



Aboriginal Voices

of Survival, Resiliency and
Community Wellness

by

Voices of the Urban Indigenous Peoples

Acknowledgements

It gives us great pride to present the release of ‘Aboriginal Voices of Survival, Resiliency and Community Wellness’ on National Aboriginal Day. We believe the contributions Aboriginal people make nation wide, as well as in our own communities, are highlighted in these stories. And although each story is unique in its own right it also represents the collective experiences as a Nation. We trust these stories will give hope and inspiration to all of you reading but especially those youth who are struggling to fit in.

These personal narratives will depict survival, resiliency and wellness in the Aboriginal Community. The life lessons demonstrate that we are indeed a strong, vibrant people just like our ancestors. We gather strength in numbers and it is our wish that you join us on our journey to healing self, community and nation.

Acknowledgements: the people who submitted their stories; the editing team Alana Ross, Chris Tyrone Ross, Jonathan Potskin, Howard Saunders, Carol Ninine and Lise Robinson, the typist, Wendy Rosenthal and Gary Dyck for putting it up on the City of Edmonton website. This project was a success because of the teamwork and passion each person had in completing this wonderful project.

- The Authors, Aboriginal Voices

Copyrights:

The following stories can not be reproduced in part or in whole without the express written consent of the author(s).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Shannon C. Armitage.....	Page 3
Miranda J. Bear.....	Page 5
Dean Brown.....	Page 6
Peter Brule.....	Page 7
Myrtle Calahaisn.....	Page 8
Aaron Cardinal.....	Page 10
Beverly Findlay.....	Page 12
Celina Cardinal Hall.....	Page 13
Isabelle Hanson.....	Page 14
Miranda Jimmy.....	Page 16
Charlotte Korbisser.....	Page 17
Conway Kootenay.....	Page 18
Jacqueline L'Hirondelle.....	Page 20
Luella Massey	Page 22
Terry Lusty.....	Page 23
Cynthia Makokis.....	Page 24
Victoria Molnar	Page 25
Stephanie Moosewah (Arcand)	Page 27
Gary Moostoos.....	Page 28
Carol Ninine	Page 29
Heather Poitras.....	Page 31

Jonathan Potskin	Page 33
Basil J Quewezance.....	Page 35
Lise Robinson.....	Page 37
Alana Ross.....	Page 39
Chris Tyrone Ross.....	Page 41
George Rowe	Page 43
Andrea Watchmaker.....	Page 44
James	Page 45
An invitation to share your story.....	Page 47

Shannon C. Armitage

Shannon being of Cree and English ancestry, was born on April 26, 1959 in High Prairie Alberta, and than was raise on a farm by Kinuso, Alberta by Lesser Slave Lake.

Shannon being a single parent of four children, three boys and a daughter and has three grand children. Shannon's wishes for his family are to take time for each other. There is so much we can learn from each other, we may come from the same background and have the same goals but we may take different paths to get there.



As Shannon grow up, his fondest memory as a child was, when his uncle seen how saddened Shannon was when he was coming home from school. This was due to seeing other kids playing with their toys and Shannon not having any toys like the other kids in school of which was due to the family lack of financial resources.

Shannon uncle wanting to make things better went on to pick up a board, trim off the ends, went to look for pop bottle caps. Nail the caps on the board, called Shannon over and said “you now have something that no one else has”.

He went on to tell Shannon that each pop bottle cap would do, he would pretend that one cap would be an ignition, one for lights, speedometer and other uses, like that would be in a car or motorcycle. Shannon thought it was such a loving gesture for his uncle to notice his feeling and needs and than was willing to make something special for him. It show Shannon as a child and for the rest of his life, that by doing the little things for each other can give a caring and loving memory for the rest of one life.

Shannon’s teaching of resiliency is that we should never ever give up on self, family and friends. Truly believes that the one who is a winner is one that continues the journey to the betterment of oneself and others.

Some of Shannon’s achievements include taking courses in college, military training “this Shannon gives credit to the military” this help give him the courage’s in life to move on to better things for him and his family and numerous courses throughout his life.

Shannon wanted to give back to the community, so he got involved in coaching kids in Edmonton, He went on to coach for 12 years in soccer from U-6 to U-18, softball for 2 years and volleyball for one year.

He has also been in executive positions with boards such as community league president and was Chair Person for the Millwood's president's zone council.

Some of the agencies and role models that affected his life were in 4-H, colleagues and friends. He was also involved with 4-H as a youngster where it was an avenue to meet new people and travel, and to try new things.

With 18 years of service within the Federal Government, Shannon career has had him working with Aboriginal People from all across Canada. This was with procurement, Procurement Strategy for Aboriginal Business (PSAB), working within comprehensive land claims in the north and then within the last five years on business development with Aboriginal people in Alberta.

Shannon co workers and supervisors have been instrumental in assisting Shannon with his career path. One person that stood out was Mike Shaw, when he said "dream it and then do it".

Another that assisted Shannon attains success was a friend within the trades and successful entrepreneurs. Shannon friend, Don being a mechanic and he loves what he does. With his presence and compassion for doing mechanical work is his gift and he shown that if you love what you are doing and have compassion you can make better life for yourself.

Remember in life, we can be all friends, may it be a short time and then some for life. Friends are the family we pick and choose to have in life. As for community look where you come from and look at the challenges of yesterday and create opportunities for the next generations to come.

Some advice to the younger generation is: *"No one owes you anything to success, you owe it to yourself. If you have a dream and compassion follow it and do what it takes to achieve your goals"*.

Miranda Bear

I am from Little Pine, Saskatchewan and of Cree descent. I am a proud single mother of two teenage children, Deidra and Zach. During my childhood I enjoyed travelling with my grandparents to various community events such as pow-wows, round dances and chuck wagon races. As a young girl my grandmother encouraged me to dance fancy while on the pow-wow trail.



My late grandfather, Eli Bear was actively involved in his community. He was involved in politics and was Chief for a brief period in his life. Eli was better known for his contribution in the Elder's Council for his community. My Grandfather was a Pow-Wow dancer, a Master of Ceremonies, and a facilitator/teacher/ and promoter of the Cree language and culture. I remember him as being "Loud and Proud" of who he was and where he came from. Many people still remember my grandfather this way, and still share his stories with me. My grandfather was away from home a lot travelling, meeting with Elders, conducting ceremonies, and preaching about the importance of maintaining the language and culture of our people.

I was taught by my grandparents to never to give up and that challenges teach you to be resilient. This has taught me to be very strong willed. A part of growth is going through life's pains. I believe that obstacles are present to teach you something, that there is a reason for everything, and that it is up to you to figure things out.

My education includes a Family Intervention/Youth Counselling Certificate, a Business Management Diploma, and a Bachelor of Commerce Degree in Human Resource Management and Marketing.

I think that some of the greatest lessons in life are that one can never stop learning. Throughout your life you will learn about people, places, exchange ideas, share experiences, figure out new ways of doing or thinking about things and develop skills along the way.

My grandfather was a role model as he encouraged me to strive to be independent, to speak for myself, and to stay in school. My Grandma was instrumental in teaching me issues pertaining to being a woman and about parenting.

Some words of advice that I would like to give to the younger generation are that education is the key to making a difference in your life. Make sure to seek help when you need it and surround yourself with healthy peers who will support you to succeed in achieving your goals.

My aspirations for my community are good health, wellness, happiness and prosperity.

Set examples, look to your Elders for guidance, for community building is.... important and vital.

Dean Brown

I was born on September 4th, at the Royal Alex Hospital in Edmonton to Rita Cardinal (Shaw). I am of Cree and Irish decent. My mom was from Grouard and I am very proud of my First Nations ancestry. My grandmother was a healer and helped the people around me.

My educational and professional achievements include a Substance Abuse certificate, a Victims Services Certificate and many related courses. I believe I have a master's degree from the "School of Hard Knocks". I am currently employed at the Canadian Native Friendship Centre and believe it is truly a gift to be constantly advocating for Aboriginal people.



I work on several community committees: National Aboriginal Day Festival Co-Chair, Voices of the Urban Indigenous People Co-Chair, Career Fair, Heritage Days Committee, and New Ways of Working Together, Action Circles, an advocate for the missing and murdered women (helping to host the marches).

I practice my culture by attending ceremonies: sweet grass, sweat lodges, sun dancing and take part in community events to help promote wellness.

I believe in being true to yourself no matter what the obstacles that comes in your life. All answers lie within. When we are quiet enough to look within, we will find our own answers.

Some of the greatest lessons in my life were learnt going through the most difficult of experiences in life and coming out stronger. I went through all types of abuse as a child and up until my early twenties. I then turned to drugs and alcohol as a way of coping with all that had happened to me. My wake up call came on my 30th birthday. I knew that my mom died at 33 and did not want to follow in her footsteps. Detox was a stepping-stone to a new life that opened the door to healing and changing my lifestyle. Now my passion is all about giving back to the people.

One of the greatest things I can share with young people is to *RESPECT the LAND and the TEACHINGS of this LAND. Our MOTHER EARTH needs all the help we can give HER. Always be true to yourself and be the person you want people to see you as.*

My wish is to always be positive and not to let negative in and remember we can be who we want to be.

Peter Brule

I am from Wabasca, Alberta. I was born on September 5, 1982 in Slave Lake, Alberta. My background is Cree.

My most treasured memories of my childhood were being around my family. My grandfather was a very spiritual man who taught me about ceremonies, how to handle sweet grass and the importance of sweat lodges.



I have had to overcome so much through my life as my parents were alcoholics. I never gave up on going to school and really engaged myself in playing guitar. I set goals for my life...and believe in NEVER GIVING UP. I have overcome my vices by focusing on my goals in my life. I have made some drastic changes in my life since losing many peers to drinking and alcohol.

My passions are Web Design Animation, Graphics Design, and Web Consulting and I aspire to continue my work in this area. I would like to become a game developer. I also love to play guitar and one of the turning points in my life was when I was the bass player in a band that made a demo CD and has performed all over Alberta.

My older cousin, Lee, was very influential and was my role model. Lee supported my desire to move off the reserve to pursue my education. Moving to Edmonton was the smartest thing I could do.

Some of the advice I would like to give the youth is to ***STAY IN SCHOOL*** and ***STAY AWAY*** from ***alcohol and drugs***. Look for something to strive for and set you some goals.

My wishes for family and community are; "***Never forget that you're not alone***". "Community keeps building itself, growing positive ways to impact the generations to come".

Myrtle Calahasen

I was born on October 21, 1931, and I am a Cree Kokum from Saddle Lake, Alberta. Some of my earliest happiest moments of my life were when I was with my grandmother, Mrs. Sarah Cardinal. Sarah was a survivor and was always busy doing something. My grandmother was motivated to get things done. No matter if she had aches and pains she always found it within herself to help out. My grandparents did not ever go on welfare.



They always went to the bush to get what they could for the family to survive. They put out snares for hunting and often they would get different types of game to provide for the family. They used to use gunnysacks to carry what ever they could get from nature. They were always provided for.

My tradition is religion and prayer. I grew up with the United Church and converted when I went to the convent.

For years I stayed there and had no contact with my mom, except for a glimpse of her on Fridays when she left work. I went to St. Francis School and had to get baptized, received communion and go to confession all in the same year because of the change of religions. Basically the nuns took over my life and I became a caregiver for the children. I enjoyed that although when I returned home I also babysat but that was because my parents drank. I remember that.

I never had a formal education because I went to school half days and half days I would work, so I only go to grade five. I was good at mathematics so I was able to add and subtract. Life was about survival and maintaining a good life until I grew up to be a young woman.

Soon after leaving the convent, I was married to my husband for the next fifty years. He was in the military and helped the children out with their schooling. We had opened a cleaning company where we hired our children as employees and they got paid each Friday. All the children graduated from high school except for Stewart. We were determined to have a good life and we opened a Handicraft store on 118 Avenue and 90 Street. We often went to the flea markets to sell our goods. At that point I got really involved with crafts and I enjoyed making them. In 1974, we sold the store because I got sick and I was not able to manage the workload anymore.

Some of the greatest lessons of life that I have learned are to respect life and to respect the wisdom of the other people. I try to help others in any way possible as that is what we are here for. My grandmother taught me this valuable lesson of being humble and sacrificing, even if she only had one bannock left she would give it to someone else. Sometimes my grandmother helped out the seniors when she could.

One of the great role models that helped me to understand life was my grandmother who influenced me to be persistent. My grandmother's way of life only was to live for tomorrow. She came to visit me two or three times. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend her funeral.

Six years ago victim services unit truly were helpful when I went through the death of my husband and the suicide of my son Stewart, just four months after the death of my husband. My question to this day is: Why?

After the death of my son Stewart, many of my children's relationships fragmented. My extended family treats me better than my own and this is so sad because it does not have to be this way. Imagine living through the death of two people in such a short span and with the adult children still not communicating has created more grief. I went for help for two years and to this day I can live my life. My desire for life comes from my Grandmother who **TAUGHT ME TO NEVER EVER GIVE UP**. I want to see the best for my children and my great grandchildren. We only have one life to live and I choose to live in happiness.

Some of the things that helped me out in feeling good about myself was volunteering at the Canadian Native Friendship Centre, The Native Seniors Centre, Employabilities, National Aboriginal Days and Heritage Days. I am always there to help people to move forward - even those ones coming out of treatment centres wanting to change their lives, I encourage them to live their best life by helping others whenever needed.

What opened my eyes was when I went to Hawaii. It was like a leaf turned and that was my awaking to the rest she needed. I even recall going to midnight mass there and hearing the Hawaiians singing the hymns I knew. The Hawaii people embraced me as one of their people and when they found out I was from Canada they were so excited to have a Canadian Aboriginal person there.

About two years ago I started to enjoy life again. I am so grateful to the vibrant friends I have. I never ever thought a woman born from the reserve would ever come to a place of where I have experienced travelling to Hawaii, going to some of the most fancy places in life lavish hotels for dinners, dinner theatres and symphonies, thanks to my friends who have helped me to overcome the dark moments of my life. Just as ever season as storms in the midst is the clearing.

I just wanted to let everyone know there is life after trauma. It's like when death comes at your door, sometimes new births arrive. After being down for so long and working out the pain there is a rainbow of many colours that include happy times. Making that transition is truly a story of inspiration.

I was able to heal through talking to counsellors, crying, volunteering, travelling, prayer and doing things that make me feel good. Humour is also very important part of my healing.

My advice to the younger people is to get your education and to respect others.

My wish for my family and community is that everyone should work hard together to make things better in life.

Aaron Cardinal

I was born on May 18, 1981 in Cold Lake, Alberta. I am Cree and Chipewyan and come from the Saddle Lake reserve. I am married with six children.

One of my fondest memories is camping and playing sports in Cold Lake with my parents and siblings.

I did not fully practice my culture until six years ago when I was 20 years old and started working with youth. It was the atmosphere I was around and the co-workers I had that influenced me to become interested in my heritage.

Being a leader has always come naturally to me. I was never one to follow the crowd and have always found my own path despite the pressure from peers growing up. I strive to stand out and be a role model, not only for my people but also for human beings. I am a very humble person and sees myself as a community worker

My have been a volunteer in the Abbotsfield community for many years. I first became involved with the community by becoming a participant in the Youth Employment Strategies program through the Together WeCan training program. As a result, I have volunteered with the Abbotsfield Recreation Centre (ARC) and within some programs at Lawton Junior High's programs. These experiences led me to fulltime employment in one of the Candora Society's preschool programs. Candora was only one stop on my journey. I am also a coach and mentor with the Edmonton Native Basketball Association.

I received my high school diploma and became a certified childcare worker. I have plans to obtain my PHD in social work. One day I would like to open and manage a recreation centre for young people where the programming takes on a holistic approach.

One of my greatest lessons in life is parenting my children. I have a better understanding of the struggles Aboriginal people are faced with because of the work I do, my own first hand experience growing up and the many addictions I have had to battle.

There were a few role models that helped influence my life. Candora had a huge impact on my life. It was there that, I was given the initial opportunities I may not have been able to gain elsewhere. The Abbotsfield community gave me a chance to give back. One of my basketball coaches and first role model, Chester Bear, helped give a focus to my life and encouragement that helped put me on the path I am following today.



My words of encouragement for the younger generation are, **be yourself, your dreams are what you want them to be. I'd like to remind others that with great respect comes great success.**

The dreams for my family and community are quite humble. I would like to see a better recreation centre for our kids and families. For my family, I would like them to stay focused so they can grow up to be responsible community members. I always tell them to not worry about what others are doing, worry about yourself now and later you can worry about others.

Beverly Findlay

I was born on July 2, 1970 in Edson, Alberta. I am of Cree and German decent. I am currently engaged and have three wonderful children at home.

Some of my fondest memories as a child were living on the trap lines, enjoyed horses, hunting and going to the mountains, as they were always very healing to me.



My family practiced a traditional way of life living on the trap lines, hunting, skinning the animals and utilizing the hide to make moccasins. I also remember having my own little trap line as a child and hunting squirrels for their pelts. My Moosum was a Medicine Man and I learnt a lot from his teachings, growing up, when we were young. I did not know I was living traditionally until I went to university as I thought it was a normal type of lifestyle.

Some of the things that I had to overcome were dealing with impacts of addictions and family violence as these were some of my father's struggles. I became involved in relationships that mimicked that type of behaviour I learnt at a younger age. I entered dysfunctional relationships as I thought it was normal. I have learnt through these experiences that one can overcome these challenges. I have learnt that the gambit of dysfunction of culture, anger and control were part of the bigger picture of oppression. I have found peace in my life by participating in culture that helped me to heal and find that balance like in the Medicine Wheel. I feel that my education was the tool that helped me to accelerate my own healing and understanding of my family dynamics.

My educational background includes:

- Child and Youth Care Diploma
- Social Work Diploma
- Bachelor of Social Work

Some of the greatest lessons of life that I feel really helped me with my life are my family, community and my spirituality which have been the centre of my life. Having balance in oneself is very important. Understanding oneself and reaching out to everyone else. Resiliency of people is a passion of mine since I believe that people can change.

My role models were my Grandparents who taught me how to be a person. Children are what are important in life. Professionally great role models helping me are: Donna Jamison, Tony Arcand and a variety of others, Elders, family and youth.

My advice to the young people is ***“THE PAST CAN CONTROL YOU OR YOU CAN CONTROL IT. YOU HAVE CHOICES. WALK THE TALK. BE GOOD EXAMPLES”***.

My wishes for family and community to be healthy and connected are circular.

Celina Cardinal Hall

I was born in Elk Point on February 15, 1968 and I am a Cree member of the Saddle Lake First Nations Band. I am married with three children.

One of my fondest memories as a child is when my father used to take me to the rodeo.

I did not practice tradition until I was 15 years of age as my father's families were evangelists. My grandmother was in the residential schools and was opposed to practicing her culture and tradition after that experience. I learned more about tradition through my mother's side of the family who practiced their culture on a regular basis.

Some of the teachings of resiliency were very heartfelt lessons in my life. At a very young age, I was in an automobile accident where my father, sister and brother perished. My mother and sister were injured and hospitalized for some time after the accident. I was not able to attend the funeral due to being in the hospital for a period of six months. I had burns to my body where I needed to get extensive surgery. For a long time I was angry with God regarding the accident because a part of my family was taken from me. At 24 years of age I came to understand my own mother's pain. My grandmother explained to me that this accident really impacted my own mother's life and that is why she had struggled with addictions for some years. Finally my mother overcame the addictions and has really worked hard to be where she is at today. To overcome the sexual abuse there were many levels that it impacted my life. This sexual abuse stole my innocence at a young age and forgiveness has been a struggle. I also had to overcome my drug and alcohol addictions since it has taken so much from my life. My mom was a key supporter in my lifestyle change and I continue to appreciate her support in my life.

Forgiveness was not an easy task. I have overcome so much in my life making the greatest lesson of my life was forgiveness and letting go were key ingredients to my wellness path. My grandmother, Mary Trottier, was very influential in my life. My father died in 1975 and my grandfather stepped in to fill the father role.

I am grateful to Mag McCree who impacted my life and was instrumental in helping me to heal from the emotional pains of my life... losing my father, brother and sister, overcoming the sexual abuse, and violent relationships with family. Mag's gifts to me were cultural teachings as well as helping me to move forward from the day of the accident that traumatized my life.

My advice for the younger generation is to **BELIEVE IN YOURSELF, TRUST IN YOURSELF**, and the **CREATOR to achieve your GOALS** and through **PERSISTANCE AND PERSEVERANCE anyone can achieve their long-term outcomes**. Working together as a family and accepting each other are very important. For the community a sense of belonging is so important so that people can come and work together. Working through the teachings of the Medicine Wheel can provide strength and guidance. Working with all nationalities as ONE is so important. There is a need to practice traditional roles and teaching to help strengthen all people. It is easy to learn but **the practicing is very important**. - **The teachings are key to community wellness**.

Isabelle Hanson

Date and Place of Birth: Feb. 8/56,
Broadview, SK.

Ethnic origin/Ancestral history: First
Nations – Saulteaux

Current family situation: I live with my
three grandchildren and one of my
daughters.

Earliest/fondest childhood memories: I
remember going for walks in the
Qu'Appelle Valley where I lived as a child.
One time, I remember my mom, auntie and
us kids walking up the hill and looking at
the stars. I was trying to figure out where
the Big Dipper was. (I could not see a
dipper in the sky – lol).



Do you currently or did your family of origin actively practice tradition? How? Yes, but I
did not know it at the time. As a family we went to powwows, raindances, flower days, feasts.
My grandmother and great grandparents actively practiced the traditional lifestyle. Today I still
maintain what I was taught as a young girl. I attend ceremonies including sweats.

**What teaching of resiliency that has evolved from your journey would you like to impart
for this project?** Because I have gone through a lot in my life, I learned to keep going.
Although it is hard, just hang in there and keep going. I also wanted to make a better life for my
children by sobering up, going to school and trying to be as healthy and balanced as I can be.

Educational/training & professional background & volunteering (helping out): I have two
undergraduate degrees and a master's degree. I work as an educational counsellor. Before that, I
worked in a women's shelter, a healing centre for residential school survivors and impact
survivors, a trusteeship and advocacy agency, among other things. I sit on community boards
and help out in any way I can.

What were some of the greatest lessons of your life? As First Nations peoples, we lose a lot of
loved ones to untimely and tragic deaths and I am no exception. I lost many relatives who I was
close to but I also lost three people who were the closest to me: my Kochum, my husband and
my daughter. Each time, I struggled to continue living and not follow them. This too has taught
me to be strong and learn from the lessons of loss: to appreciate and show/tell your loved ones
that I love them and to learn what these special people came to teach me.

Were there role models or agencies that impacted your life? If yes, how? My Kochum. She
showed me unconditional love but was tough when she had to be. She was strong and very

much a woman ahead of her time. She left an abusive relationship and raised four kids on her own (with the support of her parents). She loved her family and always made room for one more child.

If you have any words of advice for the younger generation, what would that be? I would say that if you are struggling with problems and feel overwhelmed with addictions or thoughts of suicide – get some help. Do not be afraid to approach others. You are not alone. There are family members, elders, counsellors, teachers or others who can help you. There is a purpose for everyone's life.

What are your wishes for your family and community? I wish for our peoples to become healthy and whole. I wish them love, peace and good blessings from our Creator.

Additional information: Just be good to yourself. We've gone through a lot as First Nations and Aboriginal peoples and we are healing, one day at a time, one person at a time.

Miranda Jimmy

I was born in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba on May 8, 1981. I am of Cree and Sioux ancestry. One of my first memories was speaking full sentences at a very young age.

I was the youngest of four girls and really enjoyed when I would get a rise out of my sisters. One time in particular when I was two years of age I saw this frog and ended up taking my sandal off and squishing it. I was a young brave hunter without even knowing.



I take great pride in ancestry and I participate in sweats and other ceremonies whenever I am able to. My Dad was in the Residential School and does not actively engage in these practices. At the Healing Our Spirit Worldwide Conference in August 2006, I met my grandmothers and explained to them that this life path I have taken by practicing in the ceremonies had made a difference in my life. My Great-Aunt told me that she was so proud of me and this affirmed my decision to keep on going despite my father's feelings.

As for resiliency, I believe that, no matter where you come from you must make decisions and be responsible for your actions as you are the one in power to create your own path.

One of the greatest life lessons I have learned is that surrounding yourself with good people creates great outcomes. It's sometimes a hard choice to walk away from relationships that have been with you for a long time, even though they may be negative. I have made a conscious choice in the last couple of years to only nurture relationships with people that support me and love me for who I am and aspire to be.

I partially completed a Bachelor of Arts degree and hold a Certificate in Arts and Cultural Management. I currently have transferred to Athabasca University and am working on completing my Bachelor of Professional Arts in Communications Studies. I work full time in Edmonton's Aboriginal Community and am currently the Project Coordinator for the Indigenous Elders Cultural Resource Circle Society.

For the future, I hope that my family will put their differences aside and become more supportive of each other's life choices, especially for the grandchildren. For the Aboriginal Community, I would like to see more people and organizations working together to find solutions to problems and celebrating their successes as a community.

Charlotte Korbisser

Born September 24, 1956 in Paradise Valley
Nova Scotia

I am Métis with Micmac, German, Swedish,
French, Ukrainian, and Polish ancestry.

I have been married for 30 years since
January 8, 1977, and have a beautiful
daughter Angela who is married with a
wonderful son.

I did not grow up with cultural practices, as I
did not know of my ancestry until seven
years ago when some information came
through doing the family history. I practice
my culture by attending ceremonies,
smudging, sharing circles and attending
pow-wows. I also do a number of crafts. I
have a great love for animals and the
teachings regarding them.



Some years ago I was diagnosed with a chronic illness and felt I was given a second chance coming to Urban Skills. I made a deal with the Creator to help brothers and sisters on this planet to move forward. I have been with the Urban Skills program for the past 21 years.

I believe that some of the greatest lessons are to love life and have respect for all people. Learn from those that have experienced devastating times and are recovering from them. Some of the agencies that have impacted my life are CaNative Housing and Native Counselling Services, where everyone is so helpful and family oriented.

Some of the wise words that I would like to leave for the younger generation are to respect yourself, Elders and culture because one day you will be a survivor and a leader.

There was a person that was asking for money at superstore. A few people did not assist this person. He came up to me and I gave him the loonie plus \$ 10 and said that being a survivor takes a lot of skills. Every homeless person has so much to teach us.

My wishes for community are that our youth carry on the culture from the past harmony and respect and become role models for the generations to come.

Conway Kootenay

I was born on July 12th, 1976 in Edmonton, Alberta

I am from the Cree, Sioux, Nakota people.

My education includes a Business Diploma. I have a passion for music and for twelve years I pursued this. I have also been working as a program co-ordinator at the Canadian Native Friendship Centre.

I'm married with a beautiful eight-year-old daughter,

Well I think my earliest and fondest childhood memory would be seeing how much love my father and mother had for each other. When I think of that, it gives me a warm feeling in my heart.

I was raised with traditional values and the respect that goes along with them. My family practices the sweat, Sundance, pipe ceremonies, powwows, round dances, and various other ceremonies.

Key components to my life are my inner battles and mountains that I've climbed and still have to climb. Life's battles are faced better when you are equipped with proper supports. Without my family I would not be where I am today. Having the support of my family allows me to take risks that not everyone has the opportunity to do, because I know even if I fail I can always count on my family to help me back on my feet.

I have a big family and having a big family you go through a lot of good times and as well you go through a lot of tragedies. Just recently there have been a lot of deaths in my family and community. One of the most important things that I've learned through all the grieving is to LIVE YOUR LIFE. Life is too short - be happy while you're here. None of us are promised tomorrow, so cherish the people in your life and don't be afraid to tell them how much they mean to you.

One of my most important role models in my life has always been my brother Clayton. He has always lived a healthy life style. He has always worked hard and he is such a visionary. Clayton takes such an innovative approach to everything that he does and our people are benefiting from his thought and creations every single day. I'm so proud of that guy. He has giving me so much inspiration, and in a lot of ways, he has saved my life.



My father has always told me, “you either go to school or you go to work” it’s that simple. I think that this is still good advice for the younger generation.

My only wish for my family is to stay strong and by doing that we have to stay together, the same thing goes for my community

Jacqueline L'Hirondelle

Jacqueline was born on February 27, 1974 in Edmonton, Alberta. She is Cree and Italian. She has one daughter, one son, her mom and another young girl that she has taken as her own residing with her. Her partner lives in Edmonton as well.

One of her fondest memories as a child was going out to Elk Island Park and seeing the buffalo running beside their vehicle. It was a dark and rainy day but she thoroughly enjoyed watching those beautiful animals. To this day when she sees buffalo it reminds her of childhood and the joy she felt watching them run through the field.

Jacqueline practices her tradition by praying daily to the Creator and really believes in the legend of the little people. Her son participates in ceremonies and sweats but her daughter does not identify herself as aboriginal because she does not like the stereotypes that aboriginal people face.



Jacqueline grew up in an alcoholic home and struggled with addictions herself but she believes that becoming pregnant at sixteen saved her life. The pregnancy provided an opportunity for her to follow a new path, a healthier one. She wanted a better life for her children and she worked very hard to break the patterns of poverty and generational welfare. She is determined and admits that she is often stubborn but she believes that these qualities have helped her to attain her goals and achieve an education.

She had a very hard time in school. She was part of the Catholic School system where she was not treated very well. However, while she was in the Awasis Program at St. Joseph's High School, two role models and mentors emerged, Dave Longdeau and Debbie Coulture. Although, Jacqueline struggled with addictions they never ever asked her to leave the program. She always felt welcome in that class and never felt that they judged her for the choices that she was making. Having grown up without a father Jacqueline began to look at Dave in this way, he never knew it but he was a huge inspiration for her life. She still sees them both occasionally, Dave is still encouraging and supportive of her life path and Jacqueline has never forgotten how accepting Debbie was of her. They both made a significant impact on her life and have helped her become the woman that she is today.

Jacqueline is a graduate of the Child and Youth Care Program as well as the Aboriginal Social Work Program from Portage College. She volunteered extensively over a six-year period with The Candora Society of Edmonton prior to obtaining employment with the organization. Jacqueline is also an active volunteer board member with the Abbottsfield Youth Project as their secretary. She has worked in group homes and taught life skills to men in jail and now with The Candora Society she works as a Family and Community Support Worker where she supports women to make healthy life and parenting choices.

Her advice to the young people is that life is way too short to get caught up in addictions, drugs and alcohol steals so much precious time from ones life. LIFE IS JUST TOO SHORT TO ALLOW ADDICTIONS TO CONTROL YOU. Jacqueline lost her grandma 3 years ago and although that experience was very difficult for her it gave her a new perspective on life "It has changed the way I view life and given me a deeper understanding of what is important." Jacqueline has broken the

cycle of generational welfare and addictions. She is truly a living example of what hard work, determination and hope for a better life can bring. Jacqueline decided a long time ago that she would not let alcohol and drugs determine her life path and she works very hard to instill those values in her children. She also feels it is important for children to have good role models and be taught respect for their ELDERS. Sadly she sees all too often that many of them have lost their way. Parents need to take responsibility for their children and sometimes implement tough love to get the children back on the right path.

Her wishes for her family are to raise her children in such a way that they will grow up to be responsible, healthy adults who contribute to society by following their passion.

Her wishes for her community; Jackie believes everything happens for a reason and she feels strongly that the events in her life have brought her to the Abbotsfield community. Jacqueline went through many of her troublesome times in Abbotsfield but she also turned her life around in this community. She works and lives here because she wants to be part of the process that promotes positive change for families. She is dedicated, committed and truly loves Abbotsfield as she feels that it is a wonderful place to raise her children. Jacqueline believes that it takes a village to raise a child. She knows so many people here and they all watch for each other. Abbotsfield is often highlighted only when the bad things happen however, there are so many great things happening there. It is a close-knit community that has offered Jacqueline a legacy of memories. From her childhood to the troublesome teenage years to now being a community leader. For Jacqueline, helping to make this a better place to live is like coming full circle in her life journey. The community of Abbotsfield for many reasons has helped her to attain her goals and for that she is thankful.

Luella Massey

Date and Place of Birth: Feb. 26, 1955 –
Mayerthorpe, AB

Ethnic origin/Ancestral history: Métis

Current family situation: Single

Earliest/fondest childhood memories: My siblings and cousins and I lived on the same homestead. We had enough kids for our own baseball games, rock band, etc. We also picked berries as a group.

Do you currently or did your family of origin actively practice tradition? How? Kokum was a medicine woman, tanned hides, made moccasins and crafts. She spoke Cree only. My mother has a small craft store business and my sister and I continue to practice culture and attend Aboriginal events.

What teaching of resiliency that has evolved from your journey would you like to impart for this project? Stick to your goals/dreams in spite of obstacles along the way and you will succeed.

Educational/training & professional background & volunteering (helping out): Social work diploma from Red Deer College. Board member for Métis Child and Family Services and board member for Continuing and Adult Education Program at the University of Alberta. What were some of the greatest lessons of your life? Being dirt poor but surviving and overcoming poverty. After experiencing racism as a child, I learned to be proud to be Aboriginal.

Were there role models or agencies that impacted your life? If yes, how? My Kokum showed me the beauty of Aboriginal culture, beliefs and values. She provided the inspiration for my interest in working with Aboriginal people as a helper for the past 26 years.

If you have any words of advice for the younger generation, what would that be? Stay in school – get an education. It is the key for Aboriginal people to find our rightful place in society.

What are your wishes for your family and community? For Aboriginal people – to be proud and strong, for the Aboriginal family unit – to reconnect and for the children – to have hope and pride for they are the future.



Terry Lusty

I am Métis historian, singer, writer and photographer was born along the banks of Manitoba's historic Red River. I was raised in a residential school and in four different foster homes between the ages of three and 16, after which, struck out on my own. In residential school, we had a dog named Lightning, whom I liked. I enjoy reading about realism – culture, history, etc.

I was one of those who had no opportunity to grow up with my culture and traditions. They were denied to me due to the residential school, and non-Native guardians who had no such knowledge themselves. However, in later life, I more than made up for this and now a highly respected Aboriginal historian, author and storyteller.



Early in life I developed survival skills that helped see me through very trying times. I also learned the value of respect, respect for the self and for others. These I encourage in others to adopt. I believe that all individuals have qualities to be admired and help them through life. Nothing is as difficult as it may seem and everybody is capable of success.

Despite the many strikes against me, I have come a long, long way. I credit my mentors who were many, especially such regarded Elders as the late Adrian Hope and Dr. Anne Anderson, the late politician Harold Cardinal, athlete John Fletcher and pool icon "Indian Joe" Big Plume, as well as, Elder/Senator Thelma Chalifoux. All proved positive influences that helped guide my life journey, instilling the value of doing what I do best for the good of others and the community at large.

I sought and acquired a Bachelor of Education degree (with honours) in Calgary where I majored in Social Studies. I went on to teach that as well as Physical Education and Native Culture for four years at Wabasca and two years at Ft. Chippewa. I am the project coordinator for a Residential School Survivors program and have devoted many hours volunteering and working on boards and committees all with the object of helping others, keeping youth out of trouble and off the streets, and generally advocating for the good of the Aboriginal community.

One message I wish to leave for youth is for them to look back at the many wonderful legacies left by our forefathers, in particular the values of respect, honour, and commitment, sharing and caring.

My wishes for the family and community are:

- 1) To live healthy, happy lives
- 2) To do good for the benefit of society
- 3) To be a positive and constructive role model for others

I hope that my life inspires youth today and future generations!

Cynthia Makokis

Date and Place of Birth: January 29, 1964
St. Paul, AB

Ethnic origin/Ancestral history: First Nations

Current family situation: Single parent – 2 sons at home.

Earliest/fondest childhood memories:
Waking up early one morning. Mom was making porridge. I could smell it coming down to the kitchen. It was nice and warm.

Do you currently or did your family of origin actively practice tradition? How? Sadly no. When I was in university, I started to learn about the residential school. Now I am learning about it. Parents spoke Cree in hushed tones and didn't talk to us.



What teaching of resiliency that has evolved from your journey would you like to impart for this project? I've learned to pick myself up and dust myself off and carry on. I guess it was because I had children and I wanted to break the cycle of giving up and giving my children up for my parents to raise and do my own thing. Go through abuse or whatever.

Educational/training & professional background & volunteering (helping out): Bachelor of Arts degree – I work as an Instructional Assistant and before that as an Administrative Assistant. For volunteering, I work on college committees and my kids and I went to Hope Kids where we went to nursing homes to do crafts and activities.

What were some of the greatest lessons of your life? Perseverance – I learned to be a strong woman especially in my last year of university. I didn't want to separate my family but I had to out of necessity. It broke my heart for my children to be here and there.

Were there role models or agencies that impacted your life? If yes, how? My kids kept me going – they were my strength.

If you have any words of advice for the younger generation, what would that be? Education leads to whole new options in life.

What are your wishes for your family and community? Keep going to school. Keep educating yourself. Keep an open mind. It gives you a better insight to the world out there.

Additional information: I would like to see my people stronger to avoid what's killing us, what's making us weaker.

Victoria Molnar

Birth date: August 10, 1983 Prince Albert, Saskatchewan

I am of Dene/Chipwayan, French, Irish and Welsh Heritage. From the age of five I was in and out of foster care, living mainly in Edmonton before finally settling in my permanent home in 1996 in Beaumont, Alberta, with my foster mother Linda and her family. I lived with them until 2001 and I still call them family. I am proud to call her 4 sisters and two brothers my own. I am the eldest of eight brothers and sisters. All of my siblings have lived in care and still do, having lived together in some homes and apart in others.



Some of my fondest memories of my childhood were with my siblings. Having to watch out for each other meant that we were all very close. Other fond memories were of my birth mother in those moments when she actually *mothered* me and my siblings, whether it was kisses on the knees when they had fallen or hugs for a bad day.

Taking care of my siblings while still being a child really took a lot out of my childhood. It challenged me and made me the person I am today. I recall struggling to get the children ready on time for school and was often late attending school. The school was very understanding and really helped me by giving my family extra clothing when they had it available as well as not sending me to detention for so many absences and late attendances. They did this all with kindness and without embarrassing me or my siblings. Various teachers, including Mr. Thompson, and Miss Hayes, really showed me that there were people who cared in the community, people that I could rely on.

While in my last foster home I needed to break out of the mothering role. I had to learn how to be a child again and how to enjoy life without over-managing my sibling's life while they were in other foster homes. I also had to demonstrate to my siblings a healing process that worked. I lived through sexual, physical, and emotional abuses and always fought back for the sake of my siblings to show them that no matter what happened to me my spirit could never be defeated, and their spirits didn't have to be defeated either.

I've graduated from high school and hope to go back to school for a degree in Native Studies and Education in 2008.

I ran a non-profit for three years called Association for Youth in Care for children in the child welfare system. I then moved into a position with a foster care agency providing support work for foster families and foster children.

In 2001 I was selected as one of twelve delegates for the Ship for World Youth. Selection was based on the essay I wrote, as well as, questions I answered. I stressed the importance of Aboriginal Youth involvement in the project, as well as the under represented population of Youth in Care. The purpose of the trip was intercultural understanding. I had the privilege of working with other Aboriginal youth from other countries, as well as, non-Aboriginal youth, on expanding other countries' knowledge of each other and proving a commonality of spirit regardless of ethnicity.

My main messages are this: we all make the choices where our paths take us, we cannot allow others to make the choice for us and let that be the deciding factor whether we succeed or not. We have to be our own guiding hand. Making good choices no matter what is going on really creates wellness. The selfhealing journey is really important; forgiving but never forgetting has facilitated the sense of peace within. Letting go of the hate was key to helping to the bettering others and myself. I always wanted to model wellness and through Aboriginal cultural teachings it really helped to connect with my identity. I want to thank Myrtle for being there as well and listening. She has been great help and inspiration since coming into my life.

Stephanie Moosewah (Arcand)

I am Cree and was born here in Edmonton in 1973. I grew up in Saddle Lake close to my tradition and am really grateful for the teachings of respect, honesty, and humility. My cultural tradition was a part of my upbringing and is now a part of my family's life. I am married and have four children. We relocated to Edmonton five years ago to pursue further education, employment and opportunities for our children. We had so many adjustments to deal with in coming to the huge city from the reserve. It was very stressful not knowing how to access services and I had to become my own best advocate to access the resources for my family. The adjustment included transitioning skills from survival on the reserve to the survival and thriving in the city settings. My husband and I had to arm our children with knowledge of safety, transportation (learning the bussing mechanisms), and finding meaningful activities for the children to engage in. Recreational activities such as hockey are one of the activities the two eldest children are involved with. The youngest is learning to play the fiddle.

When we first came to the city it was difficult to access cultural ceremonies so we made the commitment to travel back home which is 2.5 hours from our residence. My family has come through so much with the multi-generational effects of the residential schools. My education with the social work program as well as the Phoenix Seminar and culture, helped me to understand the choices and effects the Residential schools had on parents and grandparents. Healing and learning really was the key to dealing with the multi-generational effects. I believe in being positive and I practice that daily by following my traditional path with my family. I have demonstrated resiliency by overcoming so many challenges through connecting with Elders and ceremonies that have truly enriched my life as well as my family. I have learnt to be an advocate for myself and my family's needs. The transitioning from rural to urban life has given me to success in two worlds. My goals are to see my children become self-sufficient and to survive and succeed in two worlds as well. One other thing I would like to achieve is to speak fluent Cree. I am currently employed as Employment Service Advisor with Métis Employment Services.

Words of Wisdom for the younger generation - **We are all given many challenges that we must face, however we have the gift of being able to choose how we want these challenges to impact our lives.** Fear and pain can hold us back from our dreams but we do have the power and ability to change the outcome and break this cycle for our own peace of mind and the future of our children.

Gary Moostoos

I was born on the trap line on March 5, 1961 close to Valleyview, Sturgeon Lake. My mother delivered me by herself, as there was no hospital around. Immediately after she gave birth, she went on with her normal daily chores, as this was a simple sign of her strength. I have seven brothers and four sisters, as I am the middle child of the family. I am mixed origin Cree, Scottish and Irish. My Irish Grandmother's father was one of the first RCMP of the north. My formal education ended at grade nine. After that point I became involved with Elders and was with them for a period of twelve years of training. I worked at the hospital as an Aboriginal Liaison being a voice and interpreter for patients in the hospital and nursing homes.

The elders gave me a gift of passing on teachings of medicine. I only planned to be there for one year, but ended up staying for 12 years. Thinking of going to school, one of the Elders gave me a very important message, "*Most life lessons have to be lived*". If there were issues that needed to be dealt with, the Elders would always find me ways to resolve the problems. Whenever helping family with an Elders death, I would help families go through the grieving process. I feel my work is still limited by the lack of mainstream credentials with my current employment, so I have applied to Grant McEwan to go back to school.

I have dealt with many types of abuses including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and drug and alcohol abuse. I have been clean for twenty-two years and I'm happy with my life. I enjoy being on the go, living and learning through life opportunities. I remember how my Grandmother impacted me when she was sick on her deathbed; she told me, "*Share your life so others can live*".

Elders were my psychologists, psychiatrists and counsellors. I was approached in 1999 to put together the First International Residential School Conference that was held in Edmonton, Alberta. My parents and several siblings were survivors of the residential school era. So having been part of organizing this conference was an honour. With three thousand participants attending this three-day conference at the Shaw Conference Centre, it was a huge success.

One of the most important things I want to pass on to the younger generation is the tipi teachings. Each pole represents values like hope, faith and kindness. You have to be able to take inventory of each area of life and strengthen it. When eight of those poles are missing and only three are standing you're going to fall. You need the strength to stand up strong. One needs to find people to help strengthen themselves, as tipis also teach about walking in balance. It is important to learn about the inner self of a person and make sure that each part of the tipi pole is strong enough to ensure success.

Carol Ninine

My name is Carol Ninine. I was born February 17, 1963 in The Pas, Manitoba. I am a member of Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation in Northern Saskatchewan.

Ethnic origin: / Ancestral history:

I identify myself as Cree, however as told by my first cousin on my fathers side who is compiling a family history. There is a French connection somewhere down the line. Rather interesting information, but too detailed to get into.

Current family situation:

I am married and have three children, two of whom live with me and one who is on his own and lives in Saskatoon. My oldest son has two beautiful children, which makes me a proud grandmother.

Earliest/fondest childhood memories:

The earliest memory I have is taking in various activities on the Centennial Day celebrations. God, I believe the year was 1967.....yikes! Anyways on that day I remember having a coke in the park and then watching a movie in what I would describe as a big silver barn. Yes, it was a beautiful day.

Do you currently or did your family of origin actively practice tradition? How?

Unfortunately, my family did not practice tradition. It was not until I was an adult that I was even introduced to traditional teachings, ceremonies and all that tradition encompasses. I am proud to say that this did change over time and is one of the main reasons I am where I am today.

What teaching of resiliency that has evolved from your journey would you like to impart for this project?

My goodness! This question, for me, keeps evolving because as we all know things keep changing in our lives. When I look at the bigger picture it seems to me that as Aboriginal People it is embedded in our being, if that's possible. That is, you don't have to look too far and you'll see beautiful, happy people whom have hone through more *#%@ in their lives than seems humanly possible. Yet we have survived and I know will continue to do so. My oldest son once told me that he always remembers what I said to him as a child. As he explains it, it helps him get through the hard times and that is, "There's always a tomorrow". Wow, I thought. At the time I never realized that small phrase had such an impact.

Educational/training & professional background: & volunteering (helping out)

As stated earlier, regarding Traditional Teachings, I began what I will describe as 'my journey' when I went back to school. I'll give a little background information: I had taken a hospitality training course in Prince Albert and was placed at Venise House (a restaurant) for my work training (not that I needed to learn how to become a waitress, but at the time it was something to do). Anyways, one day I got a call at work stating that I was accepted into the program. Confused I said "what program" I did not remember applying to any program, but did remember submitting an application for student funding. The college told me that all I needed to do was secure tuition for the fall. I of course did apply and well in a nutshell, here I am. To this day I

truly believe there was some sort of divine intervention, because believe me I was a mess. I can't express in mere words what that twist of fate meant. So, there I was. I started in the Community Based Justice Program transferred to the Indian Social Work Program learning from people just as myself, First Nations and more importantly, the Elders who taught my soooo much in what was then Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. I could go on and on but, I won't.

What were some of the greatest lessons of your life?

There are so many, but I would have to say the one that stands out the most is finding out about me, who I was, where I came from and to this day what is the purpose of it all. And no, I'm not referring to where I was born. It's that 'journey' I mentioned earlier. It's quite complex, hard to understand, confusing, painful and wonderful all at the same time. It's life.

Were there role models or agencies that impacted your life? If yes how?

Yes, as a child my mother, whom I grow to love and respect as each day passes. There was also my (I'll call him my adopted dad) a great, kind, smart man. Other role models are many and those are my friends, family, colleagues and of course once again the Elders.

If you have any words of advise for the younger generation what would that be?

You know, we can all give advice. The thing is when you're young as I remember it we do not always follow that advice. So, here's what I say, whenever you have an opportunity to sit and listen to someone's story...do so. More importantly share your story with someone that will listen to you and that you know cares about you. Oh yeah, one more thing-if no one has told you lately, you're beautiful, you're smart and you're worth it.

What are you wishes for your family and community?

Heh, I'm a mother, grandmother, sister, friend and social worker...what do you think.....

Ekosi

Heather Poitras

As I walk on this earth, I pray with each step. I pray for the strength to carry on with the gifts I am to share with others. I am a single parent of three beautiful, amazing children. I am a survivor of abuse. I feel alone in my struggles, but I know that there are so many like me who cope.

Despite the various struggles I have endured throughout my life, I maintain my pride and my dignity. Many times it feels as though the environment around me is striving to knock me down, by attacking my virtues. No one is perfect, we all make mistakes.

In my life I have excelled in academics, sports and at work. In my path, while at work, I am always striving to maintain a balance; a balance of my work, my identity as an Aboriginal woman, my home life and more recently my health.

For over 14 years now every day and night, I have suffered from a spinal injury. All I can do is try to manage the pain, which is a struggle in itself.

My busiest time of the year is when I am required to plan and organize National Aboriginal Day (NAD) for the Alberta region. I have been involved with NAD since the beginning in 1996 and I remain fully committed to the file. I know that there will be a day when I will no longer be involved to the level I have been over the past 12 years, which is something I will have to deal with in the near future.

The celebration of one's history, culture and future aspirations should be all positive. People don't realize the endless hours I commit and give willingly, many of which are provided as overtime that is not covered. I continue to give all that I can to the file and dream some day that it will exist under a national organization, which will make it easier for Aboriginal groups to honour the day.

I have achieved many great things throughout my life; many times without real sincere support...many times I have felt alone. People often ask me, "How do you do it?" I humbly respond, the Creator has given me gifts and I am honoured to share what I can. We are not on this earth for long, so I strive to do what I can to help the Aboriginal community. The main driving force that keeps me motivated is that I want my children to enjoy life in a better world in the future ... even when it is without me.

One of God's Creations
Heather Poitras, B.A. in Native Studies



Education/training & professional background: & volunteering (helping out)

B.A. in Nations Studies, completed over ½ of the requirements to obtain a B.Ed. over 12 years of experience with the Federal government, experience with various Aboriginal organizations, over 20 years of volunteering at various Federal and community functions in and around Edmonton.

What were some of the greatest lessons of your life?

Life is what you make it. Always give thanks for what you have, never take things for granted. Pray all of the time, because the Creator does help those who help themselves.

Were there role model's or agencies that impacted your life? If yes how?

Various Elders have helped me throughout my life.

If you have any words of advice for the younger generation what would that be?

You have the power within you to succeed. Don't ever give up, if I can do it, so can you!!
Respect, Love, Honour, Faith, Share.

What are your wishes for your family and community? For my children to be happy, independent and successful adults, who contribute to our community in a healthy way. To maintain a loving relationship with the Creator. To continue working towards a better future for our people.

Additional Information:

Walk proud, you were made for a reason. Hold your head up high, for we have so many reasons to be proud. Our nations are strong; together we continue to represent our Aboriginal people... the original people of Canada. Get involved in your communities, help out – we can all make a difference!

Jonathan Potskin

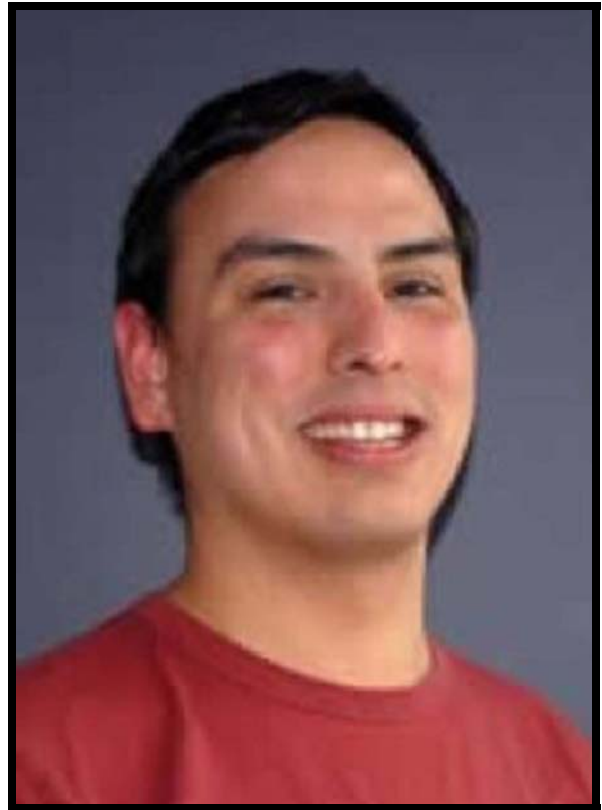
I was born in Edmonton, Alberta on April 4 1978. I was the second child of three of Lyle Donald and Lilly Potskin. My parents were divorced when I was around five years old. Most of my life I have lived in Edmonton, I have also lived in different towns in Alberta and British Columbia.

My dad is Métis with his family lineage reaching back to the Red River Settlement. My Mother is Cree from the Sawridge Band. I was born with membership to the Sawridge Band. When my parents divorced, my brother, sister and I mainly lived with our father, who raised us with his culture. I grew up around the Canadian Native Friendship Centre, as my dad's Mother worked for them all through my childhood. I learned to jig every Sunday afternoon at the Friendship Centre; and most of my cousins and I went to the Friendship Centre every summer for their Summer Day Camps.

My earliest childhood memory would have to be my parents taking us kids to Disneyland. I remember my brother dragging me through a crowd of people to go see Cinderella and Snow White. Memories of my childhood and of my teenage years seem to be fading, as it was a whirlwind of moving, and attending different schools. While growing up my cousins on both sides of my family were my brothers and sisters. With my father's family we all jigged and went to grandmas and grandpas every Sunday. My Mom's side of the family stayed close as we all had a connection of blood together, we played sports together and met at a lot of family gatherings during holidays.

My dad's family, like most Métis families, is Christian. As a young child I remember the family attending St Joseph Cathedral every Sunday to hear the word of God from Father Troy. To this day some of my family still goes to the Native Mass at Holy Cross in the West End of Edmonton to see Father Troy. My Grandparents were very loyal to the Catholic Church.

My mom's family is a mixture of Christian values and Native Spirituality. My Grandmother attended and grew up in the St Albert Residential School. My grandfather grew up with his spirituality and taught it to my grandmother when they married. My Mom and her family were raised with both the church and the land. Throughout my life I have taken the time to seek my own spiritual self, seeking guidance from different churches and elders. Through educating myself I have now chosen to lead my life in a more spiritual view of the world. I remember as a child learning that there is more than one church, and my mother teaching us how to smudge and



pray to our ancestors. I found myself being more of myself with the native spiritual side of my life.

There are many different sides of me; I share a different side of myself with different people. I look at the spectrum of friends I have and I am happy that my friends are so different from each other. Resiliency is being able to cope with different people and different situations. I grew up in different communities and with two separate homes, and feel that my resiliency has come from being able to adjust my life to the different environments and situations I was put into.

I presently hold a Bachelor of Art in Sociology. My degree means a lot to me. I remember my school counsellor and my principal in high school telling me I wasn't academic and I should look at alternative education plans. It was the way most of the educators in my life treated me. I feel that growing up Native in Edmonton, most of my teachers aimed for me just to have a grade twelve education.

I think the greatest lesson I have learned and would like to share with people is to take care of yourself first. If you are not healthy, how can you help others? I always think about what you learn when you jump on a plane and the flight attendants do their demonstration; ***“if there is a change in the cabin pressure, masks will fall from above you...put on your mask on before assisting someone else.”*** At times I was told I was selfish for looking after my needs first, but I remember at one time in my life I was helping everyone else with money and other things, that I would go home and not have anything or dinner, and thought to myself “Why am I at home starving while everyone else is in their homes eating?” From that day I decided that I will make sure I am fed before I assist in feeding everyone else.

My greatest wish for my family and my community is to find happiness. With happiness comes a great person, family, and community.

Basil J Quewezance

I was born on August 23, 1959 in Kamsack, Saskatchewan in Treaty Four Territory at 1:38 pm. I'm proud of knowing the exact time of my birth, as one minute earlier or later would have probably put the planets out of alignment.

I'm a proud father of six children ages 32, 31, 26, 25, 18 and 12 years of age. I also have seven grandchildren.



My proudest and fondest memories are of my Mom who was so proud, strong, smart, loving and caring. She taught me how to snare rabbits and hunt with a gun. I started hockey at the age of five and still play to this day. . At one time, I was the only Indian playing in the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League.

I continue to go back home to learn all about the Salteaux practices and traditions that were taught to me by my Mom and the old men on the reserve.

I'm a graduate of O'Neill High School in Regina Saskatchewan and have two years of University towards my Bachelor of Arts Studies.

Some of the things I have learned in my life are how Indian people are the most resilient people on the planet. Our Creator would not let us go through anything we could not handle. Residential schools would have succeeded in their goal of assimilation had they been other people.

I had an epiphany when I was twelve years old and realized that I could not be anyone else but myself and finally figured out what my Mom Amelia had meant when she told me to always be proud of who I am. If I wasn't Saulteaux, I couldn't be anyone else!!!!

My greatest role model was my Mom, who was so tough. I could not imagine travelling across Canada back in 1967-1968 as a single Indian Women with five kids. We moved to British Columbia and then back to Saskatchewan where she was very successful. She became ill in 1970 in the middle of the journey back home. I finally realized what Mom meant to me two years after she died.

Some of the words I would like to leave with the younger generation are to be proud of your own people and STAND UP.

Wishes for my community are to be healthy, proud and successful in what you do and to always help others in need. All my children are taught this.

My five heroes of all time are my **Mom**, Greatest Athlete of the 20th Century Sac and Fox Indian from Pennsylvania **Jim Thorpe Hockey Player**. **Bobby Orr**, Boxing legend **Muhammad Ali** and **Elvis**.

Basil J Quewezance

Executive Director of Assembly of First Nations Residential School Unit for 2 years

Executive Director of Canadian Native Friendship Centre for two years in Edmonton

St. Philips Residential School 4.5 years.

Still plays hockey today and is on three teams, two young teams and one old timer's team.

Lise Robinson

I was born on July 25, 1964 in St. Paul, Alberta and grew up in a small place between Saddle Lake and Elk Point by the name of Lafond, Alberta. We lived on a farm and lived the lifestyle of being so connected and grounded to the land.

My ancestry is Algonquin, French and Scottish. I am a single mom of two wonderful sons Nigel and Jordan who are First Nations. I come from a large family of 4 brothers, 4 sisters and my parents.



Some of my earliest fondest memories include having so many people in my life. Many of my siblings became my best friends. I never felt alone and always felt that I was part of a greater force. I recall all the team projects we had from plucking chickens to working in the gardens. I especially loved being near my mom as I thought she was a genius. She was so skilled in sewing and baking (that fresh bread with homemade jam mmm was so good). I also remember one of my favourite times with my late father was when we would go for walks and this one time in particular my sister Lucie and I were skipping and singing in synchronicity. My dad used to bellow out these melodies and his songs would be etched in my soul forever. My parents were married over 40 years and my grandparents married over 60 years. They left a legacy that long-term relationships do exist providing individuals want the same things a better life for their children and families. Another favourite was playing in the huge haystack. It was like being on a trampoline and we used to make caves in there. What a fantastic time we had! In grade one a Filipino teacher gave me a doll and I felt so special as there were so many children in the school.

As for tradition, we were taught to pray daily and give thanks to God for everything we had. I recall Sundays going to the Roman Catholic Church as part of our tradition. Since going to Blue Quills back in 1985 and feeling the connection to ceremonies I transitioned into the sweats and ceremonies. I felt that it really was where my own spirit connected. I was gifted by an Elder with the Spiritual name of Mountain Woman and I am so grateful for this. My sons also have their names Fire Keeper - Nigel and Earthman - Jordan. I continue to practice going to the sweats and practice ceremonies whenever possible.

Some thing I have learnt from my journey in life is that everyone has purpose. Even in the darkest moments of our lives there are always lessons to learn and to pass on to the next generations. I have survived various types of abuses such as sexual abuse, family violence, and divorce aftermath, numerous losses of friends and family and being a single parent. All these lessons have made me who I am and have taught me to survive and to take each challenge and find the gift in each one of them. I truly believe those gifts are not only for ourselves but to share with those people coming into our lives, for we are both students of life and teachers as well. We just interchange experiences to help others.

My educational background is I have my Bachelor of Social Work Degree, Social Work Diploma, Business Administration certificate, Reflexology Certificate. . I have also been involved with 4-H, French Club and Canada World Youth Exchange Program. I have done a lot of free counselling for individuals and group counselling whenever I could. *Truly the greatest education was through my travels, working and living in India for three months on the Canada World Youth Exchange and three months here with the exchange students.*

Some of my greatest lessons of life are to love and to make this place a better world to live in. We all have a purpose and responsibility to the next seven generations, so I am constantly trying to be environmentally conscious of products I use in my home. I feel that we must really take care of our Mother the Earth, as she needs to be saved from all the toxic chemicals she has absorbed for so long. Also one thing that I have learnt is that war is never a solution to resolving global differences. We need to work on creating more peace in our world to be a healthier one.

My greatest role models include Mohammad Gandhi, because of how he was able to peacefully make a difference in the world without war and always working towards peace. I also feel that Mother Teresa affected me because I saw here when I lived in St. Paul when I was a child and than having gone on the India exchange I could see the types of people she worked with the poorest of the poor, many banished and left to die and she took them in. She could see God in each person's eyes, for she never gave up on the people that were most vulnerable - the poor and dying. I must also speak of the Elders and my ancestors, especially my late Grandmother, Therese Theroux who was truly an inspiration. She was a very kind soul, a school principal who always believed in the spirit of giving her time to help students master their education and life. My parents inspired me to work very hard and to always do the best no matter what. I also have adopted spiritual family who have been very strong supporters and teachers, Ann, Margie, Old Sun Woman, Rides on the Wind Braveheart, the Elders and also children especially my sons have anchored me to my core of who I am and the impact I have on their lives. They are my miraculous gifts from Creator whom I love so much.

My advice to young people is to always look at the gift in every experience. Each experience has some sort of lesson, so be grateful for everything that you have. Remember to Believe in YOURSELF, Ask the Universe what you want, do what you need to achieve what you want, Receive... open the doors to receive because you do deserve it. I would love to see many more Aboriginal Youth in governance structures where traditions can be used to address the global issues. The answers are within each of us in striving to make this place better for the next generations to come.

My wishes for my family are to work in unity to love and make this place a better place to live. For my sons to follow their life dreams and help to cultivate a better life for the next generations to come as we truly need them to be healthy in order to keep our world a peaceful balanced place.

My wish for community is to continuously work at bridging the gaps of disparity so that we can call come together in a circle balanced with the quality of life so people can live in harmony on this Mother Earth.

Maussi cho.....Merci..... Hiy Hiy

Alana Ross

I was born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. I'm Cree from the Red Earth First Nation. I grew up mainly in the urban areas of Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. It wasn't until I moved out of the city to live on the reserve that I was able to grasp a hold of my Aboriginal identity. I was lacking a piece of me and I never understood why.

Before I went to schools on the reserve, I encountered racism on a daily basis and even learned to discriminate against my own people. Overcoming these prejudices was an important lesson as I engaged further into the teachings of my culture. Learning to understand the various teachings of respect further helped to overcome this difficulty.



I remember a wonderful time of learning when my family braided sweet grass, attended weekly sweats, which helped them to connect with identity by coming to a place of harmony.

My father, Allan Ross achieved his education and became a schoolteacher. He taught on the reserve where I was able to meet friends and families who helped her to learn about pow-wow and ceremony. With all these teachings I was initiated into the pow-wow culture when I was about 13 years old. Today I believe that children who learn to dance pow-wow from the time their feet hit the ground are truly blessed and that these teachings must endure.

Identity for young people is important and with powwow, I had the courage to try expanding my horizons. I decided to be a basketball player in the North American Indigenous Games. I learnt that teamwork, perseverance, and discipline are critical and necessary to achieve. At seventeen years of age I did get involved with drinking and smoking. This seemed to be a norm amongst all my peers. It was difficult to stay on track with so much influence. So I decided to keep doing what I loved which was powwow and basketball. I started to find friends who wanted the same things as I did and were not afraid to be making healthy choices. I believe that teens really needed to find positive outlets to enjoy being young strong role models.

My educational path commenced in the area of Psychology at Concordia University College of Alberta. Much hard work went into attaining my goal of graduating. In the summer of 2006 things changed and I secured a position with the City of Edmonton as an Aboriginal Youth Planner. I became inspired by Lise Robinson, my supervisor, when I witnessed first hand all that a social worker could do. How the community came together to plan the National Aboriginal Day Festival changed my view of helping the community. I decided that I wanted to work in this type of setting where I could make a difference. I believed that it would be best to help as many

Aboriginal people as possible through inspiration by making connections that affect long term change. Helping Aboriginal people to live healthy lifestyles is a goal that is very important to me.

So many youth have many opportunities and can make a huge difference. Also culturally, Aboriginal philosophies have something to offer to the mainstream community. My summer job leads to full time employment with the Canadian Red Cross.

My goals are to promote culture, sports, education and mentorship's that create a world where Aboriginal people can lead healthy lifestyles.

Chris Tyrone Ross

I am 27 years of age and was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. I am a member of the Red Earth First Nation. As a child and teenager, I was raised in various communities throughout the province, such as Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Whitefish, Onion Lake, Poundmaker and Fort Qu'Appelle. My father Alan Ross raised my sisters Marne, Alana and myself since I was eight years of age. I believe it was this upbringing that gave me a different perspective on my journey and the importance of 'understanding my people.'

My introduction to my culture was at a young age, participating in ceremonies, praying with sweet grass and sage regularly with my family. One fond childhood memory included a time when my family stood on top of a hill in a park in Saskatoon and prayed while looking towards the stars. One saying that sticks with me came from a sign in the living room that read, "The family that prays together, stays together". Obviously family is important.

Although at 27, I have yet to create my own family, but I believe I have been busy making different babies of my own, business ventures. Since living in Saskatchewan most of my life, I learned how to make connections to the right people and develop new ideas for creating my own entrepreneurship. In 1997, I started the "very first Aboriginal Youth Magazine in Canada" called Gen-X, which had a successful four year run. After that I enrolled in the First Nations University of Canada in the undergraduate program and later obtained employment as an assistant manager for a men's clothing store. This gave me much needed experience in sales and management. In 2004, I returned to the publishing industry with a new Aboriginal youth magazine called RezX, which later spawned my most recent company, RezX Promotions, specializing in Aboriginal entertainment.

I recently made Edmonton, Alberta my new home where I graduated from the Aboriginal Multi-Media Program offered by Cunningham Communication at N.A.I.T. (Northern Alberta Institute of Technology). This is where I have honed my skills in multi-media so that I could continue my business ventures with skills required in today's high-tech society.

Although I believe I am still a product from the "school of hard knocks" because the majority of what I learned came from my own lessons and mistakes. My advice to other Aboriginal youth is



to learn how to pick yourself up after failure and to always be humble on your journey. I admit to failing many times, only to overcome difficult obstacles and come back stronger than before. I credit my parents, Allan Ross and Helen Garvin who have taught me to always give thanks to the Creator for even being alive and that failure is only part of greater success.

Business aside, I am also very passionate about Aboriginal youth issues. I believe the only way for Aboriginal people to move forward is to give more decision making power to Aboriginal youth, because only they have an idea of where they want to be in the future. I hope one day to play a larger leadership role in helping our people. Everything I've done is only a stepping stone to get to the ultimate place, which is having the power and knowledge to bring my people to the next level. Although for now, I just want to continue learning in hopes it will lead me down the right path.

George Rowe

Born July 20, 1951 in Newfoundland First Nations

Note: Newfoundland Indigenous People were not recognized until 1984. By 2001, the membership of the reserve in Conne River was 7333.

He was also an altar boy and followed the Catholic faith. At the age of 19 he found his own truths regarding religion and transitioned his own beliefs about the One Great Spirit, the Creator.



He stopped being involved with the church thereafter, although he maintained spirituality through living it daily.

About 5 years ago, my sisters Sara, Stella and Bertha attained their Treaty Status and are now recognized as First Nations.

I have been working since 1967. In 1974 I got my heavy equipment operation papers and I currently have 27 active tickets. I have experience in building roads, paving and working in the oilfield.

One of the greatest lessons in life is not to be blinded by other people. Find out the real story for yourself, instead of second-hand. Express things that are positive and if you want respect yourself, you need to show respect in order to get it.

The role models and agencies that impacted my life were my parents as they taught us to respect each other, to help each other out and to help each other move forward.

Words of wisdom for the younger generation: Don't let people tattoo you or write happy faces on your skin, as it is a way to take advantage of you.

My wishes for family and community are that positive attitudes are very important and that BELIEVING IN THE GREAT SPIRIT leads to a great life.

Andrea Watchmaker

I was born on December 24, 1972 in Paradise Hill, Saskatchewan. I am Plains Cree from Kehewin Cree Nation, 2.5-hours North-East of Edmonton.

My grandparents taught me a lot about culture and ceremonies. I grew up watching her maternal kokum sew moccasins and dresses and watching my maternal moosom hunt and farm in Onion Lake, Saskatchewan. Going to visit them every weekend and attending ceremonies and learning from them was the best!

Growing up, some of my challenges had to do with my father dealing with addictions issues. I also had challenges with my parent's separation and divorce. Despite this, I never gave up on my education. It was even more complex going to high school in Bonnyville, which was a foreign environment compared to the reserve school, which I was used to. I faced many racism and transitional issues going to that school. I survived all this with the support of the native school counsellor Gordon John who really was a great role model, supportive and giving me options and directions on how to deal with my inner turmoil. Now I thrive on challenge!

I graduated from Bonnyville Centralized High School in 1991. And with the encouragement of my father, I enrolled last minute at Red Deer College that fall. There I earned a Certificate in Early Childhood Development. I then moved to Edmonton to attend MacEwan College and graduated with a Diploma in Child and Youth Care in 2002. I'm now a Program Coordinator at Bent Arrow Healing Traditional Society.

My advice to the younger generation is to talk to your Elders, grandparents, parents, attend ceremonies and cultural events. Don't be afraid to ask questions and get support if you need it.

My wishes for my family are that they would have a clean lifestyle and make good decisions from their life lessons.

My community wishes is for the young people to lead.



James

James was born in Alberta. He was one of ten kids and his mother was Cree. She was from a small community and moved to the big city. When James was born, he was a little different, born with both genders. Back in those days the doctors made the correction. Since James could not live with both genders, they changed him to female. It is always easier to go to female than the other way. This was a big mistake for James. His mom tried to raise him as a girl but James always knew he was a boy.

He was moved into a foster home (as this was the era of the 60's scoop) and lived in foster care till he was eighteen. James had many foster homes and most of them were very abusive. James suffered a lot but his will was strong and he kept letting all his foster parents know he was really a boy. The foster families didn't know what to do so they tried very hard to make James into a girl. They clothed him in dresses and curled his hair and wouldn't let him cut it. James suffered physical, mental, emotional and sexual abuse. But for him the worse abuse was that people would not see him as who he really was...

At eighteen, James moved to an even bigger city where he found a girlfriend. She was the first person who understood him and loved him for who he was. Her parents didn't understand and told her she had to find someone else or they would cut her off. She moved away heart broken and eventually killed herself. James took to drinking and getting into trouble until one day he realized that he himself was killing himself and needed to stop. He pulled himself out of his despair and decided to live. He entered into another relationship with someone who could see himself for him and she helped him pull his life together. James also found his culture, which helped him sober up and also helped him connect with his spiritual side. He began going to sweats, pow wow's and twelve step meetings. He found strength in his culture and this helped him to see life. He began to take care of the fire and start his spiritual journey to really connecting to self. He fasted, sun danced and offered back to community all he had gained from the ceremonies.

Then one day James saw an ad in the paper for a support group for men who were born in women's bodies. This was the closest to James's story that he had ever seen so he went and discovered that he could have surgeries to change back. He was so excited. Finally fate had hit a home run. James began the long road to transition back to being male. It was a very long road there with many tests to go through and hoops to jump. He had to live 2 years as male before any surgeries would be done. Once this was accomplished the hormonal therapy began and his body transformed and went through the physical changes that were really incredible. His voice dropped. He started to grow facial hair and his bones got thicker. He was on his way to being a man, realizing that this happened in his life for a reason and to assist individuals and groups to get through their own challenges with gender issues.

Seven years later James is now legally living as a male and he has almost finished all the surgeries required. It has taken a long time but James stayed true to himself and knew that it was his path to walk. He always knew he would grow up to being a male and with the help of understanding people along the way James fulfilled his goal. This he sees as a story of resiliency in the form that the challenges of identity had to be dealt with at various levels: physically,

socially, mentally and spiritually. This proves that if we stay true to ourselves we can overcome anything and that the right people will come along to help us in our plight to making our own missions and visions come true.

All my relations,

James

On behalf of the Voices of the Urban Indigenous Peoples we would like to thank you for taking the time to read these stories.

We would like to thank each person that shared their stories as they truly do give our community a sense of inspiration, pride and hope for the next generations to come.

Life's journey has many lessons and each story featured here has a teaching.

This document was put together to help keep our tradition alive through story telling in a written form.

If you would like to share your story, please email lise.robinson@edmonton.ca or deanmbrown@gmail.com or votuiip@gmail.com

All our relations,

Voices of the Urban Indigenous Peoples

Copyrights:

These stories can not be reproduced in part or in whole without the express written consent of the author(s).