



Karen Byard, Baltimore

My name is Karen Bernard Byard, and I live in Baltimore, Maryland. I am the eldest daughter of John Andrew Bernard and Nancy Elizabeth (Howe) Lutz. My siblings are Robert John Bernard (deceased), Dorene Bernard, Linda Bernard, Joanne Bernard, Tammy Lutz, and Thomas Lutz. My grandparents were Ernest and Bridget (Maloney) Howe, from Indian Brook, and Angeline and Lawrence Bernard, from Wagmatcook. I was born in Truro, NS and resided in Indian Brook until age three when my brother Robert, sister Dorene and I moved to Boston with our parents.

I am a survivor of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School (IRS), attending four school years from 1961-63 and 1966, and was there when it finally closed in June 1967. We were living in Boston when I was taken to the IRS. My first recollection of being in Boston was at age four when we went to visit my granddaddy, Ernie Howe, who lived on Dudley Street in Roxbury, MA. We stayed with him until my parents found an apartment of our own. I remember that Frank and Margaret Wightly, and my Aunt Rita and Uncle Danny Stephens, and some of my mom's cousins lived on our street on Vine Ave. We had our own little Mi'kmaw community.

When I started school my first year was spent at St. Patrick's, a parochial school, with the Sisters of Charity. It was during this time that my parents were having marriage problems due to my dad's alcoholism and abusive behavior towards his family. He is also a survivor of the IRS in Shubenacadie, which he attended from 1929-1940. My mom is a survivor as well, having attended in the 1940s. Their difficulties were left for my mother to handle alone. She was already having a hard time trying to support and raise five children while working two jobs and seeking reliable daycare. My dad was absent often and continued to drink excessively. When my parents separated, my mom was only 26. With five children to care for, she decided to send my brother Robert, sister Dorene, and myself to the IRS in Shubenacadie from Boston by bus. I know she felt she didn't have a choice at that time. She thought the IRS wouldn't be the same as when she went and that the nuns wouldn't treat the children the same way as she had been treated. There were people from the reserve working there at that time. I know that this was a hard decision for her.

Being a young child in the second grade and already having attended a Catholic school in Boston with nuns who were good to us, I didn't think going to the Residential School would be that different. I didn't know any of the other children, except my cousins who were also in the Residential School. I was naive to think I could talk to my brother or speak my voice when I wanted. I found out that I couldn't talk to my brother for the entire four years I was there. I had a Bostonian accent and sometimes other kids bullied me. We got along with the older kids who also came from Boston, those who spent some of their childhood there before going to the IRS.



We looked out for each other. I had a rude awakening to the differences between the nuns at St. Patrick's School in Boston and the nuns at the IRS in Shubenacadie. We were treated cruelly and at times I think the nuns didn't want to be there any more than we did. I felt that they never should have become nuns in the first place.

Loneliness was the first and most memorable emotion I felt. I cried every night for my family when I first got there, like so many of the other children. When I was seven, I was molested by another student who was in the bed next to me. I never told anyone about it because I was so afraid and I thought she was trying to be my friend; I didn't understand it. This is the first time I've shared what happened to me and I don't want to go into detail about the negative experiences at the IRS. There were definitely traumatic experiences that impacted my life while at the IRS and afterward, but there were also positive ones. I made lifelong friendships with many of the students and we have continued to be friends over the years. We survived together.

I remember in 1967, the IRS in Shubenacadie was to close in June, it was also the year I completed grade seven and eight. Father Kearney was the priest that year and he relaxed the rules where we could see our brothers and both the girls and boys could go skating together. Around that time, Father Kearney sent me over to the boys' side to ask for some help shoveling off the ice rink so we could all go skating. I remember being punished by Sister Gilberta for going to the boys' side even though the priest told me to do it. I was locked in the dormitory and she said that she was the supervisor of the girls, not the priest. Another thing that stands out is I remember the food was awful. We were fed scraps from the priest and nuns which were made into some awful hash and fed to the children. I couldn't eat it, so I got punished. We got one boiled egg in 1967 on Easter Sunday. We suffered from malnutrition and hunger at times because we were fed a poor diet. Some of us didn't eat at all even if we were forced, because we couldn't stomach the food and opted for the punishment instead.

After the IRS was shut down in 1967, I returned to Boston at age 13 and attended Holy Cross Cathedral High School which was run by the Sisters of Saint Joseph. I am the only one in my family that attended Catholic-run schools from grade primary to grade 12. In 1971 I graduated at the age of 17. I went to work as a Nurse's Aide after I graduated. My supervisor wrote a letter of support for me to apply for nursing school at the Boston City Hospital. I didn't think we could afford it, so my mom advised me to go home to NS to go to nursing school.

I moved back to Indian Brook, NS when I was 18, living first with my grandmother, Bridget. It was a difficult time because she was an alcoholic. I stayed with my uncle, Tommy Howe, for my first Christmas away from my family. I stayed with extended family members often when my grandmother drank; it was difficult for me to stay with her. My brother Robert John and I lived with our mom's first cousin, Reginald Maloney, and Gloria and their family. He was always



encouraging me to apply for jobs and telling me I could do anything I wanted to do. I had planned to apply for a Dental Assistant course when I got home but was too late to start that year. I ended up applying for a job with the Union of NS Indians in 1972 as a bookkeeper, and I got the job. I worked there for ten years, moving up to Secretary Finance Clerk. I moved to a new position as Outreach Coordinator to help our people upgrade their education, work-skills, and job readiness. We needed employment and skills training programs to get jobs off-reserve. I worked in this position for five years and then became the Program Manager for NS. I moved on to work Canada Employment Centre as a Canada Native Employment Counsellor in Truro, NS for 8 years and then became a PM-4 Pathways Program Manager at Canada Employment and Immigration Commission in Dartmouth Regional Office. At that time, I was one of only 4 females in the position of PM-4 and Program managers in the Atlantic Region. I went to school and was certified by the University of Ottawa in Employment Counselling. I also provided cultural sensitivity training for programme managers and counsellors about Mi'kmaq culture, values and racism and poverty and other barriers to our people in accessing training, education and employment in NS.

I was young, 21, when I got married. My husband and I had difficulties from the start, and I ended our marriage within two years. I moved to Truro and met my second husband; I was remarried to Dean Byard in 1985, and we have a beautiful daughter, Chelsea Byard, who was born on April 14, 1988. My second marriage began to fall apart after the birth of our daughter, and we separated and eventually got divorced. I raised my daughter as a single parent. I found it difficult to stay in NS and work after my marriage ended, so in 1994 I decided we would move to Baltimore to be closer to my parents and siblings. I wanted my daughter to grow up with family connections, the influence of her grandparents and extended family. I went to work for my sister, Dr. Joanne Bernard at her dental practice as the office manager. I worked there for 24 years, having recently retired in 2018 at age 65.

I have to say it was challenging to raise my daughter while I was working. Chelsea grew up with my step-dad and brother Tommy, who provided her with the male support that she didn't get from her father and although she didn't grow up with her dad, she is thankful that they played a major role in her life, as did her grandmother and aunties. I think I did a great job raising her with their help and encouragement.

One thing I regret is missing a lot of her childhood accolades in dance, cheerleading, clarinet concerts, and activities she was enrolled in, but I made sure she didn't miss out. Her grandmother and aunties and caregivers attended activities with her while I was a working single parent. I'm sure she wanted me there too, but as an adult, she appreciates all that I did for her. Today, she is successful in her chosen career as a Registered Dental Hygienist and has a bachelor's degree in psychology.



My mother was a great mom raising seven children; I am forever grateful for all she has done and continues to do for her family. My mom always instilled in us the importance of family. She worked hard and always put the needs of her family first. I know she made many sacrifices to make sure we were provided for and she helped her siblings and my cousins, too. She has always given us her love, encouragement, and support and is still our rock. That has laid the foundation for our family to love and support one another and be there for each other. I don't think we could have succeeded in life without her instilling these values and being the role model she is.

I know that the effects of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, experienced by three generations of my family, contributed to our family dysfunction and impacted my grandparents, parents, siblings and I, and many more extended family members. We are fortunate that we have come to terms with this and that many of us have moved on in our lives, healing from the impacts. We are hopeful that our future generations will continue to heal and strive to live better lives than the generation before.

I would like to share some words of encouragement to those who are impacted by Residential Schools and day schools and our life experiences; you can overcome adversity and heal from the past. We are strong, resilient and we are still here. The true history of Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States must be taught in schools so that there can be understanding and reconciliation of the impacts of Residential School.

