

## My Truth as I Know It

It is with great sadness, and a heavy heart, that I am forced to respond to deeply hurtful allegations that I expect will be reported in the media soon. Last month, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, contacted me to question my identity and the sexual assault I experienced as a child.

To relive those times, and revisit questions I made peace with decades ago, has been beyond traumatic. But I know I owe it to those I love, and those who support me, to respond.

I am proud of my Indigenous-American identity, and the deep ties I have to Canada and my Piapot family.

What I know about my Indigenous ancestry I learned from my growing up mother, who was part Mi'kmaq, and my own research later in life. My mother told me many things, including that I was adopted and that I was Native, but there was no documentation as was common for Indigenous children born in the 1940's. Later in my life, as an adult, she told me some things I have never shared out of respect for her that I hate sharing now, including that I may have been born on "the wrong side of the blanket". This was her story to tell, not mine.

As a young adult, I was adopted by Emile Piapot (son of Chief Piapot, Treaty 4 Adhesion signatory), and Clara Starblanket Piapot (daughter of Chief Starblanket, Treaty 4 signatory), in accordance with Cree law and customs. They were kind, loving, and proud to claim me as their own. I love my Piapot family and am so lucky to have them in my life.

I have always struggled to answer questions about who I am. For a long time, I tried to discover information about my background. In the interest of transparency, I'm making public a sworn affidavit from my former lawyer detailing those findings. Through that research what became clear, and what I've always been honest about, is that I don't know where I'm from or who my birth parents were, and I will never know. Which is why, to be questioned in this way today is painful, both for me, and for my two families I love so dearly.

My Indigenous identity is rooted in a deep connection to a community which has had a profound role in shaping my life and my work. For my entire life, I have championed Indigenous, and Native American causes when nobody else would, or had the platform to do so. I am proud to have been able to speak up for Indigenous issues. I have always tried to bridge gaps between communities and educate people to live in love and kindness.

This is my truth. And while there are many things I do not know; I have been proud to honestly share my story throughout my life.

Painfully, the CBC has also forced me to relive and defend my experience as a survivor of sexual abuse which I endured at the hands of my brother, as well as another family member – whom I have never publicly named.

I could never forget these violations. It is something I have lived with all my life. Speaking about my experience is difficult, and although I have shared privately, I have rarely done so publicly. I've spoken up because I know others cannot, and to have this questioned and sensationalized by Canada's public broadcaster is appalling.

While these questions have hurt me, I know they will also hurt those I love. My family. My friends. And all those who have seen themselves in my story. All I can say is what I know to be true: I know who I love, I know who loves me. And I know who claims me.

I may not know where I was born, but I know who I am.

Buffy Sainte-Marie