

I was twenty-five the first time I went to Kateri. I've been in and out of Kateri, but they never said no. Kate [Kateri's Director] said she would never give up on me.

What was different this time was that I found out I have cancer. When I found out I thought well, I'm going out with a bang, so I continued to party and get high. That got me put in the hospital. When I came to I was hooked up to all these machines. My doctor said, "You're not going to leave here. You're going to die here." I said, "You're not the Creator, you can't make that decision about life." And he said, "Neither are you, so why are you trying to end yours?"

Kateri was so supportive. I've been clean almost two years. The Creator saw fit to give me one last chance. My cancer is still at stage three.

I have been an active cocaine user since the age of twelve, and also at that age, heroin. I was a student at St. Stephen's when there was an elementary school. The nuns didn't know what was going on; my mom had no clue. I spent so much money in my life. I smoked up my house. Cars, boats, motorcycles. Both of my parents worked hard all their lives and I smoked up my inheritance.

In the past two years I've finished school and now I work as a family advocate against domestic violence. I take care of myself now. I eat better, I go to sweat lodges. I just got back from Sundance in Pipestone where they presented me with an eagle feather and a pipe for healing.

My daughter's boys live with me because she's incarcerated. When I think back...I'm the one who put her in prison. I mean, she did it by her actions, but I wasn't the kind of mother who said selling drugs wasn't OK.

I really stay on top of the boys. I talk to them all the time about drugs and drinking. And I tell them stories. My grandmother raised me traditionally and she used to share the traditional stories with me. Those are the stories I share with my grandchildren. I don't want my legacy to be one of drug abuse and addiction.

# Leona



*St. Stephen's **Kateri Residence** is a residential place of healing for American Indian women who have experienced addiction, homelessness, domestic abuse, and other challenges.*



Leona and grandsons, Daniel and Trinidad; receiving a certificate of accomplishment from Kateri staff; holding a pipestone pipe in her living room.

Opposite page: Daniel