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Mark B. Meekis

[HIGHER LEARNING]

Sharing with you the two people in my life that influenced me for higher education.¹

I would like to share with you, the two people in my life that influenced me for higher education. Helping me to have courage and finding guidance through traditional ways.

To begin with, my Mother's name is Mary Harper; she is from Wasagamack, Manitoba. This is located 610 kilometres Northeast of Winnipeg. The community is accessible by plane and boat in the summer and by winter road. She is now currently living in the city of Thunder Bay. She is the mother of 6 children, grandmother of 10. My Mother Mary is an Alumni of Confederation College and Lakehead University. My mother went to residential school; the legacy that residential school left behind was horrendous. Not only did I not know how to speak my language, I did not know my culture or traditions. It took a lot of time and effort to gain back the ethnicity of my people back in perspective, it took some time for my mother to heal and gain back the knowledge and the teachings of the old ways. I too had to take some time to heal and revisit my cultural roots. Residents of some northern Ontario reserves are reeling from a series of suicides by their young people, and they're pointing to their own past as the culprit. With no parental role models, a generation raised in residential schools has passed on the trauma to their kids. Many parents have gone back to native traditions in an effort to combat the lessons of their youth, and so did my Mother. I thank her for that. The Creator gave to us the family, which is the place where all teachings are handed down from the grandparent, to the parent, and to the child. The children's behaviour is a mirror of the parent's behaviour. What happens when this traditional cycle is broken? Residential schools is an example, it not only destroyed many Aboriginal children's self-esteem, they helped damaged their culture, language and traditions. I thank my Mother for the traditional teachings and the ceremonies she shared with us. This is when I started to incorporate Aboriginal values and perspectives into my everyday life.

In addition, my niece Rylie has also influenced my decision to seek higher learning. She is six years old, in grade one and at this time now living with me. This was not always the case. Due to family

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circumstances, she had been placed in foster care. It broke my heart when we had weekly visits with her, and she had to return back to foster care. Then I was determined to apply for kinship services through Dilico Anishinabek Family services. After completing an interview and an extensive police record check. It took a few months before a decision was made. I was in high spirits with the news. This allowed Rylie to continue to strengthen ties to family, friends, culture and traditions. Children have a right to maintain connections to their culture and traditional ways of life. When I think about how my family influenced the way I think and live in my world. It was finding that lost connection. I make an attempt to believe the effects of our decisions on behalf of the next seven generations; in this way, our children and grandchildren will inherit healthy communities. Our Indian communities need to be restored to health so the future generation will be guaranteed a place to go for culture and language. The most important teaching I have learned and would like to share with you is "we are the caretakers of the children for the Creator. They are his children, not ours." and to use the culture to prepare them for life. The most important thing you can give to children is time. Spend time with them in order to learn them and to listen to them. I make this commitment to my children, so they will have courage and find guidance through traditional ways.

To put it briefly, with loneliness, isolation and abuse as their model in childhood, generations of residential school students went on to demonstrate the same behavior with their own children. I have returned to the traditional and spiritual values which have guided my ancestors for the past generations. Look on the powers of our ceremonies and religious ways for they are important to the very survival of our people. We have survived and are going to grow and flourish spiritually.

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