

NWT Story
A Man's Successful Journey Towards Wellness
(preferred to remain anonymous)



It's hard for me to begin the story of my life, but I need to tell my story to help others that have struggled the same way as me. The effects of the modern world led me to a dysfunctional life without any of my cultural values and traditional knowledge on how to be a better and good person. That never happened for me.

One of the greatest gifts I did get from my parents was how they loved me. My parents knew the Dene way of life and lived a simple cultural way with good values, knowing how to survive on the land, using the traditional knowledge and teaching through storytelling. Being on the land helps us heal and makes us happy just to be with family. We grew up to respect each other and help the elders on the land and the community.

My first journey to Grollier Hall Residential School in Inuvik, NT, was when I was very young. The RCMP police, Federal Government Indian Agent and a Roman Catholic priest took us away with our parents and children crying as they pulled us apart. Many of us were fearful of the residential school as a result. It didn't take long before I heard about what the head supervisor was doing to the little boys in his bedroom. He gave alcohol to the little boys and made them drunk then he would start touching the boys in their private area and sexual abused them. We could hear his footsteps coming down the hallway towards the dorm and we were so fearful because we didn't know who will be picked that night to be taken to the head supervisor room.

One of the hardest times for me thinking back to Grollier Hall was a night we heard footsteps coming to the small boy's dorm and the steps stopped by my bed. I got picked that night. He pulled me from my bed to his room and I had no idea what was waiting for me. My whole body started shaking with fear. He talked to me but I didn't understand a word he was saying. He then offered me alcohol and everything was spinning around me and I got touched and sexual abused. I went through tremendous pain. I will not forgive him for what he did to all of us little boys- all the pain, anger, suffering and shame we have today as a group.

I suffered all my life from the tremendous pain I experienced at residential school and couldn't find the help I needed. Regular counseling and treatment didn't do nothing for me as I tried to work for healing

through my life.

So I turned to alcohol to keep me numb so I don't have to feel my pain.

One day a job opportunity at a large company came up and I applied. I got the job that likely saved my life. I was able to work for 30 years for the company and retired staying home but still was looking for help to heal.

Through my hard times I fell in love. I got married to my wife, but we are both alcoholics. We drank so much that my money went to alcohol and then we didn't have enough money for food or to buy what we needed. When we had our children they only knew the life we taught them through alcohol. It was hard on the children, we made them suffer with hardly no food or enough for clothing because we thought of only ourselves to feed our addictions. We were first before our own children's needs. I felt sick for what we did to our children. I started thinking more about quitting drinking and started looking for help but none of the workshops, training, counseling, or treatment helped me with the powerful alcohol. It controlled my spirit, and my mental, physical, and emotional being. It created a dysfunctional way for my life and my family especially while still suffering silently with so much shame. I kept thinking of my sexual abuse and the pain I suffered so kept praying for someone to come my way so I can heal my pain and suffering to stop.

Then one day I got a phone call from a friend who told me that an elder knowledge keeper and her team from Yellowknife was in town to do workshops on the traditional Indigenous ways of healing the mind, body, emotions and spirit towards wellness. I went to the hall to find out what the workshop was about, and I was so happy to see the knowledge keeper and her team with Elders and other people there too.

An Elder prayed in our language and the knowledge keeper sang her spiritual song and woke up my spirit. I knew I was finally in the right place to heal my wounds and suffering and pain. The song opened my mind and spirit to learn about myself for the first time. The knowledge keeper's cultural and traditional teachings fit my life story, and her teachings of problems was like she was talking about me and all of us that went through the same experiences. We all cried as she continued her teachings, my emotions started to be free as she spoke. Every day I went to the traditional workshops learned more about myself for the first time. In the talking circle we shared our experiences and there was so much tears from all of us. We all knew each other before hand at the workshops, but we didn't know what each other's experiences or problems in their lives were. Some of us were afraid to share but the knowledge teachings on confidentiality helped so what was said there stayed there and not sharing outside in the community. If you do share outside you are only hurting yourself 10 time more. What we say is sacred and only the spiritual world can help guide us to move on in the new way of life.

Finding solutions to our problems through storytelling and experiences with the group and watching healing videos helped us to fine our own solutions. We all worked in finding answers we needed for our healing and I realized that I knew my own answers- it was in front of me this whole time! My children started to ask what I was learning because they saw changes in me every day and they were proud of me for reaching out for help. They were proud of me for getting healthier each day and when I went home they would come and hug me and say I love you dad bringing tears to my eyes. The next step of healing was to make a healing to wellness plan for ourselves and putting it into action. This workshop was powerful because we were told to use this plan to help someone else and I chose my children. I am now also slowly helping my wife by teaching what I learned every day to get to my own healing.

This traditional workshop gave me healing tools that worked for me when nothing else did. I stopped abusing alcohol from the beginning of the workshops and never looked back. Today I don't about my sexual abuse anymore. I did forgive the abuser because I learned that the creator will look after the head supervisor. He will be judged by the creator and he will be suffering each sexual abuse pain he inflicted on us.

Today I'm so happy.

I am happy teaching my wife, children and my grandchildren of how they are so special to me. Every day I give thanks to the creator and the ancestors. Each day now is sacred to me. I now share my cultural values, sing drum songs with my grandchildren. We spend time on the land and make fires telling stories and cooking. We just have so much fun laughing and hearing birds singing and animals coming around us with the beauty of the land healing all of us.

Today people come to visit me at my house to offer alcohol and I tell them no thanks I would rather drink tea. I tell them I can offer them tea and they say thanks. Today they now respect me as they are still my friends and family. I still see so many young men and men causing problems, suicides, violence, abuse, sexual abuse, not listening to parents and grandparents with no respect and also abusing alcohol, drugs, prescription drugs and full of anger. There is much work that needs to be done to get these men on the right healing path.

I want to give thanks to the Elder knowledge keeper, her helpers and the Movember Foundation for funding this program for our community. After my whole life I was finally able to find help to heal into a healthy lifestyle of wellness. It was so much easier to heal using my cultural and traditional healing tools that my ancestors passed on. I learned so much through the workshops that helped me. Many people attended the workshops and have healed and are doing very well with no more addictions in their new life today. Mahsi cho (thank you).

In the next steps of my life I want be a trained counselor to help my people heal and be healthier. I now know how because of my dysfunctional experiences and path to sobriety. I want to now help the male youth, young men, lost men and parents to reconnect with their children in a healthy way with cultural values. I want them also to know who they are and be proud of themselves.