

# The Spirit Walk

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A publication of the Migmawei Mawiomni



## **Mi'gmaq Writer's Award**

The Chiefs and Councils of the Listuguj Mi'gmaq Nation, the Nation Micmac de Géspeg and the Micmacs of Gesgapegig Band decided that there was an urgent need to uncover and reward notable Mi'gmaq writers. It is imperative for the survival of the Mi'gmaq as a people that we can identify members who possess a special aptitude and a keen interest in pursuing writing as a hobby or as a career. We have been an oral people for thousands of years, a number of our ancestors were some of the greatest storytellers. This tradition must continue however; we must be mindful of the use of the technology inherent in the written word and the benefits this can accrue to future generations of Mi'gmaq. Therefore, we are offering the first annual winning submission into the "Mi'gmaq Writer's Award" entitled "The Spirit Walk" as chosen from the Selection Committee and based on content of Mi'gmaq culture, history, language or personal experience.

The Selection Committee consisted of Diane Mitchell of Listuguj, who works as a Mi'gmaq language translator and is a cofounder of [www.mikmaqonline.com](http://www.mikmaqonline.com); Karen Martin from Gesgapegiag and the principal at the Wejgwapniag school; Richard Jeannotte, a noted Legal academic from Gespeg and a Legal Counsel for MMS; and Gilbert Sewell a Mi'gmaq elder, historian, and instructor from the Pabineau First Nation.

Design & Layout: **Rick Hutchinson, Convince Graphics**

Printed by **Acadie Presse, Caraquet, N.B.**

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## EPILOGUE

Between the time when the Mi'gmaq lived in harmony on this earth and when the Europeans arrived to North America there was a way of life undreamed of and unto this was a relationship as old as time itself. Here is one story about an ancient and personal relationship, a story of a Peoples way of life; how they lived, loved and died. Let me tell you a story that only the Mi'gmaq can tell, the name of this story is called "The Spirit Walk". I hope to convey to all the readers what brought the spirit walk of 1994 into existence and all the cultural factors involved. I hope you enjoy reading about its initial beginnings as seen from the perspective of one who walked. The following is based on a true event.

There is a belief that when a person dies he or she goes to another place. The Mi'gmaq say the human spirit is an important part of the life experience, it is within us upon our creation and unto our death. In one's passing it is highly considered an important part to ensure their journey to this place, referred as the spirit world, is successful. The Mi'gmaq, since time immemorial have grown to understand their role into this existence, as many ceremonies can

be said to continue to be practiced in modern times. Such ceremonies exist to remind us of our spiritual connection with all of creation and that living a good life is just as important as speaking the language, respecting others and expressing oneself in a manner that is based on their Mi'gmaq values, custom, practices and traditions.

Putting all the complexities aside this story is about unconditional love. What does the world know about unconditional love when all the people see is pain, suffering and dismay in our world today? There is much to learn from this Mi'gmaq relationship but the teaching of the spirit walk is learning about unconditional love. After all it was the unconditional love of a People that brought forth this story initially. As a one teller of the spirit walk I can only convey my interpretation with guidance from those who participated of what occurred prior, during and following the walk itself.



## THE SPIRIT WALK

My story, our story, seemed to have begun for me on New Year's Day in 1988. I was seventeen years old and was visiting family members in the United States. I was drinking and smoking at a New Years Eve party, I did not think such youthful experimentation would have any long term consequences. I had just returned to Piedmont Street at my grandmother's house from the long and tiring walk downtown. I was in search of my older brother. There were just too many people so I decided to return home. I had gotten sick as soon as I had arrived and decided to lie down on the grandpa's old recliner. I feel asleep and had a dream.

I was walking somewhere with other people, but I was heading in the opposite direction while they headed in the other. I looked around and could see many people. I asked, "Where are all these people going?" As I glanced around it was obvious that they were in pain, every step they took seem to hurt. I could see the color of their pain run up their legs and over their body, but they continued on. I had seen one woman carrying her child and another man being helped by another. The multitude moved slowly and lan-

guidly all suffering the same experience. Their clothing was drab and their dark hair hung low, covering their faces from view. Dark blotchy shadows seemed to cling to them and the progression continued. It became unbearable to keep my eyes on them as it hurt to watch. I said, “Why don’t they stop walking? If they stop walking they’ll stop suffering.” It was the only logical solution but they did not listen.

With my eyes to the ground I turned on my way to continue when I found someone’s feet in front of me. They were small, full of life and color compared to the others. As my eyes moved upwards I could see ‘her’ beautiful white dress. Her hands were held together in prayer within a ring of rosary beads. Its crucifix dangled over smooth knuckles. Her blouse of white hung over her narrow, rounded shoulders and then finally my eyes met her lowered head of curly white hair. I recognized who she was and with excitement one would feel from meeting an old friend, I spoke to her kindly, “Oh Lena, how are you? How have you been treating yourself?” I leaned down and forward as she slowly raised her head so as to meet me. I glimpsed into her eyes which seemed to speak to me. They were tired, red and full of sadness. I felt compassion in my heart and could no longer bear to see my grandmother suffer. I simply turned to be by her side and said, “Come, I will suffer with you.” As I began to walk in prayer I could feel the painful journey and the weight they all carried. I hurt to move my legs in a forward motion but I just put my head down and concentrated on praying. In this moment I understood her.

With the dream forgotten and many years later I found myself in a Treatment Center. I had grown to be 23 now and with a problem with alcohol and drugs. Unhappy with what I was becoming, I wanted and needed to stop with the drinking and drugs. This was the biggest step I had taken in my life. Prior to treatment I sought help within the Mi’gmaq traditional community and took part in several ceremonies. My arrival to the Mawiomi Treatment Center in Gesgapegiag, QC would mark the beginning of my healing and of my personal journeys along the Mi’gmaq spiritual path. Somewhere in the middle of my treatment a spiritual walk had come to my attention. I

was told that who ever wanted to go would have to pray and ask about it. It was going to be a silent walk and who ever walked would learn about their spirituality.

I felt the desire to learn but being inside a treatment center had no idea where to begin. I was given a phone number to call and to my surprise had spoken to an old friend while growing up. He told me that there was a 'spirit' on top a mountain who I could pray to for more about the walk. I was not accustomed to praying to spirits, the Creator, God, Jesus or whoever was up there was the one I would pray to. After all I was learning and wanted to do things right. So I listened to his advice to me and hung up the telephone. I would spend most of my free time in the center in private on my knees praying about the walk. I was so busy with my business there that I started to think I did not pray hard enough. Nothing seemed to change and my time there was soon ending. After graduation from the center, I made one last return to my room and prayed to up above about the walk. I wanted to go but did not have the tools to do it or the means to get there. I felt desperate and on my own.

My Mi'gmaq girlfriend at the time was also graduating from a college in Ontario and she had told me it was her choice if she wanted to drink at her party even though I wasn't planning on drinking anymore. Thinking it was unfair that one can drink while the other could not brought into perspective the personalization of how far I needed to go to make this change my own. I had to decide what I really wanted in my life, even if that meant leaving those close to me who made personal choices that were not the same as mine. I had to make many decisions during treatment I was not normally accustomed to. My friends would change, my life would too, even the thought of breaking up was hard to make. However, I needed fulfillment in my life, as this walk I had come to hear of was my only free decision I could make in my life right now, without regret. I needed to get there and felt like I was running out of time.

After graduating from the center, I returned home to my community of Lis-

tuguj. Although I returned home having made personal changes, the world I lived in did not. I found it difficult to relax, to find new friends and to occupy my time as I patiently waited for something to happen to my prayers concerning the walk. I expressed such concerns to a friend who suggested I go to a meeting and just let things fall into place. One such night, I attended the local support group and for once just left everything to chance. I guess the more I attempted to make 'it' work only seemed never to work in my favor, at all. I took a seat at the far end of the room and sat down for a long drawn out meeting. "Blah, blah, blah" I thought as the meeting began, "Sure, yeah..., well what about me?" In my mind I was starting to give up on everything I had been praying so hard for. This was a day or two before everyone I knew was leaving and they did not have room in the car or supplies to share. I had nothing really. Not even a sleeping bag. Everything up to that point seemed to be all 'hush, hush'. I certainly felt I was not kept well informed or supported by any means. Grudgingly I just kept my false composure at face value and focused on the meeting at hand.

Finally the meeting was coming to an end. The monetary donation tray made its way around and the room began to fill with the sound of idle chatter. A man from the Gesgapegiag community leaned over to me asking, "Are you going to walk?" His slang was purely 'Mala' based and heavy. "Well I'm trying to," I said as I dropped some coins in the wooden tray, adding, "I don't even have a ride." He quickly responded saying, "Christ, tsk, all you need is a sleeping' bag." Thinking that he didn't understand, I repeated: "I don't have a drive. I'm looking for a drive." He turned over to his right shoulder and spoke our language to a person behind him. There sitting on top of a table pushed close to the wall sat a young woman, she swung her feet back and forth under the table and they spoke to one another in Mi'gmaq. When they were done she looked at me saying, "You need a sleeping bag?" Embarrassed, I said yes. "I could lend you mine," was her response. It was satisfaction at this point but it did not stop there. She continued in a whisper to me as the people in the room began to close the meeting, "Some of us are leaving tonight...I'll lend you mine when we get



there.” I whispered back in urgency, “But I don’t have a ride.” The man she spoke with leaned to tell me as we all began to stand up, “I’m taking my car. You can go with me tomorrow.” Stunned by the sudden realization that my prayers were answered I caught up to the saying of the Lord’s Prayer along with the others as the meeting tapered off to a close. Finally, I have what I need I thought to myself. I could feel the excitement growing within.





## DAY ONE

# JOURNEY TO LONE BEAR MOUNTAIN

The next day I had my duffle bag packed with everything I could possibly think of, the toot of the horn outside told me my ride had arrived. Before leaving the family house I recall taking a quick glimpse at my parent's wedding anniversary plaque that hung on the wall beside the door, with the most significance of it read: May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1969. Thoughts of my parents and of marital happiness concerned me. I would miss their anniversary. Before I departed I took time to visit my Mom in the hospital and invited my driver, Wallace, to join me. I passed by so many sick people as I made my way to the floor where she was located. They concerned me as well, "so many sick", I thought as I looked into their rooms as I passed. I came to her with my news and she simply stated, "Son, I know you. You get into so many things and when it fails, you think it's the end of the world. If this fails

you, please son, don't give up, try something else. Just never stop trying." Understanding what she meant I could not leave without letting her know how I felt about this, "But Mom this is my culture, it's about who I am. I don't think 'this' will fail me". She looked concerned, as she replied, "Just don't put your eggs all in one basket O.K.?" I could sense her sincerity, "Ok Mom, I promise." Inside I knew nothing like this could ever make me feel the way it did. There was something about this thing I was going on that made me feel alive. Perhaps I was too early in the scheme of things and was gullible enough to believe everything people told to me. I just somehow knew this was going to be special.

We traveled with Wallace's car to the U.S. border taking Route 11 - North. We spent the time listening to old Mi'gmaq drum songs on cassette that he had laying around and soon crossed over and made our way to Mapleton, Maine. He knew where to go. At first it was difficult to find but we eventually came to a small area in Mapleton where many vehicles were parked in a driveway. An older man came out from the house that was nestled along the tree line and directed us towards him. Wearing grey farmer pants and a tucked in blue and white pin lined cotton plaid shirt he motioned us over. His hair was black with the obvious sign of grey, his gold rimmed glasses sat on his short nose. His face showed minor wrinkles but recognizably deep as most native men his age. He asked if we were here for the walk and we said, "Yes". He instructed us to keep our belongings in the car and just take what we would need for the night. Politely I asked, "Where is everybody?" The friendly man looked at me and said with the toss of his right thumb in the air behind him, "They are on the mountain, they're waiting for you", now looking at us both. "My son told me to tell whoever came for the walk, to go that way." While he extended his arm outwards his sleeve pulled back a bit to reveal a silver watch he wore and with a callused finger pointed towards a dirt trail running between a set of high bushes. From there we would turn left on the tracks and walk a distance to the mountain. Someone would be there waiting.

I glanced about the yard and recognized traditional ceremonial structures

made out of fastened tree saplings, one was a sweat lodge and another was fashioned like a standing funnel, as high and wide as a person. They had no tarps covering them, but this cylindrical one had many bells tied to it. The man who directed us was David's father and began to tell us about his son. "Yeah, David is into that stuff. When he was younger he used to talk to himself a lot. He'd say it was just his friends. Every time I'd ask him he would say each time it was just his friends." He laughed saying, "Yeah we thought our son was sure a crazy kid." David's father made me feel comfortable having just met the man, I wanted to hear more but he said to leave as soon as possible because it was going to be a long hike. Without hesitation Wallace and I gathered our things and began walking the trail leading to the tracks, there we would turn left and continue our way until we arrived.

It was the second week of May and the beginning of spring. Snow and ice still covered the ground in certain areas along the track, but the high sun slowly melted those patches into watery puddles of clear sparkling water. The red willow bushes now showed signs of sprouting their tiny willows, but just barely. We continued along for what seemed like forever. The afternoon sun beat down on us both, making the trek quite the effort seeing as how many things we were carrying did not help make it easier. Knowing then we would be sleeping on the mountain I made sure to bring dry clothes and a few sweaters to keep me warm tonight. My sleeping bag hung tightly under one arm as well as my duffle bag thrown over one shoulder. Wherever I was going to I wanted to make sure I was prepared for the unexpected.

Our journey along these tracks seemed to carve a path between a mountainous and wooded area. On either side stood lengthy rows of thickly bunched red willow bushes surrounded by large pools of swamp water. A clearing, at times on either side, revealed a span of some hundred or so feet of water mixed within the landscaped of dry patches of rolled earth just before the forest line took over. The tracks now led there way left towards a bend, once we passed this we could see a huge mountain in the distance. The tracks ran straight through as far as the eye could see. Its inclination could be seen gradually rising higher and higher as we continued on. We noticed

a rocky cliff formation close to its peak and wondered if that was the location the people were. I could see a dry scattering of bare brown rock and began pointing to them. I spoke my thoughts to Wallace about it, of how nice and warm it must be to sit up there with the Sun on this day.

In between the act of keeping an eye on my feet as I placed them carefully on the oil stained ties below, I took other moments to see how much further we had to go. Then like a dark speck in the distance I could see somebody standing. I nudged my friend to inform him and kept watching my feet. Finally, we made it, I thought. I grew excited and my demeanor became more serious. This was a serious thing. I needed to maintain all respects. If only these people knew who I was and about the bad things I did, I'm sure they wouldn't allow me to walk. No, certainly not but I was ready, win or lose. I was prepared both mentally and physically to do what it would take to be on this walk. Even if that meant telling who ever was in charge everything about me. I was that determined to be sincere, let alone be accepted on the walk.

Finally, we came to a rest beside another wide curve in the tracks, the high afternoon sun created some cool shade here. Standing there was a young guy about my age it seemed, he was dressed in matching blue Adidas track pants and jacket with dark purple stripes. In his hand he held a slim, but tall, wooden walking stick. We spoke to him and identified ourselves as Mi'gmaq from Listuguj and Gesgapegiag. He was also Mi'gmaq from the Nova Scotia area, namely Shubenacadie. After formalities were introduced he got down to his task and informed us to go and find walking sticks, he pointed to an area of old dry standing stems. I searched one out and found one to my liking, sat with it on the rail and began to fashion it. I asked where everyone was because nobody seemed to be here. He said the people were already on top of the mountain but we had to wait until the spirit guide came down to get us. "Spirit guide?" I asked. "Yes his name is David. He wanted everyone to wait here by the spirit door; you can't go in without him. He left about an hour ago to bring the others up the mountain, but will return to get us. I think you guys are the last ones to arrive. I have been

waiting here all day.”

I looked around the tree line for what he was talking about and did not see anything but a short trail descending into a ditch and back up again onto an even surface. Following that stood only the thicketed tree line itself. “What spirit door, I don’t see any door?” He turned and said, “It’s a S-p-i-r-i-t-u-a-l door, of course you’re not gonna see it.” Wallace laughed, “Yeah, a spiritual door. Don’t you see it?” I just gave him a funny look and continued to look around the tree line. “When David gets here he’ll tell you all about it.” I looked at him and wondered whether or not I was ready for this at all, what did I get myself into and what could possible be so important about a door you can’t see?

We spent an hour or so at that bend along the tracks, waiting, talking, and sharing. He told me his name was Frankie, like mine. He said he great grandfather was a powerful medicine man at one time before he died. He said, “You know that bridge in Miramichi...? Well when they built it a long time ago it kept falling apart and the people couldn’t figure out what was causing it. My great grandfather went there and told them that a powerful person had left some kind of curse and that was causing it to fall apart and collapse. My great grandfather removed that curse with his power and they never had another problem with it again. Before I was born my great grandfather knew he was dying so he came to my mother and put her hands on her stomach and transferred some of his power to me.” I wasn’t sure if he was lying or telling me the truth. I just agreed with him and absorbed his story. I believe that our people had great personal power. I would read about it in books and here about it when I was younger sitting at the table listening to my Mother tells stories with her friends. I did not doubt him, I just felt a little uncomfortable.

When I thought I couldn’t wait any longer I had seen two puppies, pitch black in color, come bouncing out of the forest from where the spiritual door stood. They dashed into my vicinity, rushed over and began sniffing our shoes and pants. They were cute and playful, like twins I thought. The

only distinguishing marks were the white swirls on their chests. A number of people followed behind, each coming out of the forest one after the other. There were two men and one woman all dressed in wilderness gear and covered in a light sweat. The dark tanned one greeted Wallace and I and reached out to shake our hands in welcome. This was David.

Our right arms extended to each other and we made a firm hand shake, “too firm” I thought. He would not let go but rather kept his eyes fixed on mine. Knowing what I knew inside I turned away in shame but he gestured comfortingly and I brought my eyes back to his. He looked right through me as I tried to hide what was inside, as if he was searching. I could feel his connection. I struggled but knew it was no use and just let him do it. Whatever he was looking for he certainly found it for I could feel the grief that still lay there. His voice was friendly, “Ah, there you are,” as if to ask if he was correct. I stood firm and kept focused on his eyes never denying a moment of what he found. I tried after a moment of this to retrieve my hand but he held fast with a smile. I somehow knew what he was doing, but did not appreciate it. I tried to pull my hand away as he searched for more it seemed. No words were exchanged, just a straight stare from either side. I knew what he found because I could feel those things and I knew that he knew. In one moment this man knew everything about me, but continued to search until of course I had enough. He was not done, just one more thing he sought that defined my heart the most. When he found it I began to cry. I thought this was unfair and not right to do. When I gave a final pull of my arm from I think he understood and then decided to let go. I felt hollow and full of emotion. I did not appreciate the invasion either, especially about that particular thing.

“I had to do that. I had to make sure it was you”. “Had to make sure it was me,” I thought in anger. “Of course it’s me, I’m right here!” He just smiled and chuckled and so did I. In that laugh I felt I knew him all my life. He turned to the mountain and let out a sigh of relief. “Welcome home.” I felt more than welcome. I called it the beginning of the rest of my life. There was something about him and this place. “This is Lone Bear Mountain.



Nobody hunts here or cuts trees. It's a sacred mountain; our Mi'gmaq people once lived here a very long time ago. Now many spirits call this place home. A bear spirit protects this mountain. I grew up here all my life and used to play here a lot". The people present just listened with a smile as I did to his words, all the while David stood gazing above at the mountain.

"We should get going now, everyone is almost ready but I ask that you not bring anything into the mountain, just what you need". I looked at David as he walked us up to the entrance. He stood beside a circular formation of stones on the ground. Within the circle of stones lay numerous personal items left behind by 'the people'. Things like personal pipes and spiritual tokens of the sort. Sweet grass braids, chains, wallets, rings and the like. I looked down and asked, "What's with all this stuff, these things are important personal items." Rather than explain the reasoning behind this collection area he just asked me a question. "People depend on many things to talk to the Great Spirit. What would happen if these things failed to work anymore, what would we use to talk to him?" I thought about it for a moment and said, "I don't know." He pointed with a finger to my chest and said, "You would use your heart. When you enter here try using your heart to pray to Him. You will never lose your heart and you can use it at anytime." I smiled at the simplicity and removed all personal items I kept, that I grew attached to, in order to feel spiritual or use tools to pray with. We each took turns doing so and entered the mountain in single file with David in the lead. The twin pups darted past our feet and deep into the canopied forest beyond.

The ascent was arduous. I should have never packed so heavily. Beads of sweat traced down my face and my breathing grew heavier as I tried to keep up with David and the rest. Those puppies struggled but kept at it, I moved to pick one up but David turned and shunned the idea and just waved his hand upward quickly for me to continue. There were times I wanted to stop and take a breather but David persisted I make it all the way, so I pressed it further and further up the steep slope. Each tree trunk was a helping hand along the way. "This guy is in pretty good shape," I thought, "I so have to

quite smoking.” Along the climb we stopped to watch David attend to a woman who had been slowly making her way up the mountain, she looked very tired and was holding her knee with one hand in pain while holding herself up with the other. David had her sit down on the mountain side and kneeled beside her and slowly placed his hands over her knee that pained her so. She winced as he did this but he kept them there for a moment or two and just had her relax. When he was done she looked at him in surprise and a big smile grew upon beet red face. “Thank you,” she said. David replied, “Don’t thank me. Thank your grandfather.” We continued our way without a moment left to spare.

Our small party had arrived to some leveled ground, which eventually led into a camping area filled with numerous people. I knew of one such person and I was happy to see her. “Ah good, you made it!...,” she gladly said as she gave me a big hug. The camp area was dotted with people, men, women and youth. It was good to see everyone but they seemed to be in their own little circles. Not everyone was familiar with one another and I took notice of this right away. I dropped my belongings and sat down to drink some water and take in oxygen. I spent time shaking hands in between breathes and introducing myself to those present when time permitted it. Following such introductions I began to set up my tent and went through my belongings for a change of clothes. The hike up the mountain was an earthy and messy experience. David later addressed the group saying to us, “We are waiting for one more person. Take your time and enjoy the mountain. Walk around and go where you like. There is a lot to see here. The spirits wanted me to tell you that ‘they’ are happy to have so many people here. It has been a long time since anyone has been here.” He informed us that he would be heading down now but will return with the other walker later tonight. He bid us farewell and began making his way down with those he traveled with.

We spent the day trying to get along with each other. Personally I found it unusual to find any level of personal animosity within the group. Wasn’t this a spiritual event? But I guess that is how strangers first react when they

meet in setting like this, especially if they were not Mi'gmaq, or Native at all. One couple I went to visit nearby was an elderly Husband and his Wife. I sat with them and spent some time by their side, clearly I thought to myself, these two don't feel welcome here. His wife looked drained from the climb and was holding on to her knee. I had already made up my mind to treat them as I would have liked to be treated amongst the strange behaving and unwelcoming few. They were a loving couple it seemed. They were here like I was, to participate and perhaps learn something. Perhaps they shared the same passion for this walk as I did.

The people did mingle and helped to cook the food for supper and gather wood and water supplies. Others chose to take a stroll along the mountains many areas only to return tired from their trek or with a story of what they found or had seen. I stayed close to my sleeping bag and just relaxed and helped out where I could. I spent most of the day just observing. Eventually the sun began to set and night slowly made its way over the people atop Lone Bear Mountain. Never before did I sleep on a mountain or a sacred mountain at that. The concept of seeing spirits or the like was not that important to me. Where I was coming from all I knew was that this place was a lot better than most places I have been. As night began to settle in our camp the fire grew bigger and brighter, the people started to settle into their cozy areas. People laughed and felt more relaxed, we shared tobacco, stories, songs and laughed at many things people would talk about. I felt good that night. David arrived soon after with another woman, whose name was Donna. I introduced myself and shook her hand. The people here were obviously close and knew one another. I only knew two people but felt welcomed. Old friends laughed and hugged her and David asked that we make a circle around the fire. With hands held together we formed a large circle and our spirit guide began to address us.

Silence surrounded the circle we made and everyone was quiet and waited for David to talk, the snapping and crackling of the fire at the center lit our faces in a soft reddish glow. Some moments passed and comfort settled in and around us. "Well, this is it, we are all here now. The spirits have not

had visitors here in a very long time. ‘They’ are all happy that you’re all here.” He spoke openly and honestly, his choice of words and the sound of his voice communicated truth and sincerity. He looked around the campsite saying, “You are all meant to be here. As you know there is trouble happening in one of our People’s community, in Big Cove. There is something going on there and each of you are here to help.” I could see the looks on some of their faces as they lowered their heads, trying to hold back the tears. The people understood the severity as affecting them.

David continued, “For those who don’t know, my name is David Sanipass and I live here in Mapleton with my family. I grew up playing on this mountain since I was a child. My parents thought I was crazy playing with my friends.” He chuckled while he added, “I did not have any friends growing up, just my spirit friends. We’d play all day sometimes and my mother often wondered where I was. I would just tell her I was playing with my friends again.”

David was young in his late twenties I would imagine. He was slim and under six feet in height. “I grew up with the spirits that live on this mountain. As I got older I learned many things about our people, our culture and our stories. To me this is home and now it is part of your home. You are welcome to return to this place at anytime if you wish. You are all apart of this place now.”

He slowly looked around and viewed us one by one before continuing, “When the spirits told me the ‘people’ will walk I did not understand. Last year when I learned about the suicides in Big Cove I wanted to help. I came to this mountain, made my fire and began to call for my spirit helper. When he answered me I told ‘him’ about our people and asked for ‘their’ help. ‘He’ said he must leave on a long journey now, and so I waited by the fire. There have been times when I would wait for days to receive a message or an answer.”

We listened to David tell his story and it was what he was told about this walk that made my experience feel personal. He continued to explain to us,

“My helper came back and said to me, [The people will walk after the day of darkness. They will walk, like an arrow and pray in silence. There will be a problem with water.] I was shown who would be coming and was told to let them know about the walk. I didn’t know how to contact them and said to my helper that I can’t just pick up the phone and call them.” The people laughed as Dave held a smirk on his face, “But my helper just said, ‘Let’s say there will be a walk and they will come,’ so I returned home and started sharing the message.”

“This is why you are here, why I am here and why everyone is gathering now. We will walk after the day of darkness, pray in silence until we reached the summer grounds. That is what they called Big Cove, the summer grounds.” Everyone in the circle was quiet as he spoke. “You all carry pain and sadness here, tomorrow I want to suggest you go and find a place where you can sit and let go of these things. You will need to stay focused on the walk so don’t let those things get in your way. If there is any place to let go, this is the perfect place. Whatever you think will bother you on the walk let it go and leave it here.” The group had remained silent throughout his talk.

All I understood was that this was going to be a daily thing and as far as I was concerned I was willing to do whatever was asked of me. It takes a certain combination of trust, respect and a little faith that your own people will not steer you in the wrong direction. Sincerity is a big thing and it is very important to use when approaching such serious matters. After all the searching I had done in the rehabilitation center I had now found that I held onto many things. I thought to myself how cool it would be to leave it here in the best possible way. I didn’t know how to let go of personal pain, to me it seemed the more I thought of it or spoke of it just never made a difference. I thought this could be the one chance to let it all go, for if I couldn’t fully accomplish it then perhaps being at this sacred place could do it for me. That was of course if I was ready.

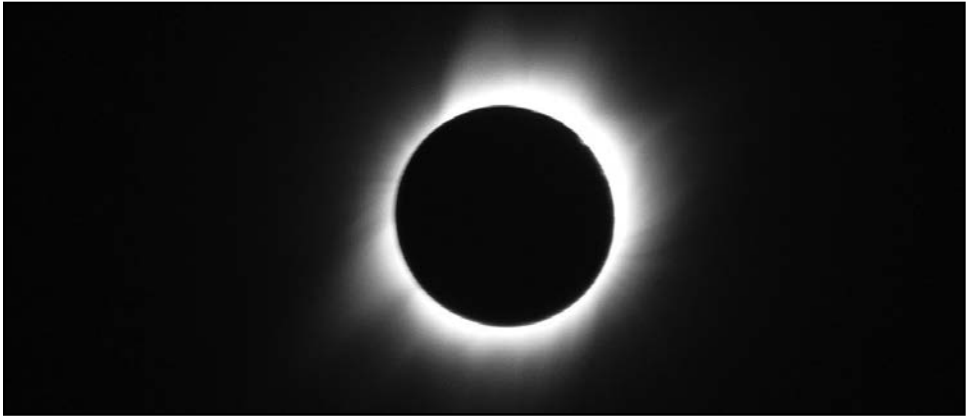
On that evening I found how serious this walk was. The people shared

their stories of lost loved ones and of the pain they experienced because of suicide. They each took turns talking about why they were here and when it was my turn I was no exception. My reasons for coming here were many but because of the feeling I got from the walkers I felt I had little choice but to share my deepest thoughts about myself and what is happening with our people and where I think we are going. Despite only being 23 years old at the time I felt I wanted to help not only at this time but in any way I could. Somehow such things were personally felt and by learning of the situation all I could think of was how fortunate I was to be able to take part in this. Little was I to know how much I would come to understand about helping others and how others help one another both here on earth and from those beyond, from a place our people have always referred to as the spirit world. Tonight we would be left alone and amongst ourselves. We were given permission to explore the mountain tomorrow and because of its ancient and seemingly timeless state to not to be surprised if we found anything from the ancient past on the grounds. I remember him saying not to be afraid while we were here but rather to enjoy ourselves and to get along. We would be dependant on each other when we began the long journey.

For the remainder of the night we stood around the fire as the people sang our old Mi'gmaq songs to hand drums played by the women. It was a learning experience, the people here felt like strangers to me, I was shy and did not know any songs or my language. All I could do was be grateful to be up here with everyone, and for once in my life I felt a level of acceptance. No matter what kind of person I was or what I did or did not know. Here I was protected and at the heart of it all, when I used to ask to learn about my culture, language and spirituality I did not expect this kind of response. I was fortunate indeed as I look back now upon the memory of where I was and why I was there.

David had returned to his home below the mountain to prepare for tomorrow, he said he would return that evening when everything and everyone was ready. Lying down in my tent under my sleeping bag, I began to wonder about many things and I wondered for a long time. Tonight we would

sleep for the first time on a sacred mountain of our people, under the watchful eye of the guardian spirit bear who protected it. The first night on the mountain was timeless. It had been a long day, I wondered too how things were back home all the while watching the flickering flames from the fire within my tent until I feel asleep.



## DAY TWO THE DAY OF DARKNESS

I awoke the next day sometime around mid morning. I exited my tent and helped myself to the tea and coffee made earlier. I heard, “If you need to wash up there is a mountain stream just down the hill from here. Some of the women are using it now so you will have to wait.” This was Jacques talking to us. He was a nice man who I noticed helped a lot around the camp site. I sat with him and shared a cigarette over a hot drink. He was kind, considerate and most of all very happy to be here. The people were already out exploring Lone Bear mountain. Only a few decided to stay behind. I waited for my opportunity to clean myself up before I took my walk.

Meanwhile back at Dave’s parents home a ceremony was about to begin. At present were a number of Mi’gmaq traditional Elders, Seers and others all of whom were preparing for the sweat lodge ceremony. They had prepared their sacred pipes with tobacco and smudged with sacred sweet



grass medicine. One by one they entered the lodge following the delivery of the heated stones at the center of the lodge. Together they ceremoniously conducted themselves in preparation for what was about to occur. Their intentions were to pray for the spirit walkers now high upon the mountain as they were preparing for their long journey. But also to welcome the many spirits that would be accompanying them on their journey. As the ceremony began and the rites performed took their place something spectacular was about to occur.

Soon enough I was washing my feet with soap by a small stream of water that headed down the mountain. The two dark puppies I had met the day before were with me, they playfully fought each other all around my area as I tried to clean up. It was fun to watch them but also difficult to clean myself as they kept stealing my clothes and socks. Something then began to happen, the day was quickly getting darker and every moment of it frightened the puppies. They huddled and cowered from the event taking place. I looked around and could see the days light quickly getting dimmer, it had gotten so dim so quickly, that I had no idea what was going on but I could feel a weird energy. What followed next was a single clap of thunder within the darkened moments and small drops of warm rain began to fall all around. I looked at the young pups as they just sat there as it began to rain. I took one of them and put it inside my boot to hide it from the rain pelting down. I then took the other and tried to place it beside the other within the boot. They were small enough I figured, but they had fat bellies which made it difficult to place them both in one boot without forcing. So now one sat inside one boot while the other sat out in the open and taking on the rain. He looked so pitiful.

I had never seen up to this point such human like behavior such as what I seeing and felt from an animal. The sheltered pup wiggled its way out of my boot and made its way over to the other and proceeded to use his own body to shelter him from the rain that continued to fall. I looked down on them both and understood the expression wholeheartedly. That he loved him so much that he would suffer with him, even if that meant sacrificing himself

in order to do it. I was emotionally moved by this gesture and quickly got my things together. I lifted them both and tucked them into my jean jacket and made my way back to the campsite. The rain continued and its drops were warm to the touch on my face. They felt thick and jelly like.

Meanwhile down below within the lodge a gathering of spiritual significance was taking place. All the animal spirits had approached the world and one of significance was a multi-colored bird that the elders had seen, a tropical bird. The spirits that entered the world at this time did so through the door that stood open between our world and theirs. On this day the annular solar eclipse taking place at that very moment was the door in which they would use to arrive. Some have said when the 'rain spirit' accepted the peoples offering with the clap of thunder the rain which soon followed was another form their spiritual descent unto the mountain. Those of us on the mountain had little comprehension of the significance involved during this time until later that evening. This was the 'day of darkness' the spirits had to spoken about. Soon the walkers would walk, after this day of darkness.

I returned to the site to a group that stood around each other using an indirect viewing method out of paper to see the Eclipse in transition. I put the pups down and told them what I had experienced. Some people began to make their way back as the darkness subsided. Everyone had a story to tell, some of which were too powerful to explain. Something happened to us up there, something happened in our world before this walk could even begin.

The annular solar eclipse of that day, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1994, can be reviewed and online scientific research can be found. To many onlookers around the North American hemisphere as it was visible in the United States, Canada and Mexico an annular solar eclipse is widely considered just an astronomical phenomenon. In ancient times, and in some cultures today, solar eclipses are attributed to mythical properties. However, the spiritual attribution of solar eclipses is now largely disregarded. In our group experience, atop a mountain that held for many of us a connection to our ancient past relationship and the involvement of celestial bodies present, along with the

inclusion of our Mi'gmaq traditions and beliefs, identified to many of us the grandeur of creation in every sense of the word to be a truly spiritual event. This event, in its entirety, had not come to our attention until much later that evening and much later in the days to come. The peoples had taken great steps to prepare themselves for this 'walk', they believed in what they were doing. The level of spiritual consciousness of those who helped communicate within a spiritual arena of the Mi'gmaq understanding can only be described as being chosen. Not everyone is chosen to do such things in life. The entire process leading up to this point and what would be required as the days worn on must be noted as one very important element to carrying out spiritual will, and that is cooperation. It is without a doubt in my opinion, one of the most awe inspiring spiritual events in to have occurred in most recent history.

Later that evening, David returned to our camp site with other people who had taken part in the ceremony below earlier that day. We gathered around the fire and he shared with us what had occurred and what would be asked of us now. David looked around the night sky, the trees stood tall and the fire seem to light a wider area. "I can see them. There are so many spirits here." Despite not being able to see spirits as he could I did feel a significance surrounding our group. "We made an offering to the 'rain spirit' today in the sweat lodge and when we did we heard a single thunder clap. A tropical bird entered the sweat lodge and so did the many animal spirits. As they approached the world they came down through a door and within the rain. Tomorrow you will walk with the spirits and the spirits of our Ancestors." He smiled like a young child and continued to speak to us.

"It was a powerful ceremony. This walk will be a ceremony too. Tomorrow when the Sun's light breaks over the mountain there will be no more talking and we will walk down the mountain. We will walk and pray as one, in the shape of an arrow, one behind the other. The spirits will not follow if we do not do this. I will lead the walkers down the mountain and throughout the day until you can start leading each other. I am just the spirit guide on this journey." Silence came over the group, "Some of you will not walk all the

way. Some of you will walk one day, some one mile, sometimes just for a few minutes. People will join you along the way, they will feel the spiritual significance of this walk and it will be too difficult for them to handle.”

David stopped to think before he went on, “They said there will be a problem with water and we haven’t figured out what they meant. But we made the appropriate offering and it was accepted. Let’s hope we don’t run out of water. We have volunteers to help out on this walk who will be allowed to talk, their job will be to make sure you all get to nourish your bodies with food, water and rest. They will be in charge of all the supplies and preparing your camping arrangements.”

He continued to discuss with everyone the things we will be facing along our path for it was not going to be easy. He stressed the importance of silence and prayer throughout the walk saying it will be a key to our success and to our failure if we choose not to follow those instructions. He wanted us to keep in mind why we are walking. Our people need help today. Many people are doing many things to help the people living at the summer grounds but this walk is one of a kind because you are walking the spirits that have come here today on this mountain. There will be many more walks but nothing compared to this one. It will be the hardest thing you will do but when you all silently pray together and move as one in an arrow you will not feel the pain.

We spent most of the remaining hours we had left talking about things. Each of the stories shared painted a picture of the hard realities our people were facing. The more I heard, the more I became determined not to give up. I was unsure of myself but confident in my abilities. I returned to my tent to get some rest and was later awoken by Wallace and told to get ready. “Leave your things here on the mountain, the helpers will gather your things and bring them down to the house.” The workers hurried about taking down tents, cooking food, serving hot tea and coffee. It was cold so early in the morning, the sun did not rise yet, but one could see the coming glow of it when looking to the east.

After swift preparations and a bite to eat we gathered together in a circle once again and prayed with the Elders and with David. We each took our place in a straight line, like an arrow, each holding a walking stick in hand and nervously awaited for the new day to begin with the rising of the sun. David spoke and said, “When that sun comes over the mountains there will be no more talking, so say what you have to say while you still have the time.” The group of spirit walkers turned to each other and spoke as if saying goodbyes, some cried and even a little bit of laughter was involved. Soon the morning sun rays began to shoot their beams directly above and over the mountains in the far distance east, everyone watched as the silence took over and so began the spirit walk. We exited the mountain side through a different route. The eldest of the walkers lead the way, while the ‘door keeper’, whose name was Frankie, waited for people at the spirit door entrance. He was our door keeper throughout this journey. His task would be to hold the door closed as we progressed throughout the territories on our way to Big Cove, NB. As we ushered our way down the mountains side all you could hear was the rustling of the leaves beneath our feet, the cool blowing morning winds and the crunching of the forest floor as the spirit walkers silently made their way in prayer, like an arrow to the Summer Grounds.



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## FRANK MOLLEY JR.

**Community:** Listuguj First Nation, Qc.

**Born:** March 18, 1971

**Parents:** Frank Sr. Molley and  
Mary Jean Molley

**Brothers:** 3, James, Jason & Erwin

**Children:** 1, Kara Metallic

**Education:** Grade 12, SSSHS 1990, St. Thomas University last attended 2005

**Interests:** Fine Arts, Music, Philosophy, Political Science, Native Studies, Migmag Traditional and Contemporary knowledge/history. Literature/Writing and watching/playing Golf.

**Profile/Background:** Frank enjoyed writing since high school and strongly points his influences to now retired local English teacher, Mrs. Ora Watson. Migmag culture, language and history has always been important to Frank. His real passion for learning about his Migmag cultural identity began during his first Sweat Lodge ceremony with Listuguj Migmag Traditional Elder Mr. Donald Caplin. It was then in 1993 that he took part with Mr. Caplin and many others during the 1st Annual Listuguj Traditional Pow Wow themed: Winds Blowing On A Dying Fire. The early influence of Migmag Culture remained to have an impact towards wellness and learning for the years ahead. He believes that there is more to be learned and benefited from within Migmag culture, traditions and history. Frank owes his appreciation to his family, friends, community and elders for supporting him over the years. Frank lives and works in Listuguj and continues to learn about his culture and to practice his writing skills. Currently Frank continues his personal work on writing.





The Mi'gmaq Writers Award is an annual initiative of the Mi'gma'wei Mawio'mi to promote the work of Mi'gmaq Writers of Gespe'gewa'gi. The writing contest is open to any Mi'gmaq member of Gespeg, Gesgapegiag and Listuguj. For more information, contact our office at 800-370-1760 or 418-788-1760.

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