

HONORARY DOCTORATES for MI'KMAW ELDERS MURDENA and ALBERT MARSHALL of Eskasoni First Nation

– Cape Breton University Fall Convocation 2009

Institute for Integrative Science & Health: www.integrativescience.ca

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On October 31, 2009, Mi'kmaq Elders Murdena and Albert Marshall from the First Nation community of Eskasoni in Unama'ki - Cape Breton were each conferred the degree Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, by Cape Breton University for their tireless efforts to help promote Mi'kmaq culture and cross-cultural understandings, reconciliation, and healing.



Conferral of the Honorary Doctorates to Elders Murdena and Albert took place during Cape Breton University's Fall Convocation ceremonies which were held at the Membertou Trade and Convention Centre in Membertou First Nation. These photos show CBU Chancellor Annette Verschuren with Dr. Murdena and Dr. Albert during the ceremony. CBU President and Vice-Chancellor Dr. H. John Harker can also be seen in the picture on the left.

The citation for the Honorary Doctorates was read at the ceremony by Mr. Lindsay Marshall, Associate Dean of the Mi'kmaq College Institute at Cape Breton University. The complete citation, as well as the earlier letter of nomination to the Tributes Committee of the CBU Board of Governors, can be read on the pages that follow.

CITATION READ AT CONVOCATION CEREMONY

Cape Breton University is honoured to celebrate the leadership of Murdena and Albert Marshall in the establishment of Mi'kmaw education and in the preservation and understanding of the Mi'kmaw culture and its language.

Murdena and Albert Marshall, wife and husband, are truly life partners. Albert, the “designated voice” for the Mi'kmaw Elders of Unama'ki (Cape Breton), was born in Eskasoni, Cape Breton in 1938, while Murdena was born in Whycocomagh, Cape Breton in 1942. Both now reside in Eskasoni and are much loved and highly respected Elders within the Mi'kmaw Nation and beyond.

In 1984, Murdena graduated from the University of New Brunswick with a Bachelor of Education degree. She also has a Certificate in Mi'kmaw Immersion from St. Thomas University. After teaching in the community for a while, Murdena went to Harvard University, where she completed a Master of Education degree. Albert is a graduate of the “University of Life.” Although he does not possess a formal university education, he is considered a Spiritual Leader among Aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities, sharing his passion and knowledge of Mi'kmaw culture wherever he goes.

Murdena and Albert have worked side-by-side to promote and revitalize Mi'kmaw culture for all. They work tirelessly to promote cross-cultural understanding and healing and are frequently sought after to speak locally, nationally and internationally. Their work is exceptional and their passion for their cause is strong. Both Murdena and Albert teach following the guiding principle they promote which is known as “Two-Eyed Seeing.” This is learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledge and from the other eye with the strengths of mainstream knowledge and using them together for the benefit of all.

The remarkable team of Murdena and Albert also developed Knowledge Education & Culture Consultant Associates (KECCA), to further their work, which seeks to preserve, understand and promote cultural beliefs and practices among all Mi'kmaw communities and encourages a strong future for the Mi'kmaw Nation and its people.

Individually, Murdena and Albert are also exceptional human beings. Albert was an inmate of the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie, NS, for much of his childhood and teenage years. This experience profoundly affected him and is what led him on the lifelong journey he has taken to connect with and understand the culture he was removed from and the culture that was forced upon him. It is Albert's mission to help the two cultures find a way to live in mutual respect of each other's strengths and ways.

After the loss of their son Tommy, in 1978, Murdena was changed spiritually, emotionally and physically. This prompted her to do work that would make a difference. After graduating from Harvard, Murdena began teaching at Cape Breton University and was instrumental in developing and enhancing the Mi'kmaw Studies program at CBU. In the 1990s, she played a key role in proposing CBU's innovative Integrative Science program. Although she retired from the University in the late 1990s her efforts are still making a difference in education today. Moreover, she is a Spiritual Leader for the Mi'kmaw Nation.

Both Murdena and Albert have devoted their lives to the promotion and preservation of the Mi'kmaw culture and language. They have been recognized for their amazing commitment, dedication and knowledge in these areas and they have touched and improved countless lives in the process. They are a force to be reckoned with and their achievements will long be remembered. To this day both Murdena and Albert remain actively involved with Integrative Science in all its dimensions, and Cape Breton University is honoured to have them as friends.

Murdena and Albert have raised seven children and provide a welcoming and nurturing home for their family and extended family. They are Grandmother and Grandfather for numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Today, Cape Breton University confers the degree Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, on a woman who shares her strength, knowledge and spirituality in the pursuit of the sustainability of the Mi'kmaw culture and on a man who overcame personal challenges and turned them into a lasting legacy of healing and education for others, Murdena M. and Albert D. Marshall.

CAPE BRETON UNIVERSITY

TO: Tributes Committee of the Board of Governors, CBU

FROM: Cheryl Bartlett, Canada Research Chair in Integrative Science, CBU

RE: Nomination of Mrs. Murdena Marshall and Mr. Albert Marshall
for Honorary Doctorates for CBU Convocation 2009

It is with great pleasure that I join with Mr. Lindsay Marshall, Associate Dean, Mi'kmaq College Institute, to submit to you our nomination of Murdena and Albert Marshall for Honorary Doctorates at Cape Breton University. We are supported in this nomination by numerous individuals who have written letters (appended herein) attesting to their strong belief in the excellent, outstanding merit of the nominees. We suggest the appropriate category of achievement for both individuals is that of *“cultural achievement”*.

Murdena and Albert Marshall are wife and husband, respectively, from the Mi'kmaw community of Eskasoni in Unama'ki – Cape Breton. Both are much loved and highly respected Elders within the Mi'kmaw Nation. They have raised seven children and provide a welcome and nurturing home for many more within their extended family.

We are recommending this wife-husband team because of the long developing and ever growing, interconnective nature of their achievement. Murdena and Albert have worked side-by-side to promote and revitalize Mi'kmaw culture, for young and old alike. And, they work tirelessly to promote cross-cultural understandings and healing; in this capacity they frequently speak at home in Atlantic Canada, and elsewhere across the country, and have also done so internationally. Their activities in these regards are readily apparent in the letters of support we have gathered for their nomination, as well as in their cv's which are also appended to our nomination. Murdena and Albert have become especially well known in recent years for their encouragement of culture and education via the guiding principle that they call “Two-Eyed Seeing” which is learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous peoples' knowledges and ways of knowing and from the other eye with the strengths of the mainstream's knowledges and ways of knowing ... and to using these together, for the benefit of all. Two-Eyed Seeing has immense importance for all peoples and is now spreading across Canada; for example, it is known to have been mentioned recently by Nobel Prize nominee Sheila Watt-Cloutier who lives in Iqaluit, Nunavut, and it is being highlighted as a desirable approach by forestry officials within the British Columbia Government and the BC First Nations' Forestry Council as they seek new ways to work together.

We provide below brief biographical information for each of Murdena and Albert, and would ask that the Tributes Committee peruse the many appended letters and the attached cv's as these provide the broad and deep basis for our nomination of Murdena and Albert as exceptionally worthy candidates for Honorary Doctorates.

*note: the 24 support letters and
2 cv's not included herein*

Murdena Marshall is a Spiritual Leader for the Mi'kmaw Sante' Mawio'mi (Grand Council of the Mi'kmaw Nation). She was born in 1942 in Wycocomagh, Cape Breton, and was only eight years old when her Mother died in childbirth. Following cultural tradition, she went to live with her maternal grandparents although her Grandmother died shortly thereafter. Thus, it was her Grandfather, aunts, and uncles who raised her. Murdena credits her wonderful Grandfather, the late Gabriel Sylliboy and the first elected chief of the Mi'kmaw Grand Council, with helping her to learn to navigate the two worlds in which she found herself – that of her Mi'kmaw people and that of the non-native. Even though he could not read, write, or speak in English he insisted that Murdena and all his grandchildren be formally educated in English while he and others ensured that Murdena was immersed in her Mi'kmaw language and culture. Thus, Murdena attended Indian Day School in Eskasoni to Grade 8, then Grades 9 and 10 at Catholic Middle School in Arichat, and Grades 11 and 12 at St. Joseph's Residential Convent School for Girls in Mabou. At St. Joseph's, Murdena and the other nine or ten Mi'kmaw girls found themselves greatly outnumbered by the 90 or so non-native Catholic girls. Murdena “did her time there” but did not complete her final year. Instead, she found full time employment in marriage to Albert Marshall of Eskasoni and motherhood to the six children who quickly arrived. Murdena indicates that the loss of her young son Tommy in 1978 changed her spiritually, emotionally, and physically. She decided to become a teacher so that she could pursue her quest for knowledge and serve her Mi'kmaw community. She took courses from the Nova Scotia Teachers College in Truro and in 1984 graduated from the University of New Brunswick with a Bachelor of Education degree. She also has a Certificate in Mi'kmaw Immersion from St. Thomas University. Murdena taught in community for a while and then went to Harvard University where she completed a Master of Education degree. She again worked in education in community for a period before joining the faculty at the University College of Cape Breton, as Cape Breton University was called at the time. Murdena played a key role in developmentally enhancing the Mi'kmaw Studies program and in teaching in it for many years; she saw the program grow from only a few students to over 200. In the 1990's Murdena was instrumental in helping propose the university's radically innovative and globally unique Integrative Science program that enables students to learn Indigenous and mainstream sciences side by side as science courses in a science degree. While this new program was threading its way through institutional inquisitional channels, Murdena's health began to fail. She retired from the university as an Associate Professor of Mi'kmaw Studies in the late 1990s.

Murdena has a vast knowledge of the Mi'kmaw language and is considered a traditional knowledge expert. She has devoted her life to the promotion and preservation of the Mi'kmaw culture, including language, spirituality, education, and science. She received the Outstanding Leadership Award from Eskasoni First Nation in 1989 and a National Aboriginal Role Model Award in 1996. On Treaty Day (October 2) 2006, she was awarded the Grand Chief Donald Marshall Senior Memorial Elder Award by Nova Scotia Premier Rodney MacDonald. Although now “retired”, Murdena has been actively involved in many organizations and events, as for example the National Aboriginal Health Organization, the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources, the Elders' Advisory Group of the Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre, the Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counseling Association, the Integrative Science program at Cape Breton University, and workshops throughout Atlantic Canada. Murdena also participates in many conferences of national and international stature as an animated speaker articulating her areas of expertise. Through storytelling Murdena shares the wisdom and understandings that the Mi'kmaw people have for the land and water, plants and animals, and all beings that make up the world around us.

Albert Marshall is the “designated voice” for the Mi’kmaw Elders of Unama’ki. He was born in 1938, in Eskasoni, Cape Breton. As a young boy, he was taken away from his family and spent many years as an inmate of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School on the mainland of Nova Scotia. Albert today seldom talks about these many painful, traumatic years of his childhood and teenage life. Although he possesses no initials after his name, he is a graduate of the “University of Life” and is a revered spiritual leader among both First Nation and non-native communities. He is a much sought after speaker locally, nationally, and internationally, as a specialist in collaborative initiatives and as a skilled and passionate ambassador for the Mi’kmaw culture and its “living knowledge”. He, along with his wife Murdena, was instrumental in the development of the aforementioned radically innovative and globally unique Integrative Science program at Cape Breton University in the mid 1990’s and today is both a strong advocate of its vision and an active participant in its many and increasingly numerous dimensions. It was Albert who first brought forward “Two-Eyed Seeing” as a guiding principle for Integrative Science and other endeavours where different cultural perspectives are attempting to walk and talk together. Albert suggests that Two-Eyed Seeing has emerged in Atlantic Canada, i.e. the traditional territory of the Mi’kmaw Nation, because Mi’kmaw people are the Aboriginal people of North America who have had the longest experience of living side-by-side with the new comers from Europe. Albert, with his wife Murdena, has also developed KECCA (Knowledge Education & Culture Consultant Associates) to better enable their work which seeks the preservation, understanding, and promotion of cultural beliefs and practices among all Mi’kmaw communities, and encourages a strong future for the Mi’kmaw Nation and its peoples.

Albert is a passionate advocate of cross-cultural understandings and healing, and of our human responsibilities to care for all creatures and our Earth Mother. He sits on various committees that develop and guide collaborative initiatives and understandings in natural resource management or that serve First Nations’ governance issues, or that otherwise work towards ethical environmental, social and economic practices. He is also a key participant in diverse efforts in these regards across Canada and beyond.

Albert’s passion for cross cultural understandings and healing is particularly remarkable in view of the cultural, spiritual, social, and economic devastation suffered by his First Nation community of Eskasoni as a result of both the Indian Residential School policy of the Government of Canada (that saw many Aboriginal children removed from their families and sent far away to attend school) and the “centralization policy” of the Government of Nova Scotia (that forced many Mi’kmaw people living throughout the province to abandon their homes and become “centralized” in government designated locations). As mentioned, Albert was an inmate of the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, for much of his childhood and teenage years. He was profoundly affected by this experience and it has led him on a lifelong quest to connect with and understand both the culture he was removed from, and the culture he was forced into ... and to help these cultures find ways to live in mutual respect of each other’s strengths and ways.