

Lillian Marshall, Elder Potlotek (Chapel Island), NS Mi'kmaw Nation

Lillian Marshall is a well known and much loved Mi'kmaw Elder from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. She has worked for her home community of Chapel Island (Potlotek) for over 33 years in different aspects of Aboriginal education. Furthermore, her interests in education have seen Lillian become involved with many other Aboriginal communities as a member on various committees working towards the preservation and promotion of Mi'kmaw history, customs, values, language, and culture. Lillian has written several books, developed language CDs, and created children's stories and games. She is also the person who revived and renewed the Mi'kmaw Mid-Winter Feast in Chapel Island over 20



years ago. This Feast is celebrated shortly after the first new moon of Punamujuiku's (January) and is a thanksgiving to all spirits, especially to the Great Spirit, for the blessings of life, health, and sustenance and the privileges of community life. Celebrations are not as elaborate as those of the ancestors but people in Chapel Island are, to this day, the only Mi'kmaq that celebrate this most important traditional ceremony of the year. In 2007 Lillian was awarded the Grand Chief Donald Marshall Senior Memorial Elder Award by the Premier of Nova Scotia Rodney MacDonald. The award honours educational achievements and contributions to community; recipients must be nominated by the Aboriginal community.

Lillian's dedication to the preservation and promotion of Mi'kmaw heritage is deeply rooted, strongly developed, and passionate. She attributes much of this to the wonderful upbringing she received from her parents - she comes from hereditary leaders on both sides of her family. Her Father was a Community Leader and always listened carefully to her questions before offering his understandings. Moreover, he shared with her the stories he had learned - stories that had been carried generation to generation. To all of this, her Mother could be depended on to add the sparkle of laughter and humour.

Lillian further attributes her strong love and knowledge of her Mi'kmaw heritage to the fact that she never experienced the trauma of Canada's residential school system. Instead, she was able to attend Indian Day School in her home community of Chapel Island although Grade 6 was the highest level offered and Lillian felt stuck not being able to go further with her formal education at the time. After a period of work in the United States she returned home, trained as



a key punch operator, and found work as a clerk on the reserve. She quickly moved into a position with the Union of Nova Scotia Indians and the rewarding job of interviewing Elders in Mi'kmaw communities throughout Nova Scotia followed by work in education in her community.

In conjunction with her work in education that has continued over many years in the community, Lillian has also been a student. In 1991, she obtained a Diploma in Counseling from Acadia University. Later, she graduated from the Froebel Institute in Truro in Early Childhood Education and she took most of the Native Teacher Education Program offered by McGill University. In 2003, she completed the Native Language Immersion Teaching program at St. Thomas University. In 2007, Lillian graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Community Studies degree from Cape Breton University. Through her work and her life examples, Lillian constantly encourages children to understand the importance of education; moreover, she also encourages people of all ages to realize that it is never too late to go back to school.



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