



Alan Knockwood, Sipekne'katik

My name is Alan Knockwood, and I reside in Indian Brook, Sipekne'katik, Mi'kma'ki. I am a survivor of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School. My mother is Annie Mae Knockwood, and I am the youngest of her four children. My siblings are Josephine, David, and Patrick. My father was Max Basque. When I lived in Indian Brook, I was raised by my mother and my Grandfather, Louie Knockwood. My mom was battling tuberculosis when I was a child. My grandfather was an Elder but only worked part-time as a trapper and woodworker, making ax and pick handles, but the market was unpredictable so we were very poor. My mother thought that I might have a better life at the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, so I was taken to the school that was less than five kilometers from my home in Indian Brook.

Before I went to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, I had attended the Micmac Indian Day School until grade three. I was an altar boy for Father Boudreau in Indian Brook. Father Boudreau had his own way of doing Mass, and he taught me to serve the Mass in Latin. During my three years in the Residential School, I was an altar boy and had to serve Mass every single morning at 6 a.m., getting up at 5 a.m. to get into my dress clothes to serve the Mass. I continued to use Latin and sometimes this would get me into trouble. I was bullied by the other boys because they thought I was spoiled, having dress clothes to wear when I was serving the Mass. This was very far from the truth. Two brothers helped me, Ivan and Carl Marble, often holding off the bullies for me. I completed grades four and five in the Residential School.

I was one of the lucky ones and was able to get out of there alive. I got very sick while at the Residential School and the nun who was our nurse, would not believe me when I told her I was sick. The nun told me I was just "lollygagging." One night while we were bussing supper dishes, we decided to have a contest to see who could walk across the dining room holding the most bowls. I collapsed that night in severe pain and was taken to the doctor in Stewiacke, who then rushed me to the Truro hospital, where I had emergency surgery to remove my appendix. My appendix had burst while I was on the operating table, I was quite sick and was even given my last rights. When I finally woke up and complained to the priest about being hungry, they let my brother David and my mother, who had come from Boston, come in to see me. They were expecting me to die. When I was discharged, my grandfather came to get me from the hospital and brought me home. On the day the RCMP came to take me back to the Residential School, my grandfather was cleaning his guns at the kitchen table. They said they would come back later but didn't. I think they knew he wasn't going to let them take me back to that place. I continued my schooling in grade six at the Indian Day School.

In the Fall of 1968, my mother met and married Pat Sark of PEI, and my family moved to Summerside. I had six stepsisters, Lorraine, Linda, Shirley, Jackie, Barbara, and Tina. I became the eldest brother to Jackie and Barbara, as the older girls had already moved out when we arrived. Tina, the youngest, was



born with severe disabilities and was institutionalized. When Tina passed away, I brought her back to PEI to be buried next to her mother. I attended Summerside High School in grade nine.

We lived in PEI until my mother passed away in 1970. I did not get along with my stepfather and certainly did not want to be adopted by him, so he eventually kicked me out. I was homeless and living out of a car for a while, but I continued to go to high school. I found a place to board with help from Marjorie Gould. She and I were the only godchildren to Peter and Mary Gould. Marjorie was also my mentor and in many ways my hero. She challenged me to work hard and was always there for me through school, even helping me with my homework on the phone from Amherst. She gave me an incentive of twenty dollars a week to continue to go to school and twenty-five when my marks were excellent. I have so much gratitude for her, for how she always pushed me to do better, and for the fact that she was the foundation of my education and success. I got through many challenges in my life, finished school and succeeded because of her.

Before I finished high school, my uncle Albert Knockwood, Aunt Hazel's brother, told me he had a job waiting for me in New York once I graduated. I wanted to quit school because I was bored and wanted to get a job so I could start working for my own money. I spoke to Principal Hayes at the Hants East High School and told him I needed to finish school sooner, so he agreed to let me write my exams. I passed all my courses and got to graduate early. There were only two Mi'kmaq students in grade 12 that year. Soon afterward, I was on the road hitchhiking to New York to see my Uncle Albert who got me a job doing ironwork. As soon as I got there I started to work. On my first day, I was just supposed to get familiar with the job site but was sent on an errand to get something on the 43rd floor. As I headed up, I discovered I was terrified of heights and I froze in fear, that's when I realized that kind of work was not for me.

On my way home that day, I stepped off the subway and there was a Navy recruiting office, so I went to find out about the service, and that's when I decided to join the Navy. My uncle Albert had served in the Navy and I had to get him to sign my permission papers because I was just 17. The incentive for me to join was that they offered me a position with air traffic control. During my last days of boot camp, I found out that I wasn't eligible for training in air control because I was ineligible for security clearance, as a Canadian. I then had the choice of being a boatswain's mate, a dental technician, a hospital corpsman, or I could leave the Navy. I became a corpsman and spent eight years in the Navy. Unfortunately, I was given a general discharge under honorable conditions following an incident.

The corpsmen were dispatched to a riot. I was in the middle of the fighting, treating people when this Colonel came up behind me unexpectedly and pulled me away. It was pure instinct when I came up swinging and struck the Colonel. In my defense, I had already been hit several times during the riot while helping others and mistook him for someone who was trying to harm me again. I went to the captain's mast that following Monday and was demoted, and then was out of the Navy by Wednesday. It was a tough break, but we did stop the riot! While I have some benefits as a



US Navy Veteran, I do not have the full benefits that all veterans enjoy. I served as a chaplain for the American Legion for one year, offering support and prayer, visiting patients, and even officiated at funeral services. Currently, I am very active with the Veterans in Canada. During the Vietnam War, returning soldiers were the most maligned veterans on their return home. In more recent years, veterans are being recognized for their service and honored as servicemen. All the Marine Corps Medics are corpsmen in the Navy, and I am proud of my service as a corpsman.

I met my wife in Boston while I was working at the Boston Indian Council as a teacher and driver for their after-school programs. We were married in Boston and celebrated our 36th anniversary this year. We left Boston and moved to Florida for two years. Unfortunately, the Florida heat affected my wife, and we couldn't continue to live there, so we moved back to Nova Scotia. I worked as a nurse for a year which was enough for me. I decided to go into counseling and started doing consulting work for Aids Nova Scotia and Health Canada. I also taught Mi'kmaq history at university. I took courses in geology, theatre and American history at Dalhousie University, as an adult student. I remember that my professor thought that our Treaties no longer existed, and that the Mi'kmaq were considered conquered peoples. He didn't agree with me when I spoke about the true history of the Mi'kmaq and that our Treaties still existed and are valid today. I continued to research, and other students would also research and report on it, and we proved that he was wrong. I continue to educate others about our Mi'kmaw history and culture, the impacts the Residential Schools had, and about The Truth and Reconciliation Commission today. I am a traditional Pipe Carrier and practitioner of our ceremonies.

I want to share a few words of wisdom for those who work to educate others about our incredible history. Some people do not know the truth and because of that, they react through ignorance. They don't know because it was never taught in schools. Use that opportunity as a teaching moment, because it's better to educate them on the truth. It will plant the seed of knowledge to promote understanding about the Mi'kmaq and reconciliation, and the impact colonization had on our shared history of Canada. We have over 13,000 years of rich history and tradition to back us up. Embrace it! Be proud of it! Most importantly, hold your ground because you are coming from a place of truth.

