by Mrs. Paul, who worked at the school and lived on the reserve in Micmac.* It was okay staying with Mrs. Paul and her boys, Eddie and Clayton, but they were too young to realize that I was not supposed to be wrestling while I recuperated from surgery and were sometimes too rough with me.

After that summer, I was happy to be reunited with my sister, Margaret, for our last year because the school closed in 1967. Sister Gilberta had taken me under her wing and began to teach me to play the flute and the piano, along with some of the older girls. It seemed like I was treated better after I had heart surgery. I think the bullying stopped as Sister Helen Patrick was gone most of that year when she had broken her leg and we did not see her much on the girls’ side after that.

When I came home from Shubie School after it closed, I was totally lost. My parents were separated by then and we lived with our dad. I had lost my identity and did not know who I was. At 13 years old, I did not have any skills or knowledge about puberty and did not have any

*an early reference to Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia



guidance or anyone to turn to. I was very vulnerable and basically, I copied what everyone else was doing. My dad and my sister and friends were drinking, so I started drinking too. My sister left home and my brother was not there and our family seemed to be drifting apart.

My brother Harry and I moved to Maine with my dad to do migrant work, but we could not escape the drinking that went on there on the weekends, so I left and came back home alone. My friend Louise was staying with an Elder, Annie Peters and I asked if I could live with her too. Alcohol and drug abuse became a part of my life at the early age of 14. My mom passed away that year and my Dad and Harry returned to live in PEI, but unfortunately, nothing changed about the drinking. There were no good times.

I met my first husband, Gerard Bernard, when I was 16, and we had our first child, Tracey May, when I was 18. We were married when I turned 21 and we had three more children—sons, Troy, Rick and Gerard, Jr. We were together for 10 years, but we separated because I could no longer tolerate the lifestyle of alcohol and drug abuse, which contributed to violence and to our family breakup and divorce. I knew I could make a better life for me and my children and decided to seek treatment for addictions. I never returned to that lifestyle.

I met and married my second husband, but due to his drug abuse, our relationship did not last. After two months, we separated and were divorced and I moved on with my life with my children.

I was blessed to have met my third husband Richard Morris. We have been happily married for 13 years. He has stepchildren from his first marriage and accepted my children. We have 11 grandchildren, one great-granddaughter, named Skylar, who was born on June 23rd, 2016! I am so proud of my family. My husband and I share our home in Birch Hill, PEI with two beautiful German Shepherds, Raven and Sarge, and our cat Charlie. Although I am enjoying being home, I have been dealing with health issues. I am also a cancer survivor and have been fighting cancer for almost five years. I pray for a return to good health so I can enjoy my retirement and create more memories with my family.

My healing journey began in 2002, when I became involved with the Aboriginal Survivors for Healing (ASH), Inc. and it continues today. The project lasted until 2013, and I credit the staff and our counsellor, Dale Sylliboy, and other survivors, with my success in healing from the past and learning to live a good life. I participated in the weekly talking circles and sweat lodge ceremonies and doctoring ceremonies and learned about my strengths and gifts. I enjoyed travelling with my family and our ASH Survivors group to attend powwows, gatherings and healing conferences to get together with other survivors. I was able to reconnect with my cultural teachings and ceremonies and found my identity as a Mi'kmaw woman.

Today, I am a traditional Mi'kmaw woman and practice the teachings that I learned as an adult. I am thankful that I will be able to pass down what I learned on my healing journey—all the things that I did not get to learn, as a child, from my parents. One of my granddaughters, Rinoa, is learning to be a Jingle Dancer and I want to help her to learn about the Jingle Dress and the prayers and dance as a ceremony. Another granddaughter, Kendall, is a Fancy Shawl Dancer, and she is a new mother, who will pass down her teachings to my new baby great-granddaughter, Skylar.



I have broken that cycle of abuse and the negative impacts of the residential school and childhood experiences in my generation and I am creating a legacy that will let my grandchildren have memories of the good things in life.

