

Submission #23

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I am third generation Metis, originally from the Cree Nation in Alberta. My family has traced our ancestry through our maternal family. Three generational Metis means that my mother [REDACTED] grandparents [REDACTED] and great grandparents were Metis. We believe that our great-great grandparents were members of the Cree Nation in Alberta, and possibly the [REDACTED] Band. I am a visible Aboriginal person.

We have not found historical information about my father's ancestry – we know that his family moved from the United States to Piapot, Saskatchewan, but we do not know when. My father was Metis – he called himself “half-breed”. His parents were also Metis. Both my parents could speak Cree but did not teach their seven children the language because they were raised to know that Indian languages were not permitted. My father could also speak French.

My parents, [REDACTED] met in Calgary, Alberta and were married. They proceeded to have eight children (one of whom died a “crib death” as a baby). My parents did their best to raise seven children, but we were raised in poverty. I recall times when we had porridge for supper. Despite growing up in poverty, my parents encouraged us to attend school and to be responsible. As a child from age 5 to 12, I was horrifically sexually abused by my Dad's cousin. That is another terrible story of my upbringing.

I was married at age 17 in 1969, when I was pregnant with my oldest son. I should have been in Grade 12 to complete my high school education. Throughout my marriage, I managed to complete my high school education by correspondence school. In 1976, I had another son. In 1979, my husband abandoned us for his relationship with another woman. At that time, my youngest was 3 years old and my oldest son was 9 years old. I struggled as a single parent, employed as a secretary, for years after that.

In 1980, I started working for the Crown Prosecutors Office in [REDACTED], Alberta [as secretary].

[REDACTED]. While working [REDACTED] I was treated with the greatest respect and he became a mentor to me. [REDACTED]

In 1980, I moved [REDACTED] and began working in the Crown Prosecutors' Office [REDACTED]. While in the general secretarial pool, I soon became secretary to [REDACTED] Chief Crown Prosecutor. While working at the Crown's Office, I decided to return to school.

I registered for university in 1986 and after my third undergraduate year, applied as an Aboriginal student to the Law School [REDACTED]. Applying as an Aboriginal student, I was told that I had to attend the pre-law program [REDACTED]. I objected to that and was advised that if I did not attend the [REDACTED] program, I would have to apply in the general applicant pool and risk not being selected. That policy was racist. In 1989, the University [REDACTED] offered only one seat for an Aboriginal person, and I was the only applicant. Out of 68 law students selected, I was the only one required to go to another city for 8 weeks and learn

pre-law subjects. As a single parent, I was required to pay the cost of that Aboriginal pre-law program, the cost of housing and food for eight weeks, and the cost of child-care [REDACTED] for my youngest son.

[REDACTED]

I decided to take Law School one year at a time. I am greatly fortunate to have had superb mentors [REDACTED], and other great professors! I never studied at the university but chose to live close by so that I could be home with my son when he was out of school.

I graduated from Law School in 1992 and was called to the Alberta Bar in 1993. I articulated with [REDACTED] [a] firm of independent lawyers. It was a hectic and extremely busy article year as I represented [REDACTED] [various clients] at regular court appearances at Provincial Court, Court of Queens Bench (bail), and Youth Court.

When I started appearing in the different courts, Judges would look at me like I should be in the prisoners' dock! One Judge told me that Native Courtworkers do not sit at defence counsel table. Another Judge started to ask me about my credentials (did I graduate from Law School). Another Judge literally GAPPED once I appeared at defence counsel table and introduced myself.

At that time, I was the only Aboriginal female appearing in Alberta Courts. It was extremely shaming and insulting to me to be challenged by the judiciary when I was a practicing lawyer! Over the years I became highly respected by the judiciary as they got to know me. In 2002, Judge [REDACTED] invited me to apply to the judiciary. He submitted the application on my behalf, and it was denied.

My experiences with the Law Society of Alberta have been completely unsupported, indifferent, and dismal.

I experienced great personal difficulties from about 1999 when my Dad died to 2001 when my partner decided to sleep with another woman, to when my mother died in 2002. I was overwhelmed with so much bad news in my life. In 2001, I found a traditional counsellor who set out a daily plan of health, vitamins, Reiki, support, and someone who saved me from depression! I asked the Law Society to pay for this therapy and it was denied because she was not a "registered psychologist or psychiatrist" I paid for that therapy on my own.

In December 2001, I learned that my secretary had been stealing from me for some time, I reported it to the Law Society. This never came up when in future client complaints against me, I was blamed.

This Law Society has never been kind to me.