



## **The Storyteller Radio Broadcast**

### **Chester Martin (Mi'kmaq)**

**My name is Chester Martin. I'm from Eel Ground First Nation, up in a small community of Miramichi, New Brunswick.**

**I was born and raised here in Eel Ground. My mother had me in Chatham, New Brunswick. The only thing I think about my childhood now, like, there used to be a lot of drinking between my parents.**

**I grew up, people having a lot of parties, you know, and alcohol was the biggest enemy of our reserve then, that I remember. You know, I grew up with that; and I remember saying, when I was a kid, that I would never drink alcohol.**

**We were real poor. My father wasn't originally from here; he was from Restigouche, Quebec; that's Campbellton, New Brunswick right across the river here, another Mi'kmaq Reserve, and met my mother and married and they had kids, and they moved to Boston, Massachusetts and they lived there for nine years, and left me with my aunt, Maryann Alexander, and she took care of me.**

**She never spoke English and I didn't either, when I was growing up. We spoke their Mi'kmaq language. She used to take me to Catholic church, started going to Catholic church a lot, and remember the times that we used to go from the highway and from the church; we used to kneel down right to the cement floor, right up to the inside the church. Remember them days like, you know, I was always right behind her, following her, listening to her, and really that's all I know at that time.**

**And I grew up, parents came back home, took me back, and I didn't want to go back, went back to her place again, then my father got me again, and he drank a lot. And I went through a lot with him, the beatings, physical abuse and everything else. You know, I wanted to get out of there, but I couldn't get out.**

**And I lived with them, and that's where I started my first time of hating people. I think I started hating my father when I was nine years old – ten years old. Still hurts today, but... Then I started going to schools, and he'd take me out of schools like blueberry picking and potato picking, when the schools just starting out. He would take me out, make money for our family, buy groceries, clothing and all that stuff, whatever we needed, you know.**

**In the fall time as September, October, I'll go cutting pulpwood and I'll miss half the schools. Was rough, you know; feel bad today that I never got educated, that I missed out on education, you know. Shamed myself; fifteen years old in grade four, then I had to get out, and he told me if I quit school then I got to move out of the house.**

At fourteen or fifteen I had to quit school, pack my bags and move out to the states and work. You know, he trained me pretty good, cause I know how to work then, putting a garden in, and hunting and fishing and cutting woods for them, helping them out, you know, through the years, you know; it was hard.

I kind of grew up fast by fifteen years old and making my own money in the states and I checked the states and it was about three hundred miles from here and I came back home and the states wasn't for me. I remember a time I was going to hitch hike to Boston, nobody picked me up so I take the other way in and I got a ride right away.

I got a feeling today if I made it to Boston I wouldn't have got out there. I would have drank myself to death.

So I came back home and started working around here and, you know, and he stopped drinking, and they both stopped drinking, and then we started getting along a little bit, but, you know, the hate was always there, hate for him, and I couldn't get away from it.

Growing up hating somebody just, you know, eats everything that you wanted to do, you know. Couldn't go back to school, couldn't learn, I tried up grade and everything else, I just couldn't get out of it, cause the stuff I was carrying inside, couldn't get rid of it.

Got my license when I was sixteen, and by the time I come back here on the reserve there was a little job, carpentry, another job was driving a school bus for the kids, and the more idle time I had the more drinking I did.

At the age of sixteen, when I started drinking, till the age of 22, I was full-blown alcoholic. I became a skid row drunk right on my own reserve. I didn't know what to do.

I remember a time I got in a fight in the tavern in Miramichi, one of the taverns; I was so drunk that guys beat me up, dragged me outside and broke my leg, landed up in the hospital.

It was then that a couple of guys came in. I didn't know who they were; they introduced themselves. One of was Carl Hill and Jack Mackay, and Jack Mackay shook my hand and he said, "I used to be a alcoholic too, when I was young." I said, "Good for you." I didn't know what he meant, I didn't know what alcoholic was, I just knew that I know now I was alcoholic. I thought I was just a drunk, our reserve drunk.

And they introduced themselves, and you know, Jack said, "You know, now I got away from that alcohol." He said, "Jesus Christ gave me a new life." And I still didn't know what they were talking about. And Carl said a few words, but I don't remember that today what he said, cause I was in a fog for a long time.

And they talked for a while, and told me that they'll come and visit me and all this stuff. I said, "Good enough." And they left, and I stayed in the hospital for ten days.

When I got out of the hospital, the first thing I did was go to the liquor store and kept on drinking again. My mother told me, "You got to stop drinking, you know." I was living with my uncle then; my father didn't want me at his house and... he just didn't want me.

So he'd tell me, "You got to stop drinking and you're so young, 21 years old," he said, "You know, in and out of jails, lockups and everything else," and this was only when I started drinking when I was sixteen.

Now I didn't realize that then, cause all that hate I carried towards my father was just eating me, and I couldn't get rid of it, and that went on, so it got better... I didn't stop drinking. I lost the school bus job and I lost my license. There, I can't work.

But it was so easy to find booze on the reserve. I went to people that got welfare, people got unemployment checks, old age pension checks, army checks, people that made home brews on the reserve, you know. The more I drank, the sicker I got.

About a year later, I remember getting the DT's, and at my uncle's place, I can hear the baby crying and I went in the other room with the DT's. And I worked later, and I start hearing voices and I start listening to these voices. And a voice told me I was no good, that I would never become of nothing, that you might as well just kill yourself, and they went on and on and on, and I walked up the road and I jumped in front of the car. I figured that's the only way to go.

It hurt everything, the thoughts, the anger, everything that I carried, you know. I was hateful, you know. When I was sober I was a nice fella, but when I was drinking and everything, I was hateful and mean, you know, I go into trouble, I go into fights and never win; always got beat up. And it just was like that.

The car missed me, you know, when I jumped in front of it; I got the back end of her, and it knocked me off the road. Started running in the woods, hid in the woods. I got away from the cops, the RCMP, that, I guess, they were looking for me, I guess.

Would you think I would stop drinking then? I didn't, and I kept on drinking. Finally one day, I got the DT's again. I got in trouble, real bad trouble. I went in a place and I destroyed it, got caught, was sent to a mental institution in Campbellton, New Brunswick, to see if I was insane.

I was sent there for six weeks, they only kept me for three cause I was only 20 – 21 years old, 21 ½ and so they told me that I drank a little bit too much, if I could ease down on my drinking. I went back, the court saw me, the judge looked at me and said, "Your charges are dropped." But he said, "You got an impaired charge against you, we never... been looking for you."

So they charged me \$250 and he asked me if he could put me on probation for six months to go to AA, Alcoholics Anonymous, and he told me that, "You been in here, in and out for years, the last two, three years, and getting in trouble." He said, "Would you go?"

I said, I looked at him and said, "Yeah, I would go." I didn't know what AA was at that time.

So my mother was so glad that I was out of jail, out of the mental institution; father didn't care, and he was at that time already sober four or five years that he stopped drinking. I think it's two or three years something like that, stopped drinking anyway, and he said, "Just go to jail," he said.

I didn't want to go to jail anymore, so I took the Alcoholics Anonymous. It was either that, six months probation, go to AA, or go to jail, and I took the to go to Alcoholics Anonymous, and I joined the program.

I used to go to AA; the first three months I used to take a pint of beer, a couple of pints of beer, and I said, "You know, beer won't hurt me." Then I'd go to AA, then come home, drink all night, then I'd go to AA cause I was scared that they might catch me.

Then one night I heard this guy's story; he went on and told his story. Talked about being in the Army, talked about overseas and all that, and I couldn't identify with him but I could; then he said, "Let go and let God take over." And the first thing that popped into my mind was Carl Hill and Jack Mackay. And he said, you know, "God saved his life, changed, made him a new man."

Okay, I'll go home and I'll... that night I went home and I prayed, and I said, "God, can you remove alcohol?" And I don't know what happened that time; it just a feeling that came over me, that I didn't want to drink no more, and I kept going back to the program Alcoholics Anonymous.

I stopped drinking, and then I met my wife; I knew her all my life, we lived next door together. And I was going out with her sister, cousin I mean, and I had an eye on her. So my life was changing fast, you know. You know, people were looking... they looked at me as a scum, and being a year sober they started look at me that I was trying to do good and better my life. And I didn't have God in my life but then, you know, I prayed for God a lot. I remember praying for God when I was a kid when my aunt used to take me to church.

And I was a year and half sober, and I met her, and finally asked her out, we started dating and all of a sudden it just bang, bang, bang and three months later we're married, next thing we're having kids, first kid was my oldest daughter Drucilla. I had responsibilities and my father already started the business up home in '76.

And I started driving for him in gravel trucks, and Carl Hill started coming around the house, knocking on the door. And they used to have a little trailer back on the reserve there, and start coming around.

We became friends. I remember the first time he came around, he had his Bible in his hand. I looked at him and my wife looked at him and said, "He's not coming in here with

that Bible.” I said, “He’ll try to change us.” So we told him, “Carl, you can come in if you want and have supper with us,” or dinner, whatever we had, “and leave your Bible in the car.”

Didn’t realize then that Carl had a Bible all memorized in his head, you know, that he had Scriptures up there that I didn’t even know about. And we talked and Rita didn’t want to hear it and then I didn’t want to hear it, but you know, Carl wouldn’t stop, you know, say a little verse right there; “Are you saved?”

“Saved? What do you mean by that?” I said. Didn’t know nothing about being saved, you know. So he kept around and, “Oh, come up to my house, we’ll have a big dinner there, turkey dinner and all that, bring the kids over,” and this was a few years later, coming around, in the eighties, I guess, you know, and Carl would come out in the road with his Bible in his hand. There’s nothing we can say, me and Rita, we just looked at him and listen. And he’d give us a verse, you know, “You got to accept the Lord in your heart,” and all this stuff.

And he’ll take me in the other room; I think he, I don’t know, wanted me to hear it and Rita and Cassie would talk, and the kids would be playing with each other. Finally he said, “Look at this Word,” you know, he’d read it out to me and he said, “Do you believe it?” “Yeah, I believe it.”

And he said, “Do you want to be saved?” Through the years, it’s like a couple of years he’d been visiting me, and I kind of started learning stuff from him, started picking up stuff.

Jesus was sent down as a child, was born as a child, and became a man, and He had to pay it out; now, it was first why He died and rose again, and nobody else can do that except by God, and I believe that today, that Jesus was crucified and died for us, you know, and you know, cause He loves us, He loves each and every one of us. And He gives us a choice, you know, every one of us got a choice, you know, you either believe in Him or don’t believe in Him.

And I chose to believe in Him. There’s no other way, you know. You might think there is no Hell and there is no Heaven, but the Scripture say, you know, there is. There is a Heaven and there is Hell. And I choose Heaven.

And I said, “Yes.” Something inside my heart was telling me to go ahead, you know, accept the Lord. And for me this, you know, I wanted Jesus in my heart, I wanted the hate that I was carrying, that hate still, I couldn’t look at my father in the eyes even being sober for two or three years, I couldn’t look at him in the eyes and talk to him. Would have the thoughts of him beating me all these years, the anger was there and everything else.

I had to get rid of it some way, and I knew, deep inside my heart, if I accept Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior that would help. And something was telling me, “It’s going to help you.”

And one day Carl said, he read sinner's prayer and he said, "Repeat it with your own lips and mouth." So I said it, and it felt good, and it, I don't know, slowly I started, you know, "This is my father." And the anger wasn't all that, I had to work on it for years, and it all started easing off and everything, and you know, I wasn't miserable anymore. My life was changing a little bit, I was more calm, and then I started going to church.

And I don't know what happened, I just kind of lost contact of going to church again, and started doing things my own way, and started driving truck, highway truck, and one night I was sleeping in the truck, and it was like somebody woke me up, you know, and asked, "What are you doing again? You're going back to your old routine. You're miserable, you're hateful," and stuff that goes in my head.

Then they used to have them little churches for truckers, you know. I started going to them churches and, I remember, one guy picked me up from a truck stop; he said, "You want to go to church?" in Chicago, Illinois. Took about fifteen of us, and I walked in that church and there must have been about 3000 people there. All different kinds, nationalities and all, I looked around, people praising the Lord and singing and everything else, and I started singing. And I started going to them truck churches all over, and they started to know me.

And I wasn't really looking after my health, and I was getting bigger and bigger, fatter, you know, and I guess I was destroying my health. And I remember a time I had a heart attack in 1999. And I was laying in the hospital in Frederick, Maryland and a guy said, "You had a heart attack."

And they sent me to Washington, DC and, I guess, I don't know what they did over there, they did something, and sent me back home. And when I got back home, I had a massive heart attack, and for some reason I knew I wasn't going to die.

I knew, deep inside my heart, that God had a plan in my life for me; I didn't know what the plan was, but I knew. Even the doctor looked at me, cardiologist, looked at his report and looked up in the ceiling, he said, "I don't know what happened," he said, "You should be dead. I don't know what saved you." I said, "I do." I said, "God almighty, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior saved me and there's a purpose in life for me."

Came back one day, I was sitting up, went to the restaurant to have breakfast. I looked over, there was a couple of... was a minister and a missionary worker. And I prayed; I said, "If these two guys come up at my table and invite me to their table," I said, "I'll go to their church." I didn't finish praying that prayer and all of a sudden Gordon Green came up, he's a missionary worker for the prison, and he said, "Would you like to join us?"

And I knew then that I made a promise to God that I'll join the church, cause I stopped going to church for a long time, and I said I was going to go to their church and I been going to their church since then.

And I rededicated my life, and about two weeks later I joined that church, and my buddy Vince was there.

**They put me in a chair and sent me in a couple of preachers, and Vince and a couple of other people that prayed over me. It felt like there was something inside that came out of me and it felt good, and I felt good.**

**There was God in my life, Jesus and I, you know, couldn't explain the feeling but, you know, just a feeling that came, and has been with me ever since.**

**That, you know, I know I fall down a lot. but it says in the Bible, that, you know, all you got to ask God to forgive you, you know, and I ask Him to forgive me every day, every morning, afternoon, evening, you know.**

**I still have my struggles. I try to learn everything I can but, I don't know, because of the booze, too much booze from the six years that I drank, or is it my father, when I was a baby, he passed out and my aunt found me, she said, "Almost dead," cause I was all blue, and they brought me back when I was just a baby.**

**I don't know, but it's not I don't try; I try to learn but I can't, you know. I can read today, that before I couldn't read. I read the Bible today, you know; some of the words I don't understand.**

**I got people like Vince, Larry helping me all the time. Me and the wife were going to Bible studies for a while, then we stopped going, but we been saying that we were going to start Bible studies in our own house. We'll want to start.**

**My mother passed on four years ago. For some reason she was in a coma; I don't know if she was in a coma, but she had a hose stuck in her throat, she couldn't talk and then she could only move her hand when you were talking to her. She'll move, touch you, you know. I remember telling her, "You need Jesus in your life, mom."**

**And the doctors came about couple hours later and they said, "You know, we got to take your mother off the machine;" they said, "We got to just let her go." Then we talked about it, the family said, "We'll let her go." I went in again and I prayed to God and holding her hand, I said, "If you only bring her back." I said, "I don't want my mother to go to Hell."**

**Sobbing to God, you'd think I was talking to you, you know, I said, "I don't want nobody to go to Hell. She's got to have Jesus in her heart."**

**So they took the machines off and they said, "Okay. She goes, she goes." And she started improving a little bit. The doctor was amazed, he said, "I seen you talking to her. I seen her moving her hand; every time you said something she moved her hand. We going to ease off the medication and take the hose off." And she said, "If she gets better we'll send her to Moncton, New Brunswick, that big hospital, and I said, "Good." I said, "If she goes, she goes. I'll accept that." I talked to the family. And she came around, started coming around, and they sent her to Moncton and two days in Moncton, she last a week in Moncton, but two days in Moncton she came around, slowly.**

Then one night, evening, I went to visit her I said, “Mommy, remember what I talked about in that hospital in Miramichi?” She said, “No.” I said, “Would you like to have Jesus in your life before anything happens to you?” She said, “Nothing’s going to happen to me.” I said, “Would you like to have Jesus in your heart?” “You know,” I said, “I have Jesus in my heart.” I said, “If I die,” I said, “I’ll go to Heaven.”

This was when I was talking to her in my own language. And she said, “Yes.” I said, “You got to say it in your own words, but repeat after me.” And we said it in my language, you know, Mi’kmaq language, and she accepted the Lord. She was so happy, and we talked, and her face just lit up and I know she had Jesus in her heart and she was going to Heaven.

And a day later I went back, me and my brother Michael went to visit her and the first thing I walked in, she said, “Let’s pray.” I said, “Yeah, okay, let’s pray.” And we prayed and I prayed and she listened, and she was happy. And two days later, we got a call, you know, she passed on. She by herself, I believe she was by herself; I believe Jesus was there, you know. Her heart couldn’t take it anymore and she lost both of her legs, you know, diabetic complications, and I know she went to Heaven.

I want to go back to when my father had his heart attacks. And I remember going to the hospital; I didn’t want to go, but God was pushing me, “You got to go, you got to go see him.”

And I walked in, and my wife walked in, and I see him laying there so helpless, and all the anger was already pretty near gone. Then I went to him; you know, I never touched my father’s hands for years. And I grabbed his hand and I said, “Dad, you got to forgive me,” I said, “I had a hatred for you for years and years and years.”

He looked at me, and said, “I know that.” And his face was lit up. And my father, when he got sober, I think he got saved.

And for the listeners, you know, there’s a lot of stuff out in this world that tells us, you know, there is no God. But Scripture tells us there is, and I believe in it.

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