



The

# LIGHTHOUSE

Helping People | Changing Lives

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Summer 2019

## Valerie's Story

*Edited by Tabitha Eastman*

*I feel I grew up way too fast but this is my story of growth...*

My mother is part Mohawk and part English and my father is part African Canadian and Native Canadian. My mother had family up north on a reserve and as a child, I remember we would spend most summers there. We stopped going up north after my dad had an accident when I was 6 or 7 years of age. This accident changed my family's life. My father was paralyzed from the neck down but his mind was damaged more than his body. I was the only child and my dad became quite negative after the accident. Looking back, I think in response I stopped having big dreams for the future. I started becoming more realistic and in a way I lost the childlike dreaming that helps us grow.

My parents split up and my mother became involved with a step father that I did not get along with. I ended up moving out on my own at age 16 or 17. Moving out gave me an escape from verbal abuse and an escape from my step dad who tried to fill in a father role using discipline, but it wasn't his role to fill at that time. Moving out also gave me my freedom which I was craving for. When I reflect on my childhood and formative years I recognize the bad and I don't blame anyone. I can look back and see the many factors that were affecting my guardians to act in the way they did. I'm not angry at the past but I understand it better now. Living on my own, I continued to go to high school. I was working, trying to pay bills, rent and buy food.

I became disconnected from my family, I was the black sheep. So I started to build a new non-biological family. My roommate and I liked to say that we took in the misfits. We had many people staying with us, pitching in like a small community. There were a lot of good and some bad times. To survive at such a young age, we started to sell drugs (not using but selling),

and we stole to survive. I ended up getting arrested after an altercation where I defended myself from an abusive boyfriend. During my court case, my lawyer suggested getting out of Toronto and having a job lined up. After I went to jail my little community split up. Upon my release, I attempted to make a clean start on life by moving up north at age 18. I moved to be around the family I knew I still had up there and to start a job.

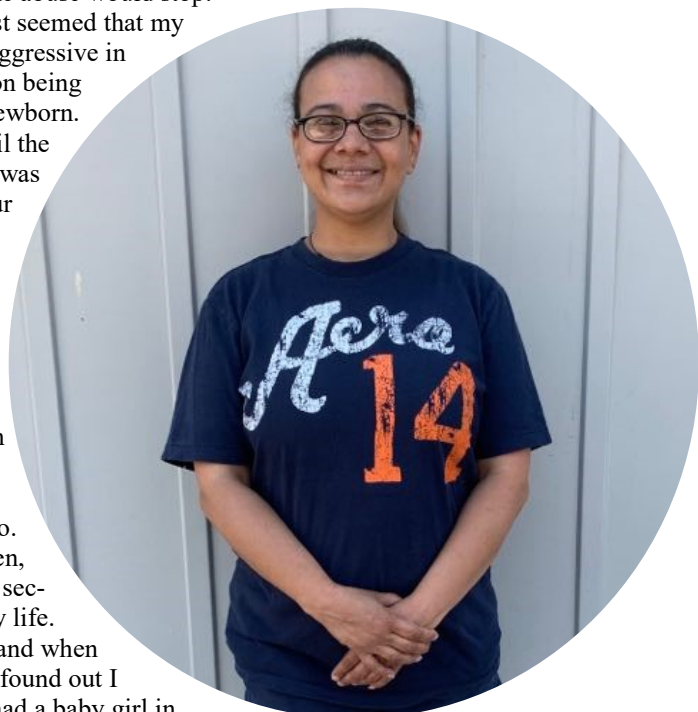
It was hard being on the reservation with not much to do. I was still involved with my boyfriend at the time and I became pregnant at age 19. I made a decision to move back to Toronto because I didn't want to raise my son in a small town. After moving to Toronto with my boyfriend and our son, the emotional and physical abuse started again. We separated after a year. I moved into my own apartment with my son, who was a year old. I thought that after having a child together things would have been better and the abuse would stop. Unfortunately, it almost seemed that my partner became more aggressive in response to my attention being directed towards our newborn. I was staying there until the rent got too high and I was taking money out of our food budget to pay for rent. There were days when I didn't eat or drink and instead saved food for my child.

My dad passed away in 1998, and I ended up moving into our old family home in Toronto. When my son was seven, the future father of my second child came into my life. He wasn't a good guy and when we were breaking up I found out I was pregnant again. I had a baby girl in

2004. At this time in my relationship with my partner, I began to learn the importance of being independent financially. I learned to squirrel away money and hide it from him so that we'd have enough money for food or other expenses. After we ended our relationship, I started dating again and got involved with a man who was an addict. Unfortunately I got pulled in as well. In 2009, I was arrested within a very discriminatory circumstance but it ended up being a blessing in disguise. My lawyer suggested I look into a rehabilitation program that was geared towards Natives. He thought that it would reflect positively on me in court. I was very interested because I felt the need to learn more about my native roots, culture and native spirituality.

I started going to this centre every day for the next six months

*...Continued on Page 2*



Page 1 continued....

I learned, and am proud to say that I am a Mohawk Native from Wahta, which is located in Muskoka, Ontario. In the rehabilitation centre I learned so much about my Native culture, people, beliefs and traditions, and it ignited a deep thirst in me to know more about who I am. In response to this awakening of who I am, I began to change the way I lived my life to reflect this identity. I began to see the different parts of my identity: I am a daughter, a mother, a partner, and a Native. I realized all of these titles are something to be proud of but they also carry pain as well. Each aspect of who I am has a history of pain and growth within the pain. I began to do my best to live my life to honor the woman I know I am supposed to be. I quit drugs and I began to make better choices for myself and my kids. While doing this I began to explore another aspect of my identity, my relationship with faith.

I had always known the stories of the evil done by 'Christians' to Natives throughout history. For a while I had tossed aside the Bible, but I learned that the Bible is not a terrible book. Rather, some who call themselves Christians do not truly follow the Bible. My relationship with faith is currently an ongoing process and I'm learning a lot. I believe that God loves me and has a plan for my life and that He always has. As my journey continues I've been blessed to connect with amazing people and amazing opportunities like volunteering with the Neighbourhood community programs at The Lighthouse. The Lighthouse centre is a place where I feel at home and the people who work there have become like family to me. I am proud and happy to be able to serve my community here at The Lighthouse and join others in being a light in our community... *Continued on Page 3*

## Meet our Summer Staff



**Chris Devires** is currently going into his final year at the University of Toronto as a Global Health Specialist and Neuroscience Major. Chris was a summer student last year at The Lighthouse and is returning for another year. After graduating from U of T, he looks forward to taking on more leadership and organizational roles at the Lighthouse this year, and making a positive impact in the community.

**Bianca Martin** is currently going into her final year of study at the University of Guelph-Humber in the Family and Community Social Services program. Bianca was a summer student here at The Lighthouse two years ago and was a previous placement student. After graduating from Guelph-Humber, she hopes to apply for her Masters in Social Work.

Bianca is excited to come back to The Lighthouse and looks forward to working with the staff, volunteers, and clients.



## A Big Thank You

To all the volunteers who participated in the Phone A Thon Fundraiser! Thanks also to all those who graciously took our calls and participated in the fundraiser by supporting The Lighthouse financially! We are thankful for your support! Thanks to you we have received a total of **\$37,000.00** in donations. This blessing will help us to continue serving others in our community in the name of Jesus!



**UNIQLO is a Japanese company that ensures it provides casual clothes for all kinds of people.** Earlier this year, The Lighthouse and a UNIQLO representative got in contact. UNIQLO graciously offered to ship thirty large boxes of assorted free men's, women's and kids clothing to The Lighthouse to distribute to our community and clients. Thanks to this awesome donation The Lighthouse was able to put on a free clothing pop up for a few days!

"Sometimes clothing can be a big challenge for low income persons and for newcomers. Something as simple as a 'friendly stylist' helping clients pick out a new shirt can not only help someone in need but can also create an atmosphere of community and joy! It was wonderful to see an attitude of excitement grow as people helped each other pick out outfits and complimented each others choices!" - Tabitha Eastman (Neighbourhood Program coordinator)







*Page 2 continued....* Getting involved with The Lighthouse has also opened up other doors to explore. Earlier this year, I joined The Lighthouse Neighbourhood Coordinator, Tabitha, at a ward meeting with Daily Bread Food Bank. At the meeting it was announced that Daily Bread and North York Harvest were looking to create a Community Action Coalition Group. The Group would be made up of selected clients/volunteers of Daily Bread member agencies. They would together be trained, working to form an independent advocacy body, active at the municipal level. It would be an 18 month commitment, meeting every month, including a 4 month community research project with a focus on poverty reduction and food security. I was very intrigued and interested in this group and I was thrilled to learn that The Lighthouse recommended me as a candidate. I am very excited to join this group and share my experience and understanding of poverty and food insecurity facing communities in our city and indigenous communities as well. Both are dear to my heart. I'm truly excited and thrilled to get involved in advocacy work and have the chance to use my own lived experience and knowledge for change!

## Factors Associated with Food Insecurity in Indigenous Communities

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|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low <b>socioeconomic</b> factors</li> <li>• Lack of <b>home ownership</b></li> <li>• Being a <b>single parent</b></li> <li>• <b>Many family members</b> in household</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mental health</b> &amp; wellness</li> <li>• Absence of a <b>hunter</b></li> <li>• Chronic <b>diseases</b></li> <li>• <b>Poor</b> self-rated health</li> </ul> |
|--|---|



### National Aboriginal Day reminds us of the deep, often painful history, rich culture, and significant impacts of the Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

by Chris Devries

Sometimes when looking at reconciliation and the heaviness surrounding how to move forward, it can be easy to feel hopeless or hardened, and attribute the responsibility (or blame) to others. In a world of sound bites and instant gratification, it's tempting to want an easy fix or one-time solution that will provide instant reconciliation. However, the reality is that reconciliation will not be an easy path. It will take years, perhaps generations, before true healing and reconciliation within the Aboriginal community can be achieved, and all Canadians will need to work together to achieve this reality. If this seems overwhelming and you want to help but aren't sure how, here are a list of some practical ways to get involved and be a part of the solution to a 400-year offence.

- Donate financially or volunteer your time with one or more of the following organizations working with Aboriginal communities in Canada:
- True North Aid
- Habitat for Humanity (Indigenous Housing Partnership)
- Honouring Indigenous Peoples
- Circles for Reconciliation
- Northern Canada Evangelical Mission
- North America Indigenous Ministries
- Research online to educate yourself and others about the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and prominent Aboriginal figures .
- Start a dialogue with your friends and family to brainstorm ways to meet and build bridges with members of Aboriginal communities.
- Consider inviting Race relations CRCNA to host an educational workshop in your local community.
- Familiarize yourself with Aboriginal culture, current projects, and events (Ex. NishDish is a local Toronto restaurant that serves traditional aboriginal food and are available for food introductions, and workshops on such topics such as Aboriginal cuisine, and food sovereignty).



## From Rob's Desk

Recently I was interviewed by four students (Maria Luisa, Tewebista, Cady and Emanuel) from St. Mary's Academy Catholic School in Toronto. These students called to see whether they could interview me and learn more about The Lighthouse and its work in the community. Their school is part of the Youth and Philanthropy Initiative Canada where students are given authentic responsibility and decision making power throughout the process.



Maris Luisa, Tewebista, Cady and Emanuel asked pertinent questions to gain a more detailed understanding of what The Lighthouse does and how The Lighthouse operates. They chose The Lighthouse as the charity for their project because of our work with refugees, immigrants and newcomers. For many of these students this work was important because they are recent refugees and immigrants.

Based on what they learned from the interview, the students prepared and delivered a presentation on The Lighthouse to their peers about the issues within the community. The team with the most compelling presentation is awarded a \$5,000 grant to be directed to their charity. These students were awarded first place for their presentation and The Lighthouse received a \$5,000 cheque because of their efforts. Thank you to Maria Luisa, Tewebista, Cady and Emanuel of St. Mary's Academy Catholic School.

It is always great to see youth and young adults take an initiative to help charities like The Lighthouse. In September, Crystal Gun who is visual impaired will be doing the EdgeWalk at the CN Tower. She hope to raise \$5,000 for The Lighthouse. She has challenged me to participate in the EdgeWalk and I have agreed to do it with her. To learn more about more about Crystal's GoFundMe page check out The Lighthouse's webpage at [www.lighthousecentre.ca](http://www.lighthousecentre.ca). More details of how you can sponsor myself or Crystal will be listed on the website.

Fundraising is always central to raising funds for The Lighthouse. You can help by supporting those involve in the Edgewalk or Ride for Refuge in October. Thank you for your support.

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*Thank you for being partners with us in this ministry.*



Yes, I would like to help with a donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Cheque enclosed

☐ Visa/MasterCard # \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

## Other Ways to Help-Contact us for details

- ☐ PAR (PreAuthorized Remittance)
- ☐ Monthly Visa or MasterCard donation - makes it easy for you and for us
- ☐ Canada Helps on line at [www.canadahelps.org](http://www.canadahelps.org)
- ☐ Giving through Christian Stewardship Service
- ☐ United Way Payroll Deduction - just provide our CRA # and address
- ☐ Matched Corporate Giving - many companies match employee donations

Please mail your contribution to:

**The Lighthouse**  
**1008 Bathurst Street**  
**Toronto ON M5R 3G7**

*Receipts will be issued in the New Year. Canada Revenue Agency #13036 3740 RR0001*



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[www.lighthousecentre.ca](http://www.lighthousecentre.ca)