



### **Katherine Sorbey**

My name is Katherine Sorbey and I am a survivor. As a Mi'kmaw Elder, I credit all my life experiences for giving me strength, resilience, integrity, and compassion to develop and embrace my *nikmatut*, in all of Mi'kmaki.

I was born on December 30th, 1943, in Eskasoni. My mother is Susan Johnson from Eskasoni and Noel Johnson, my foster father, is from Membertou. My early childhood with my family was spent living a traditional lifestyle, where we survived by practicing our traditional ways of living off the land and waters. Hunting, fishing, gathering foods and medicines, we moved around to many places. We had a difficult life and this had an impact on my entire family.

At the age of five years, I attended Indian Day School on reserve, where I was forbidden to speak my language and experienced the racism of my first teacher on my first day of school. I was sent to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School at age 10, because my dad was sick in the hospital with tuberculosis. I was filled with despair in losing my connection to my family and community. I lost my freedom to be L'nu, to speak, think, feel and be, me. I survived the racism and child abuse as a student for 6 years in the 1950s.

After the IRS, I attended the Convent Our Lady of the Assumption in Arichat, Nova Scotia. We were not allowed to speak Mi'kmaq, nor English! We were in a French immersion school where we experienced more abuse and racism. I quit school at age 16 and migrated to Massachusetts to work in the factories. My experience with racism in Canada prepared me for the racism we would survive in the USA.

In 1962, I met and married my first husband, Douglas A. Brown and we had three children, Donna Elaine, Michael Patrick and Douglas Edward, and I have five beautiful grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren. I lost my Native status, when I married a non-Native man and even after we were divorced in 1965, I had to deal with more racism under the Indian Act and from my own people. I survived that!

I returned to school and joined Native politics as a founding member of the Boston Indian Council, along with my friend, Annie Mae Pictou. I taught Mi'kmaw culture and language and we worked together to educate others in the community schools about our history and impacts of racism. I want to acknowledge all the other Indian Residential School Survivors who were also champions and warriors, founding members of many Native organizations in Canada and USA, that developed social programs, addiction programs, social services and cultural and healing programs.

I met and married, Joseph Sorbey, my soul mate of 41+ years ago in Listuguj, Quebec. I taught the Mi'kmaw language in the summer months and worked in Nova Scotia at various Native organizations. In the 1980s, I helped to create the Mi'kmaq Language workbook series, maps and storytelling to document our Mi'kmaq history and worked as a translator in Mi'kmaw, as my language is my passion.

Some of the highlights of my life are the acknowledgement and gratitude from Aboriginal people. I am the recipient of the New Brunswick Solicitor General's Award in 1981. I was awarded the Native Council Lifetime Achievement Award in June 1985; I was their first President. I received the

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Canadian Aboriginal Peoples Award in the 1990s and the Grand Chief Donald Marshall Sr. Memorial Elder Award in 2000. I am a published poet and songwriter and I have been a singer in the church choir for 65 years. My most cherished work is to promote our Mi'kmaw culture within many Aboriginal communities in Atlantic Canada.

In 1994, I began my acting career began with a small role in "Squanto—A Warrior's Tale." I also acted in a documentary "Spirit World—The story of the Mi'kmaq" in 2000, "Rhymes for Young Ghouls" in 2013, and in "North Mountain" in 2014.

As I reflect back on the paths my life has taken, I see that I have accomplished many things because I am a survivor. I would like to send a message of love and hope to our youth. Your life is going to take many paths as you create your own legacy. Learn your Mi'kmaw history, culture and language to develop your connection to our spirituality, Mother Earth and all our Relations. You will do more than survive, you will thrive. Look for my book in the future that I am writing about surviving, entitled "What I have seen, I cannot unsee." Wela'lin.

