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From the age of nine on, much of Marie's schooling was done in the south. However, with the end of each school year, Marie would return home to Iqaluit for the summer. "Iqaluit has always been my home, even when I lived in Quebec," says Marie.

After graduating high school and CEGEP in Quebec, Marie decided to continue with her post-secondary education in the south and received her Bachelor of Arts (BA) in International Studies and Modern Languages at Laval University. "I had to leave Nunavut to attend school. Many Nunavummiut have to leave to attend post-secondary school and that's not easy or right. If you want to go to university or college, you sacrifice a lot; you are disconnected from your language, from your family, food, culture and traditions. For me, that was a lot to give up for my education; but in the end, it was so worth it. More importantly, I am so happy to be back and working in Iqaluit."

Between school years, Marie made the summer pilgrimage back to Iqaluit. Every year as fall approached, she found herself sad to have to leave to return to school. "I would always feel really sad to leave my family and culture behind," says Marie. "I would spend much of September and October feeling homesick."

Marie does credit her French family in the south for providing her with lots of support. "I feel for those who do not have any support. I was so lucky to have family connections in the south and that's what helped me succeed," says Marie.



When in Iqaluit during the summer months, Marie would often work at the family-run hardware store and lumber yard. "It was 53 hours a week and hard work, but I was happy to help my family," says Marie. However, in 2005, after completing her BA, she accepted a limited term position as an administrative assistant in the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs (EIA) with the Government of Nunavut. Marie saw this as an opportunity to experience living in Iqaluit full time for at least a year. "It wasn't necessarily a big career move, but it was my first office job/government job. I was very excited to be able to live and work in Iqaluit after so long," says Marie.

Towards the end of her limited term at EIA, her supervisor pointed out a two-week program on international Indigenous rights offered in Greenland over the summer of 2006. Marie was instantly interested in the topics and applied. She was accepted and it was this experience that changed her life; it was the spring-board for her career as a lawyer.

Many of the program's professors were Indigenous lawyers and Marie found herself in awe of how passionate they were. Inspired by them, she knew she wanted to advocate for Indigenous rights. "I asked one of the professors about the idea of either becoming a lawyer or just taking law-related courses to have a general understanding of the law," recalls Marie. "What he said made things instantly clear to me. He said 'You can be a dog that barks, or a dog that bites. As a lawyer you will be equipped to actually do something.' That stuck with me, and I from there I knew what I wanted to do."

Prior to the international Indigenous rights program, Marie shares that she didn't know much about the legal profession. Nor did she really know any lawyers at the time. "I was clueless on how to become a lawyer and what was involved."

By the time Marie completed the program in Greenland, it was late in the summer of 2006 – too late for her to apply to law

school. She wasn't ready to give up that easily. She quickly found another option that would help move her closer to her new goal – apply to the law certificate program which was still taking applications for the fall of 2006 at Laval University. For Marie, it was a good way to start studying law, try it out and see if she liked it. And like it she did! Marie then enrolled into, and successfully completed, the civil law degree program (LL.B.) at Laval University the following semester.

Because her goal was to work as a lawyer in Nunavut, she decided to add an additional year of schooling to attend the University of Ottawa's National Program in Common Law. There, she obtained her Juris Doctor degree.

Marie recounts the additional challenges of being an Inuk attending university. "There were only three Inuit in my university in Quebec. I remember the feeling of being in a room and being the only Indigenous person in general, let alone Inuk," says Marie. "It was very hard most of the time. I kept my head down and ploughed through my work. I had a goal, and nothing was going to stand

in my way." While attending her studies, Marie found comradery and a sense of belonging with the Indigenous Students Association at Laval as well as the Indigenous Law Students Association at the University of Ottawa.

After completing her law studies, Marie articulated with Nelligan O'Brien Payne LLP in Ottawa for 10 months. She chose that law firm in part because they represented Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) in their lawsuit against the federal government for not implementing the land claims agreement (Nunavut Agreement). For Marie, it was important to her to work for an organization that helped her connect to where she was from as much as possible while living in the south.

Marie was called to the Ontario Bar in 2013. That same year, she was also called to the Bar in Nunavut.

"I have so much respect for my profession. It is not easy. Writing the Ontario Bar exams was really difficult. Many don't succeed the first time, I didn't," says Marie. The experience taught her to persevere. "I wasn't necessarily an A+ student and I had to put in the

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effort. I knew passing the Bar was the only thing that stood between me becoming a lawyer and realizing my dream." Marie was determined and eventually passed the exams. "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger," she laughs. Marie also acknowledged the fact that Inuit are extremely underrepresented as lawyers. "I am very proud of my accomplishments as a female Inuk lawyer."

After moving back home, in the fall of 2013, Marie started with NTI as in-house legal counsel. For her, it was a dream job and a chance to return home. "I saw this as an opportunity to represent all Inuit in Nunavut; I wasn't interested in having individual clients," says Marie. For her, the position with NTI allowed her to be 'the dog who bites', as her previous professor pointed out. She saw this as an opportunity to fight for Inuit. As in-house legal counsel, she could be used as a tool for her people and advocate for the Inuit of Nunavut through law. "I am so very grateful for this opportunity."

A year ago Marie became Managing Legal Counsel for NTI and for her, the experience has been life changing. "I now have managerial responsibilities and am part of discussions at the director's level – I'm advising senior leaders," says Marie. "I am learning so much every day about the work, but I am also learning a lot about myself."

Although Marie considers herself as someone who is still growing personally and professionally, she is gaining confidence day by day. She does not discount her years of experience and is using her position to mentor, coach and support those who have chosen to pursue a legal career like she did.

2020 RECIPIENT OF THE HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE NEIL SHARKEY VOLUNTEER AWARD

The Honourable Mr. Justice Sharkey Volunteer Service Award recognizes a member of the Law Society of Nunavut (LSN) who demonstrates outstanding dedication, innovation or results in his or her ongoing involvement with the LSN

Previously known as the Volunteer Service Award, in 2009, the LSN Executive renamed the "Volunteer Service Award" to the "Honourable Mr. Justice Neil Sharkey Volunteer Service Award" to honor Justice Neil Sharkey for his many years of volunteer commitment, which exemplifies those elements.

The 2020 recipient of the Honourable Justice Sharkey Volunteer Award was Marie Belleau for her outstanding dedication, innovation, and results through her involvement with the Nunavut Law Foundation.

Marie was a Director of the Law Foundation from 2014 to 2020. After getting her feet wet, Marie stepped up to be the Chairperson from August 2017 until June 2020. For Marie, she has always been interested in volunteering in general and saw many calls for volunteers within the legal community. "As an Inuk lawyer, I felt that I had a responsibility to volunteer and do what I could to contribute to the legal profession," says Marie.

"There are so few Inuit lawyers. When you don't see yourself in your profession, you can easily feel like you don't belong, like there is a disconnect in the profession. For many years I was the only Inuk in the room," says Marie. "If me as an Inuk lawyer, if I put myself out

