



James Martin Sack, Sipekne'katik

My name is James Martin Sack, known as Jimmy Sack, a member of the Sipekne'katik Band, residing in Indian Brook, NS. I was born on May 8, 1955, to parents Freeman Sack of Sipekne'katik, and Annie Googoo of We'koq'maq. My maternal grandparents were Mary Battiste and Frank Googoo of Wekoqmaq, and my step-grandfather was Antle Battiste. My fraternal grandparents were Martin Sack and Mary Jane Sack. I have eight siblings, Catherine Willis, Gloria Jean Googoo, Peter Sack, Leo Sack, Mary Jane Brooks, Beverly Sack, Carl Sack, and Gilbert Brooks.

The first four years of my life were spent in Indian Brook and at the age of four, I was taken to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School. There were other younger children in there at that time, some were still in diapers, the year was 1959. The staff I remember the most were the ones on the boys' side, such as Brother Sampson and the nuns that oversaw the boys. It was rough being there; the food was bad and there wasn't enough to go around, it was like being in a concentration camp. I remember Sister Gilberta, who was the head nun, was mean and physically abusive to the children. I remember she smashed me in the head, but I don't know why she did that. My Mom worked at the Residential School for some time and I know that the abuse didn't start happening to me until after she quit.

My mom and dad were also Residential School survivors in the '30s and '40s. They spent ten years in Residential School from 1935 to 1945. My mom told me that nothing bad happened to her or my father at the Ressie, but what I think she meant was sexual abuse, because physical abuse happened to the children daily. I don't think she would have ever talked about it if it did. They met in there and when they came out, they were married and had children. They didn't have parenting skills and so they had no idea how to parent us. They suffered the effects of the IRS system, even if they didn't realize it. It had a deep impact on our family. They started drinking and eventually, my dad battled alcoholism. He went to Boston in the mid-'50s, and at the age of 48, he died of complications from an alcoholic seizure. I didn't know him well, but I remember he was a tall man. I remember when they brought him home, I was just three years old, and they held the wake and I saw him, but I didn't understand death at that time and thought he was sleeping and would wake up. He had a big family of 14 brothers and four sisters.

On November 22, 1964, my mom was remarried to Norman Brooks and I returned home from the Residential School to live with them. I went to the Indian Day School for grades five and six

and had to repeat those grades before I went to Hants East Rural High School for grades seven to nine.

In 1969, I went to Maine to pick blueberries and then to Aroostook County to work in the potato house. I was making money and working hard at the age of eight and each summer, everyone would go to Maine to do migrant work. I worked to earn enough for my school clothes, boots, and toys. I gained a strong work ethic because I learned to work hard for what I wanted at a young age. This work ethic helped when I got older and I worked hard for my money.

In my twenties, I still had a hard time coping with what happened to me as a child in the Residential School, and I didn't care about anyone. I was angry, hurt and resentful, and resorted to drinking, abusing solvents, and doing drugs to numb the pain I carried. The circumstances with the nuns in the Residential School, and the negative experiences impacted me in ways I couldn't understand. I was unable to communicate well with my partners and when I did open up, what I said would be used against me. The abuse in the Rennie prevented me from having healthy relationships and I didn't handle things very well. Drinking, drugs, and violence were a big part of my life for many years, and it often got me into trouble with the law. It was a vicious cycle; I felt so much remorse and then I would do it all over again.

It was many years later in my late 30's and 40's that I realized all this, but it was too late. People hurt me and I hurt people, through the abuse of drugs and alcohol and unresolved trauma. I had many relationships that didn't work out. I was involved in an unhealthy relationship for 20 years that I knew was not good, and finally, I decided to go to a treatment program to get help and ended that relationship.

When I started my healing journey, I knew I had to work on myself and heal from my past, and I had to learn new ways of coping and living to stay sober. I learned about the addictions and the hold they had on my life and what damage it was doing to my mind, body and spirit. I continue to attend programs at least twice a year to prevent relapse on my healing journey.

Over the years I have attended several Residential School Survivors Healing gatherings, the AA Roundups whenever I can. These gatherings have also helped me to heal and learn more life skills. I keep active, love to do arts and crafts, and enjoy building things.

In the 1970s, I went to Boston and attended school at the Boston Indian Council. There I found work by way of helping others find employment and gain job training. My work experience includes carpentry, roofing, and drywall which I learned while working on houses on the reserve.



I had some positive role models in my life when I was young. Big Mom, Isabella Marble, was a grandmother to everyone and she opened her home to many young people on the reserve. We grew up around her place – she had a big house and a farm on the reserve where everyone would go to hang out. There were gardens, animals, and chickens, and she always had good food to eat. She would also go to Maine for work, and we would gather around her there too.

My life has been hard growing up and alcohol abuse was rampant in my family, as well as everywhere on the reserve. The impacts of the Residential School have had negative effects on me and my loved ones. It was a hard life at times, but I remember there were also good times. I made many bad choices and I could have lost my life many times through self-destructive behaviours, like abusing solvents, alcohol, and drugs, to numb the pain of the past and to try to cope with the negative impacts Residential Schooling had on my life.

I went to treatment several times to attend programs and counseling, and each time I learned more about the impacts that Residential School had on me. Treatment taught life skills and healthy coping strategies and helped me turn my life around. While I was getting sober and creating a safe place for myself, I was happy when I got visitors and was encouraged when people would show that cared about how I was doing. I live one day at a time, and today I'm proud to say that I'm sober and living a better life. I think there should be more opportunities for Survivors and families to gather to learn about the IRS legacy and our culture so that we can continue to heal and celebrate the good things in our lives.

I realized that I can help the younger generation by telling them that they don't need to make excuses for the bad decisions in their lives. There is help available, people they can talk to and discuss the things that are bothering them and learn ways to deal with those things while they are young. They don't need to carry the pain through their lifetime. There is treatment for addictions and mental health counseling available to help those who need it by teaching positive ways to heal.

Today, I offer this advice to young people. Anyone can find themselves in terrible life circumstances and wonder, "Why is this happening to me?" When you decide to begin to search for the answer, that's when you will know that you want to change how you are living and coping. You will discover that you have the power to take that first step and begin your journey towards healing. I want young people to know there are people who care about them. Keep your head up and don't give up trying to get the help you need because you are worth it. There is a better life for you, and you will heal and create your best life.

