DOUG KNOCKWOOD

MI'KMAW ELDER

DOUG KNOCKWOOD

MI'KMAW ELDER

Stories, Memories, Reflections

BY
DOUG KNOCKWOOD
& FRIENDS

FOREWORD BY
BRIAN KNOCKWOOD

Roseway Publishing
an imprint of Fernwood Publishing
Halifax & Winnipeg

Editing: Brenda Conroy
Cover photo: Lorna Lillo Photography
Cover design: Stephen Brake
eBook: tikaebooks.com
Printed and bound in Canada

Published in Canada by Roseway Publishing
an imprint of Fernwood Publishing
32 Oceanvista Lane, Black Point, Nova Scotia, B0J 1B0
and 748 Broadway Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3G 0X3
www.fernwoodpublishing.ca/roseway

Fernwood Publishing Company Limited gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture and the Province of Manitoba, through the Book Publishing Tax Credit, for our publishing program.

Canadian Heritage Patrimoine canadien
The Canada Council for the Arts / Le Conseil des Arts du Canada
NOVA SCOTIA
Manitoba

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Knockwood, Doug, 1929-, author
Doug Knockwood, Mi'kmaw elder: stories, memories, reflections / Doug Knockwood.

Issued in print and electronic formats.
ISBN 978-1-55266-949-5 (softcover).ISBN 978-1-55266-950-1 (EPUB).
ISBN 978-1-55266-951-8 (Kindle)

1. Knockwood, Doug, 1929–. 2. Micmac Indians—Nova Scotia—Biography.
3. Elders (Native peoples)—Nova Scotia—Biography. 4. Autobiographies.
I. Title.

E99.M6K63 2018 971.6004'97343 C2018-900912-8
C2018-900913-6

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements / ix
Foreword by Brian Knockwood / xi

Part One: The Early Years / 1
Newville Lake / 2
My Early Childhood / 2
Residential School / 13
Taken Away / 13
Back Home to School and Work / 19
Back with Our Family / 19
After Newville Lake / 26
Springhill Junction and Beyond / 26
Out to Work / 27
Germany / 32
Doug McAdam Remembers / 32
Return from Germany / 33

Part Two: Tuberculosis and Alcoholism / 35
Fighting Tuberculosis / 36
Leaving Active Service / 36
Finding Love in the San / 43
Patsy / 55
Bernie Remembers / 57

Part Three: A New Life, A New Career / 63
Recovery / 64
A New Life in Boston / 64
Carol Ann Remembers / 66
Going Home / 73
Bernie / 75

Back in the Maritimes / 76
Vera and Eileen Marr Remember / 79
Theresa Meuse Remembers / 82
Growing the Program / 84
Volunteering / 84
New Career at Manitou College / 85
Bernie Remembers / 90
Dianne Spencer Remembers / 94
Yellowknife / 96
Back to Yellowknife / 103
Back to Nova Scotia / 105
Theresa Morris Remembers / 108
Frank Meuse Remembers / 109

Part Four: Retirement / 113
Inspiration in His Community / 114
Going Back to School / 114
Errol Sharpe Remembers / 115
Tragedy Again / 117
Peggy MacNeil Remembers / 119
Meeting Michelle / 121
Michelle Remembers / 121

Part Five: A Lifelong Counsellor and Honoured Elder / 125
A Natural Teacher / 126
Being Educated / 126
Don Fitzpatrick Remembers / 126
AA Philosophy / 128
Bill Partridge Remembers / 132
A Gentle Approach / 134
Respected and Honoured Elder / 136
Debbie Toney Remembers / 138
Glen Remembers / 140

Chronology / 144

To the memory of Lawrence Paul
and the many people who worked with me
over the many years

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am truly grateful for all the work and effort that went into the production of my book for it was truly a work of love. My heartfelt gratitude goes to all those who took the time out of their busy lives to participate and produce the book you now have in your hands. To Michelle my partner, support, friend, wife, my deepest and most heartfelt thank you for agreeing to be my travelling companion on this road we call life. Love you.

My love and thanks to all my children and friends who agreed to be interviewed for the "Remembers" sections of the book. Your many kind and thoughtful words lift my spirit and warm my heart. To my long-time friend Errol Sharpe, my deepest and most sincere thank-you. Errol and I talked of this book for many years; if it wasn't for his persistence and determination it would not have been started let alone completed. Many thanks also to Miles Howe and Annie Clair, whose many hours of interviewing resulted in the "Remembers" section.

On my life's journey I have met many, many people who through their loving companionship and camaraderie have helped me to become the person I am and able to do the work that I have done. It is because of you and your love and caring support that I celebrated fifty-four years of sobriety in February 2018. My most humble and appreciative thank-you.

I thank Robert Clarke, whose contribution helped shape the final book, and Brenda Conroy, whose encouragement and expertise in editing the manuscript has made it easier to read. Finally, thanks to

Beverley Rach for putting the book together, and to all the people at Fernwood Publishing many thanks. And to those of you who read this book, thank-you.

Doug Knockwood

FOREWORD

I have always looked up to Doug. He has been my neighbour here on the Indian Brook First Nation for nearly thirty years. Doug is one of the most respected Elders that I know.

One beautiful day in December, Doug invited me over to his house for some tea. He explained to me that he wanted to talk to me about something important. He also explained that he was busy that week and would not be home until that Saturday. He asked if I could come over to his place and that 10:30 a.m. would be a good time. I had plans that day, but when an Elder such as Doug invites you over for tea, you make sure that you clear your day.

"Is he ok? Am I in trouble?" are some things that were going through my mind. That week ended up being pretty long. Just getting an invite from Doug and being able to spend some precious moments with him is an honour in itself. Doug has always had a mysterious way of doing things, but they always had a purpose.

A few months earlier, in October, Doug had me over to his home and was telling me about a book that he's been working on and that he planned on releasing it in the spring. At that time, he mentioned that he wanted to have a launch in the community and wondered if I would be there to speak at the opening of the launch.

That Saturday morning when I went over to Doug's, his wife Michelle had made a nice light breakfast for us all. Doug introduced me to his friend Errol Sharpe and told me that Errol was the one who was helping him with his book, which he's been working on for the past few years. During breakfast, while Errol was talking about the

book and how far along it was, it was in those moments that I realized that when Doug had asked me to write the opening for the launch of his new book, he was actually asking me to write the foreword! My heart went up into my throat and my eyes filled with humble tears. With Doug being such a great man, whom so many look up to, being asked to write the foreword for his book is undoubtfully the highest honour I have ever been given.

My life is very busy. But not nearly as busy as Doug's. Doug used to be an avid golfer. He loved golf. When he wasn't travelling for work or being asked to be in another community, he could be found on the golf course with his close friends. He used to be gone bright and early, at the crack of dawn. One evening, we happened to get home at the same time and I said, "Doug, a little late getting out on the course today?" Doug replied with that beautiful ear-to-ear smile of his and said, "Oh no, it was such a beautiful day, I decided to do another round of eighteen in the afternoon." Here was a man double my age, with double the energy! I later told my mother about how Doug made me laugh and she replied, "Oh yeah, he loves his golf, and I think he may only have one lung."

I remember travelling to Ottawa one time to sing with our drum group. While we were there, I got talking with someone at the Odawa Native Friendship Centre. I introduced myself and right away they asked, "Are you related to Doug Knockwood?" I replied, "I sure am. He's my neighbour, and my grandfather grew up with him. I'm pretty sure that we are cousins." They replied, "Oh Doug is such a great man. He is one of our Elders here and has helped so many people. We all love Doug."

Doug has always been such a humble man. He is very soft-spoken, but his words have so much meaning. Over the years I became quite amazed by how many people knew him from coast to coast. I was more amazed when I would hear stories from others about how many lives he has touched and how many people he has helped.

This past November, it was such an honour to watch Doug on

TV. He was invited to take part in the national Remembrance Day ceremonies in Ottawa. When they invited the veterans to lay down their wreaths on the cenotaph, Doug was honoured by leading the veterans and being the very first one to lay his wreath.

Doug never talks or brags about the things that he does, where he goes or what he has coming up. He just seems to do it. It is who he is. He just seems to pop up everywhere, doing what he does in helping others.

As I write this, I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to be a part of Doug's life over the years — his kind knowing eyes, his wonderful smile and his great big heart. One does not ask to be an Elder. It is earned by the trials, tribulations, lessons, teachings and journeys of one's life. Doug is a true Elder. He lives and posseses all of the sacred grandfather teachings. He is a person of unconditional love, vast wisdom, upmost respect, true courage, a person of honesty who lives in truth and is full of humility. Doug is a true gift from the Creator.

Wela'lin Doug. Kesalul Doug.
Brian Knockwood

PART ONE

THE EARLY YEARS

Newville Lake

Newville Lake is a beautiful glacial lake in Cumberland County, Nova Scotia. It is about ten kilometres north of Parrsboro on the No. 2 Highway to Amherst, near the community of Halfway River. From Newville Lake the water flows south to the Bay of Fundy on one side and north on the other. In the early days, before refrigeration, ice was cut from the lake each winter. The ice was packed in sawdust, and some of it was transported to Springhill and Amherst. Special trains used to travel from Parrsboro to take people north to watch sleigh races on the lake. On its shores, there was a lumber mill which employed several people. In later years, a thriving blueberry business operated in the community.

It was in this small rural community that Doug Knockwood grew up with his parents, Ann Mary and Freeman Bernard Knockwood, and their extended family. His nearby relatives included his grandfather Sam, who was blind, yet for Doug a great teacher, his uncle John, who lived on the Franklin Manor Reserve, five kilometres north of Newville Lake, his uncles Isaac and Henry, his brother Ralph and sister Mary Evelyn. This is where Doug begins his story.

My Early Childhood

I was born in the coal-mining town of Springhill, Nova Scotia, on December 11, 1929, to my proud parents, Freeman Bernard and Ann Mary Knockwood. They lived at Newville Lake, Halfway River, Cumberland County, a small village nine miles north of Parrsboro and twelve miles southeast of River Herbert. Newville Lake was three miles away from Franklin Manor, a Mi'kmaw reserve back in the bush. We did not live on the reserve, as my grandfather had the presence of mind in his younger days to buy property around the lake. That's where the homestead was. My father worked in the lumber woods nearby. He made a home for us, building a nice house on top of the hill overlooking the lake. There was a lumber mill at Newville Lake.

Newville Lake, circa 1950

Doug at Newville Lake, July 2015

Ann Mary Knockwood

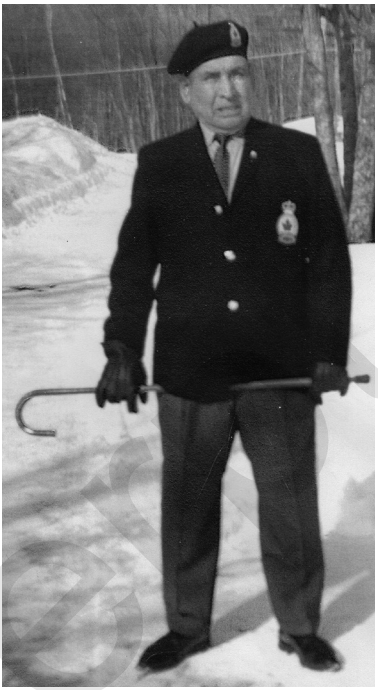
Newville Lake is where I first started to appreciate life, I guess. I started to see things as I grew older. The lake was so beautiful. I remember the music that came from this beautiful lake in the summer. I did not know that I was living in paradise until much later on in my life. I have fond memories of this remote area of Cumberland County.

My childhood was very happy as I recall. My mother was always home for me and gave me a lot of love. I was the third boy. My first brother died shortly after his birth. My second brother, Ralph, lived with my grandfather. Four years after I was born, my sister Mary Evelyn came along and upset the applecart for yours truly.

My dad was an excellent ball player. He also played hockey and was a boxer. He had been educated at a school called St. Pat's Home for Boys, a boarding school in Halifax. My dad's father took him there when he was old enough to go to school and never went back to get him. It was in that school that he grew up. When he was sixteen he came out of the school and lived around the area until he married my mother. St. Pat's school was run by the Catholic diocese. There were different students every semester, but because my father didn't have anywhere to go he stayed at the school all the time. The teachers were Catholic brothers, and the government paid for my father to go there. Non-Native people had to pay for going to the school. I didn't hear very much about his life. I just know that he went through that school until grade ten and came out with a good education. In those days grade ten was a good high school education.

When I was growing up, a lot of people from the community, both

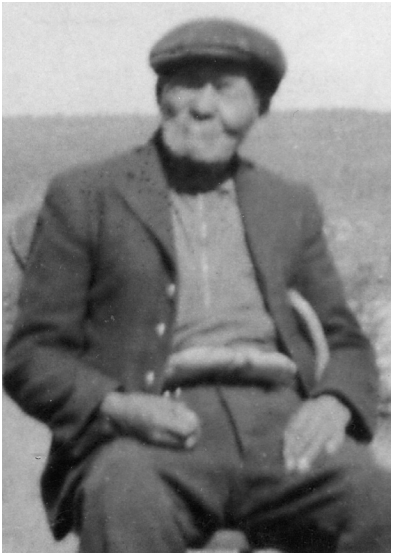
Native and non-Native, used to come to our house and have my dad write letters for them. We got along very well because Mom always made baskets, and if Dad wasn't working in the woods he'd be home helping my uncle John make handicrafts. Uncle John taught him how to make things. Dad also helped Mom make baskets. We always had, not huge meals, but they were big according to us. I was taught by my dad and my uncle to respect people when they talked and listen very carefully. So I respected my dad until the end. He was always my dad.



Freeman Bernard Knockwood

I remember my grandfather, Sam Knockwood. He lived across the road from our house next to the lake. Granddad was blind from the time of my birth until his death. He never knew what I looked like but he would hold me and use his hands to feel my facial features. He said he knew what I looked like that way. He was in my estimation the most intelligent man I ever knew. During my childhood we spent a lot of time together, out of both necessity and love. The things that he taught me will stay with me for the rest of my life — like how to read the environment, how to read people.

My grandfather was well known in that part of the country. When he could still see, he had worked in the woods as a log driver and he played the harmonica. I don't know when he went blind but I know that while he never knew what his grandchildren looked like through his eyes, he knew what we looked like through his hands. My first



Sam (Blind Sam) Knockwood

memory of him was of being a toddler and sitting on his knee while he played the harmonica for me and told me stories. I loved that old man. He needed a shave most of the time, but he didn't need a haircut as he was bald — the only Indian man who had a bald head — but that didn't matter. I was always busy talking to him. He could not see the light of day but he could lighten your load of worries by his uncanny way of talking about life as he lived it. The vast amount of knowledge that this man carried with him and shared so freely with me has been with me all my life.

Those times when he would hold me on his knee and sing tunes to me and tell me stories were training for me although I did not recognize it at the time. My only interest then was that he was holding and loving me at the same time. I remember his earlobes were very soft and I would put one thumb in my mouth and grasp his earlobe between my index finger and thumb on the other hand. As I grew older I went from sitting on his knee to standing at his side or sitting next to him, always listening to whatever he was doing at different times of day or night. Often he would be in conversation with older people, and I would sit very quietly as I did not want to be asked to leave the room by my mom. When I talk with people of my generation, they tell me that when they had the opportunity to listen to their elder kin talk, it was the same procedure.

In his younger days, my grandfather played his harmonica for dances. He was a one-man band. When Blind Sam played, everyone

listened. I agree with the white man's expression, "He could make that harmonica talk." He wanted his grandson to learn other instruments. He supplied me with three stringed instruments and an accordion. The only instrument I learned to play a tune on was the mouth organ, but I could not hold a candle to my granddad's playing. In those early days a lot of dances were held in people's houses, and usually there was only one musician to supply the music. My granddad would blow out three harmonicas a night.

My granddad did not tell me that he was an honest man. I remember one time he was trying to help with the upkeep of our house by selling baskets that my mom had made. Along the way he met the local priest, who asked the price of the basket. My granddad said 50 cents. The priest thought that was a little steep, but my granddad stuck to his guns, saying he "had to make a bit of money on the baskets." The priest asked, "How much did you pay for the basket?" and my granddad said, "Nothing for it." Everyone had a good laugh. The priest bought the basket.

It was a very hard road that my grandfather travelled in his life. While I shared part of that life, I did not know how many hardships he endured. Part of the time that I lived with him was when he went out to make some money for food for his family. Because of his blindness he could not work at any kind of employment. As a result he was given a letter that he could pass out to people on the road. I remember the words on it as if it were today: *To Whom It May Concern. The bearer Sam Knockwood is blind and unable to work. Any assistance that you can render him would be appreciated.*

He would get on the bus or train and travel to a nearby town and walk all day. Sometimes he would go home in the evening or he might stay overnight at a relative's home. I would often go with him all day until the bus or train would bring us back to our home in Newville Lake. But a lot of times we would walk to Parrsboro, nine miles away, and return after walking all day. I would be so tired that I would sometimes have to climb on my granddad's back until I was rested enough,

usually a couple of miles, and I would continue walking with him. Sometimes we would be given a drive by someone who recognized us, but there was not very much traffic in those days so as a result we did not hitchhike. When we arrived home my mom would be so happy. We always brought something home for her and my little sister. They were the only ones left at home. Sometimes I would be so tired that I could not stay awake long enough for supper.

All of our conversations were in our own language. It was a very interesting and educational time in my life. As I reflect back on those times today, I see that we did not have very much. But on the other hand, we had the world, our world. We had kinship, love and understanding. There was always someone to listen to us when we talked, but we also learned a lot by listening. Those times were very educational for the young.

My granddad was allowed to travel on the old railway for free. You see he was not always blind. Before he went blind, he worked in the woods. It was an accident in the woods that made him blind. He was a river driver, transporting the logs to a mill site. In those early days, the coal from Springhill was taken to Parrsboro and loaded on the coal boats in the harbour.

July 1st was known as Miner's Picnic day. The picnic was held in Parrsboro at the beach. There were extra trains put on for that day for miners and their families. The extra trains went ahead of the regular trains. On one occasion a few miners missed the special train to Springhill and had to catch the regular train. The conductor of the regular train warned those gentlemen that he would not tolerate any harassment of his passengers or they would be put off the train. Of course, they promised the world so they could get on the train and figured that once the train was moving, there would not be any need to heed the request of the conductor. The train was in the vicinity of Lakelands and Halfway River when the miners decided they would have a little fun. The conductor went to the passenger car that they were travelling on and warned them for the last time. He said that he

would stop the train and put them off. The miners let him know that they were going to stay on the train. My grandfather and the conductor were very good friends, and Granddad happened to be on that train that day. The good conductor came forward to the coach my granddad was travelling in and said that he had to put six or seven miners off the train. The conductor figured he would need some assistance and asked my granddad to help him in this little episode. The train was stopped and the minors were kicked off. And from that day forward my granddad and his family were allowed to travel for free. As I grew older and the train crew grew older, they always reminded me of this little confrontation and how Sam the Mi'kmaq was able to quell the miner's uprising and help throw them off the train.

Later, when he was blind, my grandfather would arrive home and the trainmen would help him off the train. They would leave him between the rails and he would walk to the crossroad, where my brother and I would meet him. Even after he was blind he was a great walker. He would sometimes walk alone from Maccan to Newville Lake, a distance of approximately eighteen miles. We never heard of him making a wrong turn. When the highway became paved it was easier for him. He told me he would drag his cane along the edge of the pavement as he walked with one foot on the pavement and one on the gravel shoulder.

They talked to us in Mi'kmaq mostly, so as a result I was talking Mi'kmaq pretty well all of the time. My grandfather never spoke English around home unless people came to visit from the community.

My uncle Henry lived next to my granddad. Uncle Henry was married with four children, three girls and a boy. His wife's name was Annie. The three girls were Freda, Ruby and Annie, who was nicknamed Gookie. The boy was Peter. Next to Uncle Henry lived Abraham Gloode and his wife Annie. They had three children, George, Jimmy and Josephine. A short distance beyond my uncle's place were the little church and the community store.

Another of my uncles, Denny, was a big man. He was a bachelor

and one day he took me to Amherst. I remember this just as clear as a bell. We came to a restaurant, and he asked, "Are you hungry?" I said, "Not really." He said, "Come on in and have something to eat." He said to the girl, "He hasn't been away from home, so give him something good." So she made up a dish for me. I ate it and he ordered a good meal. She said, "Will you have soup with that, sir." And he asked, "What kind of soup is it?" and she said, "Chicken." He said, "That sounds good." He took the bowl and it was chicken broth. We called the waitress over. She said, "Yes sir?" He said, "Would you take that back to the kitchen? Let the chicken walk through it one more time." She had to bust out laughing too.

Uncle Denny could make anybody laugh. He was a jokester. He was full of fun. He worked in the woods all his life until he became a fireman in the mill. So he always got along well in the white man's world. Of course, he never got into trouble 'cause he was a big man, 200–300 pounds. But could he ever dance, holy shit! He could put those young fellows to shame. He'd step dance. God, he was light on his feet.

A lot of people came to visit at our home when I was young. A lot of Mi'kmaw people came. They worked and lived close by, and there was a lot of camaraderie. I especially remember my uncles coming to visit, Uncle Henry and Uncle Isaac. They always hooked names on us when we were children. My uncle Isaac called me Douglas Way. He would say, "Douglas Way, how are you, Douglas Way." Uncle Isaac was married and had one child. He died early in life. My uncle Isaac lived on Athol Road but he came to visit a lot, usually on Sundays. He sure had a beautiful voice. I did not mind going to church on those Sundays when he was asked to sing in the old Mi'kmaw way. When he would go to church in the town of Parrsboro the priest would ask the choir to relinquish their time that day. My uncle would sing in our own language. Everyone always paid him compliments. Because of Uncle Isaac people always remembered our family.

Uncle John was my favourite uncle. He never spoke English in his

life. He was a single man who lived on the Franklin Manor Reserve, in the bush. I would call this man a master craftsman. People would come from many places if they wanted something made. He could duplicate just about anything that was made of wood. Because he could not communicate in the English language, I don't think he ever got enough pay for his hard labour.

My sister and I used to go to his camp and visit when I was five years old. He would always have something to give us to take home. Sometimes mother would go with us. We liked that because we would in all probability stay overnight. We never got lost, as there was always a footpath. It was approximately four miles as the crow flies. We did not have flashlights. We had lanterns fueled by oil. One night I went with him from our house. My mom let me go. It's strange. I was not afraid. My uncle would stop every now and then to explain some of the nightlife, the winged creatures along with the night crawlers. I was so excited to be travelling in the woods after dark and I enjoyed his company. I remember our walks through the woods and being by the campfire in the evenings. It is this time in life that every young person should have in their book of memories. My fondest memories of this man were sharing those wonderful times with him.

We used to run out onto the bank and watch the buses go by and dream of travelling on them. This one time the guy who was driving said, "Do you want to be a bus driver when you grow up?" and I said, "Yeah," and he said, "You keep watching and you'll learn how to drive." So he took me in the bus and I sat up front. They had the engine in the middle. The bus driver was over here and the big engine was here and there was a seat beside it.

When my sister was old enough, I set up a bus in the bushes a little way from the house. Didn't want to mess up the yard. We had seats. We borrowed chairs from the kitchen. One fellow, Lorrie Rector, came in and he said, "What's this?" I said, "Bus." "That's what I thought it was," he said. That made me feel pretty good. My sister and I used to sit in that. We didn't have much to play with.

Uncle John — John Knockwood, at his cabin in Franklin Manor

Sometimes I drive to Newville Lake from Shubenacadie just for the wonderful memories. I cherish a photo of Uncle John in front of his log cabin on Franklin Manor Reserve, where we spent so many happy hours. I remember how peaceful those days were and I regret the vast amount of history and life stories that I missed because, like the wind, I did not grasp the knowledge as it was being handed down to me by people like my grandfather and Uncle John. This was Indian education from my family being passed from one generation to the next.

My memory of those great men still lingers in my daily living as they were a part of that early childhood education, which I hope will be passed on through these pages, not only to my own offspring but for the rest of the young population of Indian Brook and other communities who need this type of learning to help them be proud of who they are.

Residential School

Shubenacadie Indian Residential School opened in 1930. It was one of 130 such schools in Canada that were funded by the federal government. The first residential schools opened in western Canada in 1883. Sixty percent of the schools were run by the Catholic Church, and it is estimated that as many as 150,000 children went through the residential school system. In 1920 the Indian Act was amended to make it compulsory for Indian children aged between 7 and 15 to attend residential school. The last of these schools closed in 1996. While the total number of children who died in these schools is unknown, Justice Murray Sinclair, the chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, says that the mortality rate in some schools was as high as 60 percent. The Shubenacadie school was the only residential school in the Maritimes. Children from Mi'kmaw, Maliseet and Passamaquoddy Nations were forced to attend the school.

Isabelle Knockwood, one of Doug's cousins and a long-time confidant, was a resident at the Shubenacadie school. In her book Out of the Depths*, she records the stories of many of the surviving residents. Knockwood tells of horrendous abuse of children. At the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in Halifax, survivors testified that they witnessed Father Mackey, the director of the school, murder two young girls by drowning them. Stories of children in the schools being used for medical experimentation abound. These schools were touted as educational institutions, but their real purpose was "to kill the Indian in the child." Douglas Freeman Knockwood is one of the survivors.*

Taken Away

My education was cut short as I was taken from my happy home to a life of turmoil. It was cut off in mid-stream. There was no parting of the ways from my granddad, no chance to say goodbye to my

spiritual leader and trusted friend. I abruptly went from this life to a life that was very, very cruel.

My brother Ralph was already in residential school. When I was five years old, it was my turn. One day my uncle John and I arrived home and the Mounted Police were at the house. They reached for me saying that I had to go with them. It was a very sad situation as my whole family was at home.

I don't know what happened that day. My dad was working in the woods and he came out for some reason, whether he was sick or what? He was lying down in the bedroom when the Mounties came to pick me up to take me to the residential school. Of course, my mother was all nerved and didn't know what to do and she was crying. She woke Dad up and he said, "What's going on out there?" The Mounties said, "We're taking Freeman Douglas to the residential school. He has to go." My father said, "Oh, no. He's not going to the residential school by Mounties. If he has to go, I'll take him." And they said, "He has to be on the train tomorrow." I remember my dad saying to them, "Don't worry about me." The next morning they were there, sitting across the road when we got on the bus. If I hadn't been on that bus they would have taken me to residential school away from my family. Dad and I took the bus to Maccan to catch the train. Uncle John went back to his camp very lonely and with a heavy heart, blaming himself, saying if he had not brought me home I would not have been taken away. We had a tough time convincing him that it would have happened anyway. For me it was my first trip on the Advocate bus to Maccan. I used to watch the bus as it passed by my door twice a day.

In Maccan we met Susan Hood. She asked my dad if he would take her son Tommy with us and we did. He was a playmate of mine. In that area we all visited each other. It wasn't very far. We walked it sometimes — eighteen miles. The big train arrived in Maccan and we three musketeers boarded the train. Springhill Junction was a fueling stop for coal and water. It was about a twenty-minute stop. And lo and behold my little friend Frankie Pictou came on board. Like the

Shubenacadie Indian Residential School

good gentleman he was, he said that we could all travel together and relieve Mrs. Pictou of the trip. So we had a fun trip to Shubenacadie.

When we got to Shubenacadie we were taken up to the residential school by horse and buggy. When we got to the school they put the run to Dad right away and told him to go back on the train. That was the only time in my young boyhood that I ever saw my dad sad. So Dad went back on the carriage that had brought us up to the school.

My brother, who had already been there for two years, was just over across the way from me. I was happy to see Ralph, but he said, "Don't come over. Don't come near me." He said, "They'll beat you." So I couldn't go and put my arms around him or anything. I was crying. He said again, "Don't come over. They'll beat you." And he kept saying that to me so I didn't go. Later I met him and we talked a little bit. I was younger so I was in a different bracket. He was over across the way from me and I wasn't allowed to talk to him. I wasn't allowed to speak to him. It was the start of a way of life that I had never experienced before. For the next year and a half I was a prisoner. I experienced a lot of abuse both physical and sexual. I couldn't speak a word of English as my dad was never home long enough for us to learn English even though he was fluent in the lingo. My only mode of communication was Mi'kmaq, and I was not allowed to speak in my mother tongue.

I was terrified that first night. I cried and called for my mother. That was the start of many, many nights that I cried myself to sleep. I was devastated. I could not comprehend what I had done, why I could not talk to my brother, my own flesh and blood. I was crying all the time because I was never so alone in my entire life. I always had my mom and my dear grandfather to support me. I cried constantly, and the nuns would slap my hand and sometimes my face.

When we were still living at home, at Christmas time we always had lots of things. Mom and Dad both worked and made baskets. We got along fairly well because Mom always had baskets and if Dad wasn't working in the woods for a lumberman he'd be home helping my uncle John make handcrafts. That's how Dad learned. Uncle John taught him how. And we always had enough food to eat. So Christmas at the residential school was really hard.

Dad came to visit us the first Christmas that I was at the Indian residential school. He arrived with a load of goodies and my brother said we had to eat as fast as we could because they would take them away from us as soon as our dad left. After Dad got a look at what was happening he said he was taking us home. Dad said to Father Mackey, "My children never had snot running out of their noses and into their mouths." He took the goodies back and said to Ralph and me, "Go get your clothes." Ralph said, "We can't do that," and Dad said, "Yes you can." Father Mackey came in and he said, "What do you want to do, break up the family?" And Dad said, "No, I'm taking them both home." Father Mackey said, "No, you're not. You're going home." Father Mackey ordered my dad to leave the premises. Before he left, Dad told Father Mackey that we would be taken out of the residential school. "Mark my word," he said, "my two boys are coming out of this place." Father Mackey just laughed and had the Mounties take Dad to the train station. They took our goodies away as well.

It was at Christmas dinner that I got sick. I had eaten too many goodies and the boys used to play tricks. When they were setting up the tables they would take the shaker, put salt in it and then put the

cover on loose. Of course, I was new and everyone was watching. I picked it up and the whole thing went into the turkey dinner. Sister Anderson, a big, red-faced woman, came over. "What's going on here?" she said. The boys were laughing. A pile of salt was sitting on top of my dinner. She stirred it all up, grabbed a handful of my hair, held my head back and shovelled it down my throat. I threw up in my Christmas dinner plate, and Sister Anderson just mixed up my dinner with my vomit in it and forced me to eat it. She repeated this process four or five times. I got very sick and was put in the infirmary. I don't know how long I was sick because when my brother noticed me, he said, "Where were you?" I said, "I don't know, I was just upstairs." He said, "God, you were gone a long time." I guess I must have blacked out.

When I was allowed back with the general population I was fragile. As a result I was under constant threat. Everyone knew how vulnerable I was. I became the young boy who would not defend himself. As a result, my brother was in a lot of trouble because he defended me constantly. When your peer group can make you do anything and everything at any time, life is not your own anymore. It becomes a way of life without a future.

I did not learn anything at residential school but fear of almost everything. I was afraid to look out the door because I would see nothing that I could understand. I lived in fear of having a bath because we were not allowed to bathe ourselves. As a result, there was a lot of sexual advantages taken on our bodies as we had to bathe in huge bathtubs. Usually there were adolescents doing the bathing. It was a painful ordeal that we had to experience twice a week. We were not allowed to talk about it. Can you picture a five-year-old wondering what he had done to deserve this kind of treatment? At home we may not have had too much material-wise, but we were taught from the old blind man and a very loving mother that there was more to life. There have been reams of paper written about residential schools. I don't have to elaborate, but I want to let you know the vast difference between the school and our original way of life with my loving family.

When my dad went home after that first Christmas, he went to the courthouse in Amherst and opened a case for Knockwood versus the residential school. I have tried to find out but I don't know much about what went on.

Later we came out at vacation time. We came home and I was crying. "You're not going to get us out," I said. My father said, "Don't worry, you're coming out." He said there was a date to release us. We were only back about six weeks, not very long, when we came out. When we were leaving, my father said, "Thank you for your hospitality, Father Mackey. I told you my boys were coming out of here." Father Mackey didn't laugh at him that time. My father won. He beat the system. He was the only Indian to ever take his children out of the residential school through the court system. And he fought the battle himself.

Years later when my wife Kathy was going to Ottawa as part of her job, I said to her, "If you get a chance, see if you can haul out my papers and read them." She came home one night and said, "They didn't think much of your father." And she told me what was in the affidavit.

The stay at the residential school was a living hell. I lived that hell for half of my lifetime, long after I left. I am not proud of that half of my life. After residential school the hurt and the anger did not subside until my mid-life.