



Chief Janice George's story of

# Molly



Molly Jacobs was born in 1940 in St. Paul's Hospital, Vancouver. She was the fourth of nine children born to Lena and Alfred Jacobs. Through his family, Alfred was a Hereditary Chief of the Squamish Nation. Alfred was a longshoreman, and they mainly lived on Capilano Reserve in North Vancouver. Her mother had been taken out of residential school after a nun hit her, and so as a child she was home to listen to the cultural teachings of the elders. She was given four ancestral names, signifying her as the keeper of many Squamish stories and traditions.

Molly went to residential school in Kamloops, which she didn't much like, and finished grade eight at St. Paul's School in North Vancouver. She couldn't go further unless she gave up her Indian status. Those were the rules. Kids were punished for speaking Squamish, so English was the language everywhere, except with the old people. Molly was very athletic and loved baseball. She was a very good pitcher. And she was cute. In 1955, she was crowned Miss North Shore. She was sponsored by Lionsgate Dry Cleaner, and my dad says one of the guys there had a crush on her. "If I hadn't come along," he'd say, "you'd all be Chinese!" My dad was friends with her older brother. I don't know how or when they started dating, but she was married at sixteen, and I was born soon after, in 1957.

My father, Ross George, was the oldest son of the oldest son in the George family and thus one of the Hereditary Chiefs as well as, occasionally, an elected counsellor. He was a longshoreman, and we mostly lived on the Mission Reserve. In the next ten years after me, Mom had five more girls so we were: Janice, Kim, Lisa, Cindy, Charlene and Paula. We lived in war-time houses, which meant: six girls, two parents in a two-bedroom 600 square foot house with one bathroom. There were diapers hanging outside our house all the time, which Mom washed in an old wringer washer. My mom would kick all six of us out of the house so she could clean. We'd stand outside and peek in. She'd put on "Sugar Pie Honey Bunch" really loud and clean, dance around and put the house in order. Now I think of it, she was only 25 years old.

She and Dad loved baseball, and Dad coached Mom's team in the Lynn Valley woman's league. A headline in the Province newspaper said, "Good Golly Miss Molly You Sure Can Pitch!" They trained me to be catcher, and when I was twelve, I joined Mom's team and she pitched to me. As my sisters reached twelve, they joined the team, too. So we had a team of Mom, her six daughters, my aunt and my cousins. We were good! Mom was also a home run hitter; she could hit the ball right out of the park. We were so good, the league changed the rules saying people couldn't enter their own teams, and we got split up.

We'd still get together for prize money tournaments though, and every weekend through the summer we'd play somewhere in the Interior. Mom would cook all week: chicken and roasts and salads, and pack coolers full of food. Then all we had to do was get there. We'd jump in the cars – the players, their husbands and families; there were about 40 of us. We'd maybe camp or take over a motel, and Mom would have every meal for the weekend all ready. She had it all budgeted out of our winnings – the food, the motel, the gas. She could pull people together. She taught us so we could make a meal for 150 with a few hours notice. She loved to cook.

When I was in grade seven, going to Queen Mary School, the teacher told us that we, the First Nations people, had come here over the Bering Sea from China; I was shocked. I went home and said, "Did you know?" and my mother was blown away. She said, "Well, you know what? They can say whatever they want." She got my dad and they sat down and said, "We are Squamish people and Squamish people have always been here. We did not come from anywhere else; our history tells us we were created here." That has always been a strong teaching.

In 1970, when Paula was six, Mom went back to school and got her ECE diploma. Then she went to work at a Squamish Nation daycare on Esplanade, with half the kids Squamish and half not. She loved those kids, taught them Squamish words and songs and cooked for them every day. Sometimes we complained that they got better food than us! One time the daycare lost its funding, and Mom just kept going in every day to look after the kids – without pay. After a few weeks, it all got sorted out and the money came back, but those kids were cared for and never missed a meal.

Mom was a health-food nut before it was invented. She wouldn't have any processed food in the house, cooked everything from scratch. So we were jealous of other kids who got macaroni and cheese and bologna sandwiches. She taught us how to cook. My sisters learned so well, they had a catering business when they were older. My grandmother said, "You girls are good cooks, like your mother."

In 1972, we moved into one of those condos on 5th when they were brand-new – four bedrooms, two baths! Mom was in heaven! But on a Friday night, when the six of us girls were getting ready to go out, two bathrooms still weren't enough. Dad would run up and down the stairs, trying to get into one of the bathrooms, and we'd have to get out.

Being the oldest I was the trailblazer in our family and moved out to marry at eighteen. My parents thought I was too young, but I was determined. At 21, I had a baby boy – the first boy in the family! The marriage didn't last, and soon my son and I were back living with Mom and Dad. My mom wished that I had found a way to work it out, but didn't say anything to me. She didn't need to; she would just look disappointed. Then I got gallstones, and after the operation my mother took over the raising of my son.

In 1981, my parents built a house in Waiwikum Reserve near the town of Squamish, and Dad and Mom, my son and my two youngest sisters, Charlene and Paula, moved there. My sisters and I had an apartment in North Van. My mother told my aunt, "They're all living on popcorn and tea," and she'd bring us care packages of meat and groceries. "Take care of your sisters," she'd tell me, "no one else will."

On October 28, 1981, Mom and Dad, Charlene, Paula, and my four-year old son came into town to celebrate my parents' 25th wedding anniversary. They had a nice dinner at a Japanese restaurant and then came to our place. My son asked if I could come home with them, and my mother said, "No, your mom has to find a job."

It was raining hard, and dark. They didn't see that the bridge over M Creek on the Squamish Highway had washed out. Their car went over the edge. Paula survived, but everyone else – my mom, my dad, my sister Charlene and my son Ross died. I was 23. My mother was 41.

Everybody knew what had happened. Wherever I went, people knew. They'd see me coming and the light would go out of their eyes. No one could hold the space for this tragedy. It was too big. I felt like I was supposed to carry my whole broken-hearted community through this grief, a grief that had happened to me . . . and my family.

I ran. I ran all over the place. Some time later, I don't know how long, I was in California, living anonymously in my grief. For three nights in a row I dreamt of my mother. I knew she had come to tell me to go home. So I did . . . the next day. My grandmother had said, "When you lose a loved one, you need to give up something that is unwholesome, and you will never have a problem with that bad thing again." So I gave up drinking alcohol. The only way to walk on the path the Creator had put me on, was with an open heart and a clear mind. I realized that to thrive, not just survive, I needed to walk on the right path, and that if I did that, the Ancestors would show up and help me carry my burden.

My grandmother also said, “Lead by example.” People would come to me and say, “I lost my son, and I didn’t think I was going to make it. But I would see you, and see that, yes, I can make it, because you made it.” Now that I’m older, I understand part of my purpose in my community is to help people – whoever, whenever I can. This is my mother’s gift to me. My grief I now cherish as my gift. In telling her story now, I have back her life, not just how she died. It took a long time to get here. Thirty years passed before I could tell this story out loud.