

Karen Ann - Audio Transcript

Karen: I was born in St Paul's hospital in Vancouver. Until my dad went to join the army, and then my mom, ended up having TB. So, we ended up coming up to Squamish to live with our grandparents, my older brother and I. Government got in and dragged us all to residential school. I was three years old. I stayed there until I was nine, they closed the school down, thank heavens.

Karen: My grandparents, they used to speak our language. They used to speak that language to us. With Grandma, we'd be out, picking apples or cherries. With Grandpa we'd be in a canoe fishing.

Residential school took our language and our culture away from us. Both my parents are Squamish Nation. My dad was Sammy Lewis. And my mother was Mabel Andrews.

Karen: My father came back from the army. Oh, that was so heartbreaking. I mean, because he was alone. Mum was in Coqualeetza. So, he had to come to visit us. We were allowed, just touch his fingers against, cuz they had a big fence, wire fence. And they had a limit, two times and they'd chase him away after that.

You know, when we were in the empty school, we were throwing around the papers and the books, we were just like little wild Indians. (laugh) Letting our Indian out again, they couldn't beat it out of us.

Karen: And then mom came from Coqualeetza and we all lived in West Van. I went to school. Day school was terrible. I didn't even graduate.

Then I got into cooking and I liked that so I stayed in that, until I got married. That was a mistake. And then I had my two kids. Son and daughter. That is my short version of my life.

Karen: I end up having a stroke and the kids already had their own lives, so I didn't want to be bothering. I came to Hilltop. So, I have been here since 1993. Every time I went out I dreaded the thought of coming back in here. But now, it's my home.

But Squamish Nation, they're planning on building a facility down in North Van.

Our relatives they would know what we feel and how I don't know how to explain it. You know, it's like being all native, you feel at home. You'd be in the long-term care home with the people. They would have Squamish nation workers They wouldn't treat us like a job, they would treat us with respect because native people have a lot of respect for elders. We grew up respecting our elders. I wouldn't have get stuck in the bathroom for half an hour because they're busy with somebody else.

Karen: Well, going through this COVID thing. It seemed like they went home and tried to figure out how they could mess up my life. (laugh) *Everything was no, no you can't do this*. No. At least if it was our culture, maybe they'd explain why. Not just no. At least I think so.

I didn't really take it seriously. Because we are in here, nothings real, but that's all you see on TV. It was coming closer.

When Lynn Valley. I thought, oh my goodness that's coming closer. So it was getting a lot more real to me. One whole month in this room. So, I was glad I had a big room.

Well, my daughter made sure I had a laptop and a tablet. But I had to teach myself. (laugh) Oh yeah, video chat my sister every morning, and I talked to my children every morning, every night and said goodnight to them. Every, every single day. But that's still not the same.

KAREN: It was so hard. And in that year I lost my uncle he lived in here, and I lost my aunt, she lived in here too. And nobody's allowed to come in to see them but I went down to tell her goodbye. Both of them.

They wouldn't tell us if they had a case of COVID, we just had hearsay. Every time that we had a scare, boom there goes the door. Locked back in again.

I think that's why I had that anxiety attack. Remembering being isolated in the residential school and being isolated in here. Because I've never really talked about it to anybody, to help me go through that. I mean now they have a lifeline you can phone. But I mean, most of the time I end up in tears. Which I think I gonna do now.

Karen: After I think was a year, my son was allowed in. The only one allowed. He wouldn't even go see his friends. He would say, "I am not allowed. If I do, I won't be able to see my mum." I just remember seeing him coming in in the door, and I thought oh... I think I was on another planet. I thought he was gonna break my neck, hug me so tight. Well we weren't supposed to hug, but we did. (laugh) That was a tough year.

Karen: It seems I've been locked up my whole life. Being in residential school is a big part of my life, and being in here is a big part of my life. But this is my home. And I intend on living another 20 years at least. Yeah.