

Storytelling in the Spirit of Wise Woman:  
Experiences of Kuper Island Residential School

by

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B.S.W., University of Victoria, 1993

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

in the Faculty of Human and Social Development

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0-612-52810-3

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### ABSTRACT

This thesis, or journey, looks at the experiences and shares the stories of three former students of Kuper Island Residential School (Kuper Island, BC). Storytelling is the methodology utilized in this research. The joys and struggles of storytelling are identified, as storytelling traditionally was, and still is, a teaching tool. Included are an overview of traditional First Nations education, the development of residential school policy, and the impact on First Nations children of a policy geared to cultural genocide. The Medicine Wheel, three Coast Salish masks, and a borrowed mask are used to analyse the impact of residential school on former students. Traditional legends are used to explore the lives of the storytellers. Included is the development of “characters” through trauma, humiliation, abuses and isolation from family, community, and culture. Wise Woman offers us an understanding of how First Nations people can begin to heal and move away from the residential school experience and return to our traditional way of life – Snuw’uy’ul.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Rarely in our lives, do we embark on a journey and receive more gifts than we have given. I would like to acknowledge and thank all of those special people who bestowed upon me gifts. First, to the storytellers: The'tha'le'yah, Seletze and La'hal'uwits – without each of you this thesis would not be possible. For the gift of your story -- Hy'chka. And, to the storytellers' families who supported all of us through this journey. To the four most important men in my life: Pahyahutssen, Gigalis, Qwul'the'lum, and Thi'ya'lat'sih – for your continued love, support and patience – Hy'chka. To my family and friends for the various roles you played in the creation of this document, specifically, Mom, Dad, Leslie Brown, Gord Bruyere, Lindsay Desjarlais, Aunty Helen Kamai, Alex Nelson, Chief Rick Thomas, Art Thompson, and Christine Welsh. Last, but not least, to my Nation, Lyackson for your continued support. My hands go up to each of you! Hy'chka

## DEDICATION

Over the process of working on this thesis our families lost five members, all of who attended Kuper Island Residential School, to them, I dedicate this thesis:

Raphael Johnnie

Emerson Thomas

Thi'ya'lat'sih (Phillip Clifford Thomas)

Randy Thomas

Rodney Thomas

Their lives and stories will always be remembered and shared.

To the “Wyse” Women who have touched my life and shared teachings, I dedicate this thesis. Grama Lavina Prest (nee Wyse), Amma Val Josephson, and Nana Mary Moody (nee Albany). To all the Grandmothers, Grandfathers, and Ancestors in the spirit world for their teachings, guidance and direction, I dedicate this thesis.

## **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION: WHERE THE JOURNEY BEGINS**

Years ago when I began my undergraduate degree, I was taking an English course at Camosun College. As an option for our final assignment, I had chosen to interview someone with an issue and write a paper based on that interview. My friend Alex Nelson was always making reference to residential school and I never really understood what he meant. So, what better topic to choose than one I knew nothing about? I phoned Alex and asked him if he would allow me to interview him about residential school. Alex agreed.

Alex's story devastated me. He shared his experiences at St. Michael's Residential School in Alert Bay. Today, I cannot remember the precise details of his story, but a few things remain crystal clear. Alex remembered hearing that his Mother had passed away and was to be buried in Alert Bay. Even though St. Mike's was located in Alert Bay, Alex was not allowed to attend the funeral. He also remembers, one summer, staring out the third floor window watching the fishing boats as they pulled out of the harbour heading for Kingcome Inlet -- his hometown. As his mother was deceased, he was not allowed to return home. He remembers sitting on the floor crying as the boats disappeared into the distance. How he longed to go home, to see his family, and to not be in this place.

After the interview, I began writing my assignment. I was in a frenzy, typing like a mad woman, not able to stop. I now realize the frenzy was disbelief. How is it that this incredibly important person was sent to a place like this? How is it that I, now pursuing my undergraduate degree knew nothing about these places? Why?

Seeking the answers to these questions began what seems like a lifelong journey to understand residential schools. What was most surprising for me was that when I went to research residential school, expecting to find nothing or very little, I found that this experience was well documented. I was left with more questions. Given the fact that I was able to find all this information, why did I know nothing about residential schools?

This thesis, or journey, provides me with the opportunity to explore residential school. In this journey, I take a look at the experiences of three former Kuper Island Residential School students.

Chapter two provides an overview of residential school literature. This chapter includes a summary of traditional First Nations education and the development of residential school policy. A pivotal report that influenced the development of residential school policy was the Davin Report. The Davin Report of 1879 recommended the need for “aggressive civilization.” As not all First Nations families willingly sent their children, in 1920 the *Indian Act* was amended to make attendance to residential schools compulsory. Jointly, the Churches and the Government launched a plan of cultural genocide. With assimilation as the goal of residential schools, it was believed that the staff needed to be very authoritarian in order to break down First Nations children’s “ways of knowing.” This chapter concludes with a look at the impact, on First Nations children, of a policy geared to cultural genocide.

Chapter three discusses the use of storytelling as a methodology. This chapter begins by discussing the tradition of storytelling for First Nations people. Storytelling played a vital and pivotal role in nurturing and educating the youth. In this chapter I discuss how, as a First Nations woman, storytelling allowed me to honour and respect our

Ancestors. In order to “authentically” represent the voices of storytellers, the storytelling process needs to be very collaborative. In this chapter I share the struggles and joys of storytelling. Learning to really “listen” to story and then replicate “voice” onto paper is one struggle that is identified. As well, I discuss the struggles that I, as the researcher, experienced in this research. These struggles include researching in your own community, positioning yourself in your research, ethics of asking people to share story, and protecting yourself while researching.

Chapters four, five and six are the experiences of residential school as told by three storytellers who attended Kuper Island Residential School. All of the storytellers are from the Coast Salish Nation on Vancouver Island. Chapter four is The'tha'le'yah's story. Belvie is a member of the Halalt First Nation. Chapter five is Seletze's story. Delmar is a member of the Cowichan Tribes. Chapter six is La'hal'uwitz's story. Herman is a member of the Halalt First Nation. The storytellers have edited the stories presented.

Chapter seven, Characters and Masks, begins to analyse the development of “characters” and loss of self through trauma, humiliation, abuse, and isolation from family and community. I present a brief play “Breaking the Spirits” to set the stage. The intent of the play is to offer a way to make sense of the stories and the development of characters.

In this chapter I use the teachings of the Medicine Wheel, three Coast Salish Masks and one borrowed mask to analyse the residential school experience. Wild Woman represents the time prior to residential school when children were with their families. The teachings of Wild Woman are intended to teach and protect children. The Devil has been chosen to represent the time students were in residence. The goal of residential school

policy was assimilation; as such we could not find a traditional mask that represented this immoral process. The Devil is chosen to represent the residential experience. Raven represents the time that students left residential school and were “acting out characters.” Raven, as trickster, represents many things; he is an educator and a protector. During this time, former students needed protection, guidance and direction. Wise Woman symbolizes the time when former students “cast” aside their characters and begin healing. Wise Woman is our Grandmother and our Mother; she is a nurturer, a healer, a teacher, and a protector. Wise Woman enables students to speak about their experiences in residential school and begin their healing journey.

Chapter eight provides a brief reflection of this journey and offers us the teachings available through our traditional way of life – Snuw’uy’ul.

## CHAPTER TWO AN OVERVIEW OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL LITERATURE

### Traditional Education

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the First Nations people had a sophisticated education system reflective of their values and beliefs. When discussing traditional education, Miller (1996) states that First Nations people had an education system that he refers to as the 3 L's -- looking, listening and learning.

...the education system of the Aboriginal peoples of the northern portion of North America was admirably suited to the structures and values of those indigenous communities. It operated in a largely non-coercive way, relying on the use of models, illustration, stories, and warnings to convey the information that was considered essential. This approach reflected the high value that most Native societies place on individual autonomy and avoidance of the use of force with members of the community (p.35).

A key component of traditional education was storytelling. The storytellers were the elders -- the wise old ones who possess the most knowledge (Knockwood 1992, Haig-Brown, 1988, Miller, 1996). Through storytelling, family lineage, family values, and history were shared and passed down. The traditional ways substantially contrasted the values and beliefs that the Europeans would bring with them.

In northern hunting and gathering societies knowledge was not acquired passively from formal, external sources. Instead, children learned the skills they needed to survive, and the beliefs, values, and codes of behaviour appropriate to their society, by a trial-and-error process of observing and imitating adult behaviour and by listening to stories in which ethical concepts and morals were imbedded. These indirect, non-authoritarian educational techniques fostered in children a sense of individual autonomy and self-confidence. Consequently, the children who entered the Williams Lake residential school came from cultures which placed great emphasis on direct experiences as the best form of education (Furniss, 1992, p.48).

Residential schools did not encourage and support the traditional looking, listening, learning, approach to education. Assimilation to Western values, as the goal of these schools, would make very authoritarian structures necessary.

### ***The Davin Report***

The history of Canada has been constructed from the perspective of those Canadians of European ancestry. This eurocentric perspective of history which has permeated all aspects of education has led to the need for this curriculum to address the gap of history that includes the perspective of Aboriginal people's experience. It is impossible to understand the contemporary situation of Aboriginal people unless you have some understanding of how colonization affected their way of life. (Herbert, 1997, Ministry of Children & Families)

When the Europeans arrived in our country they brought with them their values and beliefs. As Herbert (1997) explains, "One of these beliefs was the concept of the superiority of the white race which was supported by Christian dogma that God created life in a hierarchy of existence whereby those of European descent were ranked on top with indigenous peoples ranked lower" (Ministry of Children & Families, 1997, p.25). The notion of European superiority and Aboriginal inferiority has been the key component of colonization.

In the 1620's, the Recollets, an order of Franciscans, realized that if they could convert young Huron boys into their order, they could attempt to convert the masses of Huron people. However, due to the Hurons' migratory lifestyle, the Recollets decided "none could ever succeed in converting them, unless they made them men before they made them Christians" (Miller, 1996, p. 39). In other words, the Recollets saw it necessary to 'civilize' the Hurons first, and then send them on their mission of converting Huron people into Christianity. At this time, the Recollets approached the Huron leaders

in an attempt to convince the Hurons to willingly send their young men to the school. This attempt failed. This was the first attempt at setting up residential school programs.

In 1879 the Federal Government of Canada appointed Nicholas Flood Davin to investigate the residential school system of the United States. The *Davin Report* of 1879 reported the need for “aggressive civilization” and recommended that residential school programs be instituted to reinforce the disintegration of families (Miller, 1996, p.101). Davin recommended the development of “off reserve” boarding schools that completely remove children from the “influence of the wigwam.” The development of “off-reserve” schools failed to meet the desired outcomes of Davin’s report as very few First Nations families willingly sent their children to residential school. Consequently, in 1920, the *Indian Act* was amended to include “compulsory attendance” of residential school. The object of this policy was assimilation. The intent of the *Indian Act* of 1920 was clearly to absorb the Indian into the dominant culture. York (1989), quotes Duncan Campbell Scott, deputy superintendent general of Indian affairs:

Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is not an Indian question and not an Indian department and that is the whole object of the Bill (p.23).

First Nations children were now legislated to leave their families and communities and placed in residential schools. The Indian Affairs policy of assimilation, or more specifically cultural genocide, began a path of cultural destruction and devastation for First Nations People.

### **The Residential School Experience**

As we can see, the issue of Indian Industrial schools (or residential schools as they are commonly called) is not a new one. These church-operated, government funded

schools, were in operation from approximately 1870 - 1980. The residential school system was a planned attempt by government to assimilate First Nations children. Assimilation was intended to resocialize the First Nations children into European values and beliefs. The process of resocialization involved a collaborative effort between the churches and the government to eliminate the familial and community connections, Aboriginal languages, traditions and beliefs of the First Nations students (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People [RCAP], 1996, p.337). To meet this end, "the Children of First Nations groups were removed, by law, from their homes and families and forced to attend schools operated by nonIndians" (Chrisjohn & Young, 1993,p.2). The intended implications of this plan is evident in the following statement:

"To kill the Indian in the child," the department aimed at severing the artery of culture that ran between generations and was the profound connection between parent and child sustaining family and community. In the end, at the point of final assimilation, "all the Indian there is in the race should be dead" (RCAP, 1996, p.365).

The government developed and launched a plan of cultural genocide. "The government and the churches ... explicitly agreed that the ultimate goal of education was the assimilation (the operative euphemism for cultural genocide) of First Nations peoples" (Chrisjohn and Young, 1993, p.2). By disconnecting children from their culture, tradition, family, and community they could directly attack their First Nations ontology (RCAP, 1996, p.341). The churches needed to break down the First Nations worldview and replace it with a Christian worldview, especially Christian morality.

The book replaced the spoken word; strangers from another culture replaced family, elders and community members as teachers; learning through memorization of text replaced learning through observation and by example. Education was no longer a lifelong, organized process, the responsibility of the entire community. In fact, the community was

portrayed by the new teachers as backward, ignorant and useless to the children (Residential School Update, March 1998, p.5).

Once in the residential school system, formal education was not the priority of assimilation as evident in the following quote:

...three quarters of the Indian pupils across Canada were in grades 1 to 3, receiving only a very basic literary education. Only three in every hundred went past grade 6. By comparison, well over half the children in provincial public schools in 1930 were...past grade 3; almost a third were beyond grade 6. The formal education being offered young Indians was not only separate but unequal to that provided their non-Indian contemporaries (Barman et al, *Indian Education in Canada*, vol 1 *The Legacy*, quoted in Milloy, 1999, p. 171).

Separation and isolation from family, community, culture and tradition were the crucial components of assimilation. Students were prohibited from and cruelly punished for speaking their First Nation's language. Children were only partially educated. Most of the time they were free labour -- running farms, doing laundry, cleaning, helping in the kitchen, etc. The use of child labour subsidized the cost of running the schools. The ever decreasing funding by the government made life for these students even more deplorable. Students were expected to do more work to keep the schools running at the same time that the resources for proper nutrition, food, health care, and safety decreased. At best, the conditions of the schools themselves were poor. It was known and well documented through various reports that the restraints under which these students lived contributed to their hunger, malnourishment, and disease.

As well as physiological neglect, discipline and abuse were documented. "Head office, regional, school and church files are replete, from early in the system's history, with incidents that violated the norms of the day" (RCAP, 1996, p.367). Discipline included strapping, head shaving, public humiliation, and food deprivation and was seen

as necessary to move children across the “cultural divide” (Haig-Brown 1988; Knockwood, 1992; Furniss, 1992; Miller, 1996).

In the vision of residential school, discipline was curriculum and punishment was pedagogy. Both were agents of civilization; they were indispensable to the “circle of civilized conditions” where the struggle to move children across the cultural divide would play itself out in each school situation, child by child, teacher by teacher (Miller, 1996, p.44).

Punishment for speaking their First Nations language and not English was thought of as a reinforcement to speak English (behavior modification). With the goal of assimilation, punishment for speaking the First Nations language was seen as acceptable and often necessary. The following are excerpts from Kuper Island Indian Industrial School punishment record books of student offences and punishments:

|             |                           |                               |
|-------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ?           | talking Indian            | work at recess                |
| Tobie #63   | runaway                   | arrested - 7 strokes of strap |
| Daniel #76  | truancy                   | 10 lashes                     |
| Jeanin #82  | stealing plums            | bread & water                 |
| Thomas #117 | stealing apples           | whipping & confinement        |
| Thomas #117 | skulking                  | whipping & confinement        |
| Thomas #117 | breaking into girls' dorm | expulsion (Public archives)   |

For the past few years the reality of residential schools has received elevated awareness. The increase of “sexual abuse” charges against residential school staff has contributed to this awareness. The deluge of recent charges verifies that the closure of these schools is not the end to the ‘problem.’

On January 7, 1998, the Government of Canada announced *Gathering Strength - Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* which calls for a renewed partnership with Aboriginal people based on recognizing past mistakes and injustices, the advancement of reconciliation, healing and renewal, and the building of a joint plan for the future. The Government offered a Statement of Reconciliation which acknowledged its role in the development and administration of residential schools. The Government also said to the victims who suffered physical and sexual abuse at residential schools that it is deeply sorry (Backgrounder: The Residential Schools System, p. 1).

Former students live out daily the many abuses they experienced at the schools.

Chrisjohn and Young (1993) describe the psychosocial indicators of cultural disruption (which may be seen as successful indicators of the federal policy of assimilation) as including:

- ⇒ oppression
- ⇒ elevated level of suicide
- ⇒ family violence and breakdown
- ⇒ substance abuse
- ⇒ education failure

Other indicators of cultural disruption include:

- ⇒ addictions (Church and gambling)
- ⇒ fear of affection, lack of trust
- ⇒ unemployment
- ⇒ identity
- ⇒ eating disorders

Furniss (1992) refers to the impact of residential school as cultural alienation.

The cumulative effects of cultural alienation, dislocation from their traditional lands and the decline of subsistence practices in the face of an expanding forest industry, and marginalization from the mainstream economy finally had brought the Shuswap to a point of social and cultural crisis. (p. 114)

The impact of “cultural alienation” was characterized by the “high levels of unemployment and alarming rates of alcohol abuse, family breakdown, violence, and suicide” (p.114).

Miller (1996) discusses how the residential school system did not prepare students to be successful when leaving these institutions. “Many of the returned students wasted years and decades in alcohol, drugs, and violence before they managed to put their lives back together, confront the pain that had been driving them to harm themselves, and get on with the business of living” (p.8).

The residential school had disrupted Native families and individual identity. It had severed the ties that bound Native children to their families and communities, leaving semi-assimilated young people and shattered communities. In far too many cases it had driven its young products into destructive byways from which far too many never emerged alive (Miller, 1996, p.11).

Knockwood (1992) recalls viewing the charred remains of Shubie (the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia):

I thought about how many of my former school mates, like Leona, Hilda, and Maimie, had died premature deaths. I wondered how many were still alive and how they were doing, how well they were coping, and if they were still carrying the burden of the past on their shoulders like I was (p. 132).

This “burden of the past” was a piece of Canadian Federal policy. Chrisjohn and Young (1993) refer to the Canadian Federal policy as piece of “colonial machinery.” As long as the machinery is oiled, serviced, and maintained, the machine continues to move along and do exactly what it is meant to do. Randy Fred agrees, “colonization works that same way everywhere, its policies geared toward displacement and elimination of indigenous culture: genocide” (as quoted in Haig-Brown, 1988, p.15). The “colonial machine” worked exactly as designed.

...the Indian residential school system was an attempt to obliterate First Nations. That this was so is explicit in extant policy statements and other documents of the churches and the federal government ... (Chrisjohn & Young, 1993)

Residential school was an “attempt” to obliterate the First Nations, but the First Nations survived. Chuckryk and Miller (1996) state, “we need to communicate the idea that with oppression also comes strength and wisdom” (p.3). Paula Gunn Allen speaks to the strength of our people, specifically, the strength of women when she claims:

We survive war and conquest; we survive colonization, acculturation, assimilation; we survive beating, rape, starvation, mutilation, sterilization, abandonment, neglect, death of our children, our loved ones, destruction of our land, our homes, our past, and our future. We bond, we care, we fight, we teach, we nurse, we bear, we feed, we earn, we laugh, we love, we hang in there, no matter what (p. 190).

In spite of all we needed to do to simply survive, we heal. The healing process or the “business of living” must include relearning what it means to live, as well as how. Healing has, and will always be, a different process for each student. For some, healing meant returning to the traditional ways. For some it was returning and getting the education they needed to compete in mainstream society. For others, it was too late; they were unable to begin healing. And, yet for others they continue to struggle on a daily basis. They live out the abuses they experienced in these schools. They were beaten -- they are violent. They were sexually abused -- they are abusive. They were taken from their families -- they struggle with intimacy and being in a family. And the cycle repeats itself.

Barbara-Helen Hill in *Shaking the Rattle: Healing the Trauma of Colonization* states that “residential school, colonialism, government plans, and the churches” are the cause of internalized racism. “Internalized racism stems from colonialism and oppression” (p.45). Internalized racism is the belief that there is a hierarchy of humankind. This hierarchy begins with the white race being superior and First Nations or other minority (colours) being inferior. Eventually, the inferior races internalize this

belief, and they too begin to develop a hierarchy of their own. With themselves being superior and others of their own race and other coloured races being inferior. “They now treat each other and other peoples of colour the way our people are treated with contempt, indifference, and sometimes hatred” (Hill, 1995, p.45). Internalized racism has our communities in chaos. We have hereditary Chiefs against elected Chiefs, status against non-status, Metis against status, men against women, First Nations against Blacks -- we have disharmony.

Brenda Daily (1988) lists residential schools as one of “the present day factors which have impact on Native families which are experiencing family violence and child abuse” (p. 107). From the individual person who attended residential school, to their families, and through to their communities, residential schools have devastated our people. Now, we need to rebuild and heal.

Jeanette Armstrong (1996) claims that:

The placement of our children in residential schools has been the single most devastating factor in the breakdown of our society. It is at the core of the damage, beyond all the other mechanisms cleverly fashioned to subjugate, assimilate, and annihilate (p.x).

York (1989) believes that the impact of residential schools is still evident today. “The schools were the chief weapon of the missionaries and the federal bureaucrats in their systematic campaign to destroy Indian culture. Today, thousands of Indians still bear the scars of that war of attrition” (p.27).

Before we can move towards healing, the discussion must turn in the direction of devastation and scars -- the impact that residential school had on the students who attended them. The focus on impact will provide the context necessary to focus on healing. We must first acknowledge the pain before we can heal.

Prior to contact, First Nations people believed that their children were sacred. The children were the future. Geoffrey York (1989) shares a story in his book *The Dispossessed* by an old Indian Man. The story goes like this:

The Indians were on this land and the white people came from across the ocean. They came here in their boats, with their Bible, with their priests and missionaries. And they wanted to translate the Bible into Cree and they didn't know an equivalent word for 'sin'. So they went to the elders and asked the elders, Tell us, what is the equivalent of 'sin' in your language? The Indians didn't have a word for sin...Our children are our future, and when you shatter those lives, the lives of the children, then you shatter our future...That's the sin (p. 227).

Laurence Boucher

Residential school did exactly that -- shattered the lives of the children. In those institutions the children were physically, emotionally, mentally, sexually and spiritually abused. Duck, Ironstar, and Ricks (1997) believe that oppression and dominance have resulted in the "loss of dignity, honour, and strength to function in a purposeful healthy way." This inability to function in a well and healthy way, they refer to as the cycle of disability. This cycle of disability is a direct result of the oppression and dominance experienced in residential schools.

As listed earlier, Chrisjohn and Young list the psychosocial indicators of cultural disruption. Not surprisingly, this list of indicators is very similar to indicators of children witnessing violence, physical neglect, physical abuse and characteristics of sexual abuse victims. In *The Spirit Weeps*, Martens (1988) lists the psychological characteristics of child abuse as:

- ⇒ low self esteem
- ⇒ guilt
- ⇒ pseudomaturity

- ⇒ low tolerance for family tension
- ⇒ alienation from the family
- ⇒ emotional needs towards the father offender
- ⇒ inability to trust
- ⇒ loneliness
- ⇒ depression
- ⇒ anger & aggression
- ⇒ phobias

behavioural symptoms as:

- ⇒ sudden changes in behaviour
- ⇒ eating & sleeping disorders
- ⇒ regressive or infantile behaviors
- ⇒ extreme behavior related to personal hygiene
- ⇒ excessive concern about night-time security
- ⇒ withdrawal
- ⇒ alcohol & drug abuse
- ⇒ sexual promiscuity
- ⇒ withdrawn from friendships
- ⇒ running away
- ⇒ inappropriate peer relationships
- ⇒ lying
- ⇒ school related problems
- ⇒ poor attention span

- ⇒ truancy
- ⇒ hostile behaviour
- ⇒ inappropriate sexual knowledge and/or play
- ⇒ sexual abuse of others/sadistic or self-abusive behaviour
- ⇒ suicide

The unquestionable similarities of child sexual abuse and cultural disruption point to the extent of abuse that these young people experienced in residential school. There are many types of abuse and equally as many levels. The impact on each person will vary even under the same circumstances. However, when you combine the various forms of abuse with the multiplicity of levels, you most definitely will create pain.

When we abuse someone, we generate fear, anger, hopelessness, confusion, guilt, and shame. These wounded individuals become victims and are walking, wounded children inside anger, fear-riddled adults. They are men and women void of any connection to their source of creation, and as the loneliness deepens their victimhood strengthens. That is spiritual abuse, loss of connection to the Creator and the self.

What happens when you are spiritually abused? What happens when you lose a connection to your self? How do you heal? All the students who were taken from their families and communities and placed in residential schools were spiritually abused.

Once again I found myself in this place with more questions than answers. I wondered about the students that went to Kuper Island Industrial School. What happened to their spirits? I was particularly interested in this residence as it is located on Kuper Island, which is in the heart of Coast Salish Territory. As a Coast Salish person, I wondered about the many family members that had attended that particular institution. I wondered, what are their stories?

As well, I wondered, what happened to the young people when they left those places? One of the most devastating indicators of cultural disruption, cultural alienation, or assimilation has been the loss of identity. Miller (1996), Haig-Brown (1988), and Knockwood (1992) all discuss the “identity” issue for students upon leaving the schools. “Nearly everyone had many difficulties when they left the school finding an identity and a place in the world” (Knockwood, 1992, p.156). The residential school experience destroyed not only their cultural identity, but also their personal identity. Knockwood quotes in her book a former student who said he felt like a “born again savage” when leaving the school. Or, as a student that Haig-Brown (1988) interviewed states, he felt like a truly dumb Indian. What these students are referring to is the fact that residential school failed to equip First Nations students with an adequate education while at the same time successfully stripped them of their traditional way of knowing -- their language and culture. They did not possess the skills to assimilate in the mainstream society and now had lost the language, culture and tradition of their people. Many students did not know where, or if, they fit. How do you heal from all the abuse experienced in residential school – the spiritual, emotional, physical, and/or mental abuse? How do you reconnect with your self?

To support my learning journey and begin to research the answers to the above questions I decided to listen to stories and explore “identity” for students who previously attended residential school.

The topic areas for my research are as follows:

- 1. What are the stories of former Kuper Island Indian Industrial School students?**
- 2. How do former Kuper Island Indian Industrial School students create an identity upon leaving these institutions?**

The following chapter discusses storytelling as methodology. Storytelling allows me to hear the stories while at the same time exploring the creation of identity.

## CHAPTER THREE STORYTELLING AS METHODOLOGY

### Voices of the Grandmothers

#### Nana

*When I was just a young girl we used to live right over there, Nana pointed to the land on the downtown side of the Ellice St. Bridge. One Christmas Eve, my Mother, Father, brothers and sisters were going to my Uncle's place for dinner. It had snowed so much that day that it seemed like it took us hours to get to their place. They lived down where Uncle's Johnny's place is now. You know, it used to snow lots in those days, not like now.*

#### Gramma

*I am so proud that you are practicing some of our old ways, my Grama said. What is Dylan's name? "Qwulthelum" I told Gram. And Paul, what is his name? "Pahyahutssen" Did they have the Sxwaixwe dancers there? "No Grama they didn't." Our family is from the masked dance you know. I remember years ago when I was young when we went to the winter dances, sometimes there would be twenty or more dancers there. Someone told us once that one of my Uncle's masks was in a museum in Europe or England or someplace like that.*

#### Amma

*"Amma, why don't you just throw out those old socks?" Oh, because that would be such a waste, the tops of the socks are perfectly fine, only the feet need to be replaced. I have wool and know how to knit, why throw the whole sock away?*

What is in a story? Are these simply words? Grandmothers reminiscing? Or are they rich with teachings?

In Nana's story she points to land where she was raised. Identifying this land as traditional Songhees territory is crucial as the Songhees Band is currently negotiating their treaty through the BC Treaty Commission. The land that Nana identified is not a part of the reserve today.

Gram's story tells me the cultural and traditional rights that I inherited through my family. I have the inherent right to have Sxwaixwe, or masked dancers, at all dances our family hosts. This is our most sacred ceremony that is passed down through familial rights.

Amma's story is about being conservative and taking, using, throwing out only what is necessary. She taught me about taking care of Mother Earth long before anyone else. As well, she taught me about recycling and composting before these things were enforced.

These stories include important teachings that pass down historical facts, share culture and traditions, and life lessons. Traditionally, stories and storytelling were used for the same reasons, to teach values, beliefs, morals, history, and life skills. For my research I have chosen to use the traditional teaching tool of my People and "story tell."

First Nations people come from an oral society. I feel by using this methodology that I honour my Ancestors and the traditions of our People. Storytelling compels me to listen and document stories "in the spirit" of the Ancestors. In other words, I feel that my methodology forces me to remember our Ancestors, traditions and culture throughout the entire process of this research. The research and the stories became more than a project to

complete my academic requirements for a thesis; the research was linked to the past, the present and the future.

Through a series of extensive interviews I recorded and documented the life stories of three former Kuper Island Indian Industrial School students. Storytelling allows storytellers to use their own voices and tell their own stories in their own terms.

Cruikshank (1990) states that her work, *Life Lived Like a Story*, is “based on the premise that life-history investigation provides a model for research” (p. 1). In the past, life stories have been viewed as supplementary material to support other forms of research.

However, as Cruickshank states, this view is changing. And this view must change. All that is written is someone’s interpretation of what happened. In her book *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory*, Cruickshank (1998)

questions the voices of history by asking, whose voices are included and whose are left out?

Contesting the legitimacy of the dominant discourse is not new, of course. Certainly a concern that many voices are systematically erased from written history has been recognized for a long time now in northern aboriginal communities. As feminists have pointed out, enlarging discourse involves much more than adding and stirring in additional voices, there are fundamental methodological problems involved in rethinking familiar genres of historical narratives (p. 116).

Storytelling or oral histories are seen as subjective and therefore biased. In some communities there was little, if any, written records. How are these communities to then have their histories recorded? Why is it that their only means of recording histories, orally, can only be seen as a way to complement another “legitimate” research methodology? As all that is written is subjective, why then is storytelling seen only as “supplementary.” Storytelling allows for the ‘other’, or those voices that have been

erased, to be included in the dominant discourse. Storytelling has the ability to fill the gaps in the present documentation of the lives of First Nations people.

Storytelling provides an opportunity for First Nations to document their histories and thus become a part of the written record. In other words, storytelling “revises” history by naming and including their experience. Life stories “take seriously what people say about their lives rather than treating their words simply as an illustration of some other process” (Cruikshank, 1990, p. 1). Furniss (1992), in *Victims of Benevolence: The dark legacy of the Williams Lake Residential School*, states that “it is critical for these and other stories to continue to be told, and to be heard with an open heart and mind, if we are to prevent the tragedies of history from being repeated” (p. 120). When we listen with open hearts and open minds, we respect and honour the storytellers. I find this process incredibly comforting and respectful. I believe that storytelling respected and honoured our People while simultaneously documenting their reality in residential school.

Gluck and Patai (1991) describe oral histories as a “way of recovering the voices of suppressed groups” (p. 9). Of particular value is the ability of life stories to share a perspective that is in conflict with another perspective. The residential school perspective from the voices of those who attended these institutions is in conflict with the perspective of residential school from the dominant society (Gluck & Patai, 1991, p. 11). This conflict is highlighted these days as many groups of former residential school students seek justice from the Church and Canada for the injustices committed in those institutions.

Storytelling has a holistic nature. Oral histories or life stories “generally range over a wide range of topics, perhaps the person’s life from birth to the present”

(Reinharz, 1992, p. 130). With the process of telling the stories being in the hands of the storytellers, the storytellers had the opportunity to include in their stories that which they wish, that which they perceive as important, that which they want documented.

Cruikshank (1998) refers to this process as the “open ended possibilities” of oral history (p.72).

Storytelling provides an opportunity for the uncovering of a new way of knowing. As the true reality of residential school is only beginning to be uncovered, life histories have the ability to generate new ideas about this reality (Gluck & Patai, 1991; Yow, 1994). Gluck and Patai (1991) state “oral history interviews provide an invaluable means of generating new insights about women’s experiences of themselves in their world” (p. 11). I too see life histories as providing an opportunity for the generation of new insights into the experiences of First Nations students at residential schools.

Yow (1994) believes that oral histories, as a form of qualitative research, allow the researcher to “learn about a way of life by studying the people who live it and asking them how they think about their experience” (p.7). This is what I did. I listened and learned from three students who attended Kuper Island Indian Industrial School, about their experience in that institute.

### **Interviewing**

The stories were collected through a series of intensive interviews over a period of approximately one year. The interviews were more dialogic in nature than they were “interviews.” By this I mean that each interview was more storytelling and interactive than questions and answers. The interviews actually came to be only a part of the process. The relationship that transpired between the storytellers and myself became very fluid.

The storytellers would be in contact with me over the phone or in person at other times than the formally arranged interviews. This process is ongoing. The storytellers phone to share such things as “I just remembered another story,” or how they felt after the interviews, or how they felt when something else happened. I strongly believe that the relationship that developed was possible because of the nature of dialogue.

One of the most trenchant observations of contemporary anthropology is that meaning is not fixed, that it must be studied in practice - in the small interactions of everyday life. Such practice is more likely to emerge in dialogue than in a formal interview (Cruikshank, 1998, p.41).

Reinharz (1992) introduces “phenomenological interviewing,” as a method of research that some feminists engage in. This method of research is “intense” feminist interviewing (p.21). Interviewing as a method of data collection supported my research for a number of reasons. One reason is that “...interviewing offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher” (Reinharz, 1992, p.18). This reason was pivotal to my research because far too often, other people including researchers have spoken to First Nations people and interpreted the research from the researcher’s standpoint, not the participant’s. It was the essence of their life’s experience, including Kuper Island Indian Industrial School and the essence of the experience of healing that I strove to describe in my research -- essence from the storytellers’ experiences.

To facilitate the desire to capture the ‘essence of experience,’ I chose to conduct multiple dialogic interviews. The dialogues took place both at the storytellers’ homes and at my home. The storytellers were asked where they would like to talk. The interviews were tape-recorded and at the same time I would take brief notes. These notes often included my observations of the storyteller’s physical reactions to their process and of my

own reactions to the stories. After each interview, I would listen to the tapes and re-read my notes. If I did not understand something that was recorded, I would ask for clarification at the next interview. The process of clarification was brief, and then the interview would proceed in an unstructured nature. The use of informal conversational interviews, Patton (1980) claims, “is the phenomenological approach to interviewing” (p.198). Unstructured interviews are useful when the research has “no presuppositions about what of importance may be learned...” (Patton, 1980, p.198). It was crucial for me to enter my research with no presuppositions about the experience of attending Kuper Island Indian Industrial School. Maintaining maximum flexibility allowed the information to be gathered in whatever direction the conversation went. The unstructured dialogical nature of the interviews enhanced the collection of stories.

I found it an interesting process to watch how the storytellers set their boundaries. Initially, storytellers openly shared the ‘easy’ parts of their stories. That is, the parts of their story they felt safe to discuss. Then, at each of the subsequent interviews, the storytellers returned to where they left off, and set out on their journey into the more dangerous, less explored territory of their experience at Kuper. It was after the second interview that the fluid nature of the process began. After beginning the exploration into the unexplored territory, the storytellers were often inundated with memory, feelings, thoughts, etc. At this point I began to receive phone calls at home. On one occasion, a storyteller phoned and asked that I come over that evening and tape, he was ready to tell more stories. On many occasions I received phone calls saying things like “I remembered more about that time.” I strongly believe that the flexible nature of my research supported the storytellers during their process of sharing.

The participants were specifically selected. Patton, (1990) describes this process of selection as purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a method of selecting “information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p.169). Maxwell (1996) refers to purposeful sampling as a means of selecting “experts” in the area you will be researching (p.67). The Webster’s Dictionary states that an expert is “one with the special skill or knowledge representing mastery of a particular subject.” For the purposes of my research, I deliberately selected experts in the field of residential school. Specifically, the storytellers selected had experience directly from Kuper Island Indian Industrial School. These former students are the “experts” because they have special skills and knowledge about this experience. Friere (1970) claims, “who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society?” The oppressed are the experts of their experience. I found it necessary to use a very selective approach to sampling as I was only telling three stories.

As I stated above, I chose only three storytellers to participate in the research. Each of these storytellers was purposefully selected as they had all attended Kuper Island Indian Industrial School. I had originally wanted to interview four storytellers - two women and two men. As I began interviewing the first storyteller, it became abundantly clear that the interviews were going to be lengthy and complex. I made a decision to limit the storytellers to three. Now that I had limited my research to three and already had two participants, both males, the third storyteller I chose was a woman.

Prior to any interviewing or recording, I met with each of the storytellers individually and explained the purpose, nature and intended outcome of the research. We read through the informed consent form and they signed the form on that first meeting.

As I had chosen storytelling as my methodology, how the stories were perceived, documented and written was a crucial point. It was imperative that the stories remained the storytellers' stories and did not become mine. My story needed to remain separate and is included throughout this thesis.

Once I had completed all the interviews with a storyteller, I transcribed the tapes. The written transcription was given to the storyteller asking them to ensure that what was transcribed was accurate and to allow them to add, delete, or edit that was written. Only then did I begin to formulate stories. As I wrote the stories, these too were passed back and forth between the storytellers and myself.

The stories had to speak the voices of the storytellers, not mine. Again, as I wrote the stories, they were passed along to the storytellers to edit. As much as possible, throughout the story writing process, I used the words of the storytellers directly from the transcripts. Use of their words was an attempt to authentically present the voices of the storytellers. The storytellers edited the stories as presented.

The most important ethical issue that I identified prior to beginning my research was informed consent and confidentiality. Informed consent happened naturally as all the participants were asked to share their lived experience. There was no room for deception. The participants were involved in all stages of the research including data analysis.

Lipson (1993, p.336) lists the following guidelines for informed consent:

1. consent is informed and voluntary (sufficient information to make an informed decision)
2. the subject can withdraw without penalty at any time
3. benefits of the research outweigh the risks (benefits to society or the individual, preferably both)
4. the investigator is qualified to perform the research
5. all unnecessary risks should be eliminated

The informed consent included the above (see APPENDIX A).

Another ethical consideration was confidentiality. Two of the storytellers have already publicly identified themselves as having attended Kuper Island. They did not want to be anonymous for the purpose of this research. Lipson (1993) claims that researchers “should do everything in their power to ‘protect the physical, social and psychological welfare of informants and to honor their dignity and privacy’” (p.335), unless they want to be identified.

All three participants want their names attached to their stories. Originally, one storyteller wanted to use an alias name to protect himself and his family. However, once we had finished interviewing and writing the story he said he wanted to use his name - this was his story.

### **The Spirit of Ethics**

As I began my journey, I believed I was prepared. I had read every book, article, and story that I could get my hands on pertaining to residential school. I had talked to

nearly everyone I knew that had attended one of those institutions. But, I was far from prepared. I had no idea what obstacles lay ahead on my path.

Punch (1994), when discussing ethics, states “in essence, most concern revolves around issues of harm, consent, deception, privacy, and confidentiality of data (p. 89). While I certainly agree with these issues, what I experienced was not quite that simple.

### **Researching in my own community**

When I began my research, I thought about the ethics of confidentiality when working in a community where I am well known. What I failed to consider was the emotional impact of listening and sharing stories when the characters are family. Many of the stories included family members. At times, listening to stories of my family caused me a whole lot of sadness. Here I was, as a part of my thesis, learning about my family. Some of the stories were funny but some of the stories were so sad and tragic. And this was my family too.

However, had I not been there, I would not have had the opportunity to learn. Here I was in this day listening to stories of the past, about my ancestors, my grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, and cousins. I was given the gift of information that I otherwise would not have had.

### **Positioning myself in my research**

With the storytellers being family, there is little choice but to be a part of the research. Again, being so intimately involved in the research was emotionally draining. Interview after interview I would leave and be physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally exhausted. I thought that I would do an interview a day, but I never thought

about how much time would be needed between interviews to feel holistically strong enough and prepared for the next one.

One day I drove northward on Vancouver Island to do an interview with one of the storytellers. The night prior, I had interviewed for about five hours. I was thinking about the interview and I began to cry. I almost had to pull over because I had become completely overwhelmed with grief. I learned to pay particular attention to the time necessary to recover between interviews.

### **Ethics of asking people to share**

On the same day as that I was overcome with grief, I wondered about the ethics involved in asking people to participate in this research. I now knew how painful it was for the storytellers to relive those times. I had heard and saw the pain, agony, sadness and grief that the storytellers endured while sharing their stories. For the sake of research should I continue? Here I was falling apart but it was their lives. At this time I needed to consult as many people as I could. Should I continue? Was this ethical? Is there another way of doing this project?

My conflict was quickly resolved when two storytellers contacted me after really difficult interviews. Both of them shared the agony they had gone through with the interview but also the lightness they felt inside finally going back to that place and telling what really happened. So the research would go on.

### **Protecting self**

With the storytellers acknowledging the healing nature of sharing, I knew the stories would continue. But I also knew that I needed to be aware of my own Spirit. During one interview, the storyteller was sharing an incident of sexual abuse. As I sat and

listened, I started feeling physically numb. I had to consciously say to my Spirit, “you must move over here beside me.” This needed to be a mental process because the pain and grief of this story was too harsh for my soul. I would leave and pray to the Creator to make sense of this stuff that I was hearing and feeling.

### **Voices of the Ancestors**

What does it mean to say that I have chosen storytelling as my “research methodology” because it *honours* the *oral traditions of my Ancestors*?

For me, I have come to realize, more through my inability to write my thesis than through the writing of it, that this process must be real. I was unable to use words such as honour, tradition, and Ancestors only as token words that glorify or romanticize my academic process of producing a thesis. There was a point in the research where I was unable to write. I wondered, why? As I closely examined the work I realized that I had, on one hand, the stories -- the words that honoured the traditional teachings of my Ancestors. Then, on the other hand a traditional academic process was shaping the remainder of the thesis. I felt that I was not a part of either. The traditional academic words did not have life; they were not a part of me -- of my identity.

Wow, now it feels like I must go back a bit and share my own life’s struggle with identity. Throughout my life I have struggled with the whole notion of identity. As a child, I had no concept of ‘race.’ When our family left the isolated protection of Zeballos I was exposed, for the first time, to racism. Within a short time I learned the subtleties of this thing called racism. Being of mixed blood, Coast Salish through my Mother and Icelandic through my Father, I chose to identify with my Icelandic heritage and leave the First Nations stuff behind. For the most part this was relatively simple. I chose white

friends. The hard part was being caught (seen) with my Indian Mother or Grandmother. And, believe you me; I tried my best to limit these sightings. Eventually this would be my breaking point. How could I hide behind my Father's whiteness and deny my Mother's Indianness? Especially when Mom and Grama were my role models, mentors, and my life.

I could no longer live the contradictions. I was being disrespectful of my maternal lineage. I would have to revisit my Indianness. That I did. Unfortunately, all I did was flip my world upside down. I had done such a good job at being white that I thought I would now try being Indian. As before, I chose all First Nations friends, went to pow wows, Winter Dances, First Nations soccer tournaments, all Native basketball tournaments, and on and on. As much as this time was an incredible personal learning journey, I remained untrue to who I was -- 'mixed blood.'

I needed balance in my life, an acceptance of my whole being. Having said that, now you can understand the struggle I have with identity. And the struggle would continue.

On February 15, 1997, we lost my father-in-law, Theyalatsah (Phillip Clifford Thomas) to a massive heart attack. As is tradition in the Coast Salish way, on November 13, 1998 our Aunt Helen hosted a Winter Dance to honour the siblings she had lost and to give Indian names to family members. Generally a picture showing happens four years after you have lost a family member. One of the purposes is to bring the family together to pay their final respect to the deceased. The celebration is to, as quoted by an Elder, "pay your last respects to your loved ones." He went on to explain that it is not forgetting because they will be with us forever in the Spirit World. But it does signify the end of the

grieving process. We must take over for the one we lost and be there for the young ones, old ones, and the yet unborn ones. This is our responsibility.

So what does this have to do with my identity? At this time I was co-teaching with Gord Bruyere, an Anishnabe man from Couchiching First Nation at the University of Victoria's School of Social Work. Aunty Helen called Paul, my partner, down to her place. As they would also be passing down Indian names at her Dance, Aunty Helen thought it appropriate to pass our Father's name onto our youngest son, Trent.

When explaining the process to Paul, Aunty Helen asked "What about Robina?" Paul indicated that I would, no doubt, be honoured to receive a name. Aunty Helen frankly replied, "If she is going to keep working up there [at the University of Victoria] she should have a name." The name that was chosen for me was my Grandmother's name Qwulsihyehmaht. I now share both my Grandmother's English and Indian names. I remember as a young child, Grama used to laugh about her name and say, "imagine, they call me the black haired one (which is the English translation of Qwulsihyehmaht), do not all Indians have black hair?" Well, Grama, you now share your name with this red haired one!

At first I did not take seriously what it meant to have this name. What is in a name? I have since come to discover -- everything. Aunty Helen wanted me to have a name so that I always remained grounded in where I am from -- a Coast Salish woman, partner, mother, daughter, sister, granddaughter, aunt, friend, etc. With this name began a process of, once again, looking at identity. Now I was beginning a journey of self-discovery, which includes prayer, learning to listen, learning to teach, and learning who Qwulsihymaht is. This path is not an easy stroll, but manageable with many natural steps.

The message I received from the Creator and my Ancestors was that I was not to use words that justified an academic process of meeting my thesis requirements, I need to believe in and use the integrity of a storytelling approach throughout the thesis. The following three chapters are a result of the messages that the Creator and Ancestors have given me. These chapters are stories from former students of Kuper Island Indian Industrial School.

## CHAPTER FOUR                      THE'THA'LE'YAH's STORY

### **Introduction:                      Belvideria Alvera Anne Brebber (nee Thomas)**

I am the daughter of Stanley and Dorothy Thomas and the granddaughter of Chief Philip and Esther Thomas and of Chief Walter Williams and Medicine Woman Alice Williams. I was born in a house on Cooper Road. I was the seventh child of seventeen.

I spent five years at Nanaimo Indian Hospital in a full body cast from the age of four until I was nine years old. I was nine years old when I had a spinal operation. After I got out of the Nanaimo Hospital, I spent two years at home. Then I was sent to Kuper Island residential school for four years. After Kuper Island, I was sent to Mission residential school for two years. By the time I was eighteen I had only spent six years of my life at home with my parents.

They try to say we were an unstable family, (yes we were after residential school) but the two years between the Nanaimo Indian Hospital and residential school were the happiest. We knew who we were -- we were children. We belonged; we knew who we were related to. It wasn't wrong to be related to certain types of people. I didn't see anything wrong with being a medicine woman, all I knew was the great love I had for my grandmother. There wasn't anything wrong with any of my relatives, because they loved us so much, so much and we knew it.

By the time I came out of residential school I was embarrassed about my Dad's drinking and my Grandmother's medicine. We were constantly being told that it was heathen, witch-like and evil to work with plants. Those who drank were drunkards and would never work. I didn't know how to take that because even though my Dad did drink, he worked. I was told our people were dirty -- children were always dirty. But

when you consider living on dirt roads, how do you keep from getting dirty? That is where we played because it was flatter than the rest of the areas. Besides we were the last to receive services like paving. The government didn't know a darned thing about our Peoples. They figured they KNEW IT ALL. They destroyed our families. After residential school, we didn't fit on the reserves, even at ages six years and upwards. We just weren't children anymore.

After I left the schools I began to drink, probably because I didn't know who I was anymore and who cared anyhow. That was my thinking. I did this through all my losses of relatives. The more I lost the more I drank. I guess because I didn't really know how to deal with it. We weren't allowed to cry at school, so any kind of pain you learned to bury. I am glad to say I have been sober for more time in my whole life than I spent drinking. I am glad to say I survived and I am loving life.

I have three grown children who are trying their best to get on with their lives. I have had to teach them the right way of life -- after learning about it myself. I guess what was done to me I also did to them. I have truly apologized to them. Children need a lot of love and care because nurturing teaches children how to cope in life. Through love children learn that when they hurt, someone will be there for them. Lack of love has made life harder on those of us who went to residential schools. We didn't learn about love and nurturing as children. Who was there to love us through our pains and sorrows?

You know the saying, " You only hurt the ones you love the most?" Well the Creator must have loved us dearly, because I know how much we have suffered. A lot of our people didn't want to live after they left residential school. There were, and continue to be, lot of deaths due to alcoholism and suicides. That is where I came from. So many

of our Peoples attended these schools and it is not often you hear of good stories. I have heard of one such story. Yes, only one!

As for family, now there are only four of us left -- four sisters. What a loss of lives! Lives that could have and should have been very productive considering that "People of God" were teaching us. We were, and are, very smart peoples. My Dad knew so many Native languages. My aunts talk about how smart he was. I was speaking to a former schoolmate of mine who had testing done to determine where in life he could have been if he had not gone to residential school. He said he could have been the Mayor of Duncan. He had a "C" average in school. For the first three years my school average was an "A." I wonder where I'd be. Perhaps I could have had traditional knowledge of my Grandmother, the Medicine Woman, combined with the knowledge of a physician, who really knows? I do know that before I was so humiliated I loved school. I know that I love people and care deeply for children. I must have inherited my Grandparents' and Parents' heart because they too cared and loved others. Regardless how big our family was they would help people.

I have now decided to go back to school and get a counselling certificate. I wish I could have done this a while back. Maybe then I could have helped my brothers, but I guess it just wasn't time. I know I have a lot of life skills but I don't know how to use them. That is what I really want now. When I got out of residential school I hated school. I didn't trust anyone involved with education. I went back to school about twelve years ago and found out that I loved school. I guess I had to get past all of those past experiences. The more you heal the more you learn to accept and forgive. You'll never forget. I guess that is what makes a person more caring in life. As children, no one should

go through all of this. Maybe in some ways we are the teachers and healers of the new millennium. I once heard a dear, dear friend say to me in order to reach the real good things in life, you have to have gone through hell and back. I think that is so true.

Since I began healing, the hardest part of my life is losing relatives because now I have to deal with it in a different way. I cry, get angry, all the stuff you're supposed to go through. All those things we were told not to do in school. It is **really okay** to have all of those feelings. It makes you feel better to do those things. Tears are a source of healing energy. The body has many ways of healing itself. Maybe if we knew this, there could be more of us alive.

I guess I could say the easiest part of my life is life itself. I don't have to hide or bottle up my feelings anymore. Whether I am happy, sad, glad, angry, loving, giving, sharing etc. I am truly aware of all of those feelings.

## **Belvie's Story**

I would like to say that I was appalled and very angry when I heard Tom Henley speak about the Penang people. He mentioned they were going to start residential schools for the Penang children. I don't know it just seems like some people want other people to be just like them. I guess in some ways it's like a child. People want their children to grow up just like them. But this isn't just one child; it is many. People want to control people just like they control animals. Line them all up and change their way of life. Look at all that we have lost. We've lost many of our values and beliefs, weavers, knitters, dreamers, medicine people, storytellers, artists, etc. All of these could have helped keep our histories alive.

Who's to say what is civilized? Is it civilized to take children away from their parents, their love, their culture and their language? If it were anyone else (any other group of people) they would be charged with kidnapping. But the Canadian government legalized the kidnapping of our children. Yes, to think that another country is considering residential schools infuriates me.

Now, I would like to share my story. This is what happened to me when the government decided to educate, civilize and assimilate my people.

## **The Letter**

When I think about residential school, I always remember the letters my Mom and Dad received from Indian Affairs. I am not exactly sure what happened, but I think somebody must have been angry with our family and phoned welfare. Welfare was told that we were starving. This was so far from the truth. My dad never ever accepted welfare. When times got hard my Mom and Dad would either go hunting or clam digging

to feed us. We always had food. As big of a family as we were there was always something on the table for breakfast, lunch and supper. At that time there were ten children in our family. Well anyway, the welfare people arrived at our house one day and told Mom that they were there to take us away. Mom wouldn't let them in the house. Mom called us to block the door with our bodies so they couldn't push their way in. She knew they would just come right in without permission. Mom was pretty brave to try stopping them. She said, "You're not coming in at all until my husband gets home."

When Dad came home we could hear them talking to him outside. Dad was laughing, and called us "Come on out you guys." We were so scared to go out because we thought they were going to take us away. When we got out he said, "Do they look like they're starving?" The welfare people replied "No," then they left.

About a month or two later my parents received a letter from the Department of Indian Affairs stating that my sister Donna and brothers Emerson, Richard and Arnold would have to go to Kuper Island Indian Industrial School. I don't know why they didn't include Belinda or my name on that list, as we were older than Richard and Arnold. I still don't understand that.

Anyway, we didn't know what was going on. We absolutely didn't know what was happening. Mom and Dad, they were crying. It really seemed like there was a death in our family because the only time we had seen them cry like that was when there was a death. It was pretty scary. The next thing we knew, Dad was telling my brothers and sister to get their stuff ready because they were going for a ride. He told them to bring a suitcase. Just like that they were gone. When Dad and Mom came home my brothers and

sister were not with them, they were alone. We didn't know what to think about that. I can't remember how they explained to us that they weren't coming home for a long time.

I can remember when my younger sister told me that they weren't coming back home. I asked her how she knew that and she said she overheard Mom and Dad talking about it. It wasn't very long after that that they got a letter for me. My sister Lynn seen the letter in the mail and told me that it looked like the same kind of letter Mom and Dad got before Emerson and them were sent to Kuper Island. We looked at each other and Belinda said, "I bet you anything it's for you." We opened up the letter and sure enough it had my name on it. We burnt it not thinking that they would contact us again. About two weeks latter, Dad received another letter. This time Mom and Dad got the mail. This letter was very threatening. The Department of Indian Affairs said that: they would take the rest of the younger kids away, Mom and Dad would be fined \$500.00 and Belvie would never be able to attend any school in BC if they did not immediately take me to residential school. Dad told me to get ready right away. He told me I had to go because he knew I wouldn't want to lose the rest of my brothers and sisters and not know where they were.

I got all my clothes together. I had this great big suitcase full of my stuff. I think I packed everything I owned. Now, we were on our way. When we got to Chemainus they loaded my trunk into the boat.

Getting on the boat was very scary for me. Not long before this I had read in the newspaper about the two girls that drowned trying to escape from Kuper Island Indian Industrial School. As well, I remembered Mom telling us not to run away because of the eddies (the swirls) in the water between Kuper Island and the main Island. She told us

“don’t even think about taking out a raft or anything.” So when I got on the boat I was absolutely terrified thinking that boat was going to sink. It was raining out that day. They tried to get me inside. I wouldn’t go in because I thought if the boat goes down I don’t want to be stuck inside. I don’t even know who else was on the boat. They might have been workers because on the weekends they would go across to Chemainus and do their shopping.

### Number Twenty-Eight

Arriving at Kuper Island was as frightening as the boat trip over there. I kept asking, “*Where is the school?*” They kept pointing at the school and saying, “right there.” When I looked in the direction they were pointing all I could see was a jail like building. And, this building was so big. I thought for sure I was going to get lost. That was the one thing that really came into my mind; I would never find anybody in there. I wanted to look for my brothers and my sister. As soon as we arrived at the building we were instructed to go to the recreation room. We didn’t even know where anything was.

The workers there must have known we would be arriving because they sent somebody to meet us. There was another little girl with us. She had lived with her Grandmother and they only spoke their native language. We were told to stand there while they read us the rules. One of the first things they instructed us was that we were not allowed to talk about them (the Brothers, Sisters, Priests). If we did dare talk about them, we would burn forever in hell. This was so scary for me. Forever was like **FOREVER**. We were still kids and to ‘burn’ was like a burn from a stove. When you feel that, it is pretty bad in itself. So you can imagine, for us as children, how scary it was to imagine burning forever. This was such a powerful statement.

She continued reading the other rules. We couldn't talk or wave at our brothers. I couldn't understand that. I had always looked after them when I was at home. I took care of them because they were just babies to me, even though I wasn't very old they were still like six and seven years old.

This little girl kept talking in Native. I guess she was asking, "What is she saying?" The nun kept getting angrier and angrier and kept banging this pointer on the table and telling her to keep quiet. She kept telling her that she was not supposed to speak when she was speaking. She didn't understand what the nun was saying and nobody was translating it for her. The next thing I knew, the sister was dragging her by the ear into the bathroom. I asked my charge "*What's happening?*" She told me, "You can't talk when she is talking because if you do she will stick your head in the toilet bowl and flush it." I was getting more frightened all the time. When that little girl came out of the bathroom, her head was soaking wet. That was the beginning of our first day.

Next, I guess was the time for us to 'clean up.' We were brought down to shower and be deloused. Just before I left home, my Mom had given me a perm. My hair was in such tight curls that it just stuck to my head. Anyway, they put this stuff (I think it was coal oil) on our heads to kill any lice we might have. This stuff had a really strong smell and stung my head. They would have cut my hair off but because my mom cut it short they didn't have to.

Eventually we had to hand all our clothes in to the nuns. You weren't allowed to wear any of your own clothes at residential school. You had to wear whatever they gave you -- the bra, the underwear, and whatever else. So on the first day you had everything that was 'you' taken away and were given uniforms.

So we had a place to keep everything we had, we were assigned lockers. Whatever number happened to be on the locker you were assigned became your number. Every thing that was given to you was marked with a number. My number was 28. I was number 28 for the four years that I was there.

### **Growing up fast**

From the very first day on, we had to learn everything very fast. I remember the first Christmas we went home. I had only been there for about three months and already there was a big change in me. I didn't want to play with the kids on the reserve anymore because they seemed so 'childish.' We didn't know how to have fun anymore. All the reserve kids were acting so silly and we weren't allowed to do that in residential school. When it was our playtime, most of us just walked around the fields. It was strange.

When we did play games, it was very competitive. You played to win. There were basketball teams, volleyball teams, soccer teams, and softball teams. But, the girls were not allowed to play soccer. I think it was my last year in Kuper Island that they let us play one game of soccer. It wasn't lady like.

We rarely played. Mostly, we worked. We went to school during the day and after school we would work. Some girls learned that if they went to morning mass they could get out of some of the morning chores. But, sometimes they would have to do chores as well. I have to call it 'work', I can't call it anything else, and it went beyond chores.

We got up at 6:00 each morning, 5:30 if you went to mass. There were only about 10 showers, so some of us showered in mornings and some at night. After we showered, we got dressed, made our beds, and went upstairs to do the same thing with the younger kids to make sure they were ready for school.

Making our beds was a task. The beds needed to be made perfectly without any wrinkles. This one nun used to flip a coin on the bed, if the coin didn't bounce a certain way; we had to remake it until the coin landed properly.

Then we would go down for breakfast. After breakfast we worked until school started. Morning chores included things like washing out the toilet bowls, sweeping the stairs, sweeping the hallways, or things like that. Then off to school we would go. We weren't really being educated; just taught how to work, clean anyway. Slave -- slave labour that is what we were. We followed a regular 9-12 and 1-3 routine.

And then, after school we were either in the sewing or laundry rooms. Only some of the senior girls were trained to do the laundry because laundry involved using such big machines. One of the chores that the older girls did was run the roller to iron the sheets, pillowcases and stuff like that. The linen was ironed for the priests, brothers and sisters. I saw a couple of girls get their hands pulled threw the roller. That was pretty awful. The girls that got their arms caught ended up Chemainus hospital and that is probably why I don't remember too much about that.

The rest of us girls had to either sort or darn socks. When we sorted the sock, we had to make sure none of the socks had holes in them, if we missed any we would get in trouble. As the boys change their socks everyday, there was always, always work darning socks.

We continued in the laundry or sewing room until suppertime. After supper we would get about one-half or one hour playtime. Then, back to school to do our homework. After one hour of homework, we would go back and watch television. The amount of time you got to watch TV depended on which age category you were in

(junior, intermediate, senior). It didn't really matter because there wasn't that much on TV in those days anyway. After our allotted time of television, it was bedtime.

We slept in these great big rooms. Again, they divided us by age groups. Each group slept in separate rooms. One side of our room was bunk beds and the other side was single beds in rows. I used to sleep in the bunk bed that was right up against the wall behind the door. So whenever that door opened, it would wake me up. Because I would wake up, I used to see all the people who were coming and going. I can remember stuff. Like, I remember a nun would come in and take girls out. At that time, we thought these girls were getting cigarettes, candies or stuff like that. Now I know differently. I didn't know then what was going on, but when I think about it now, I remember seeing changes in some of the girls that were taken out.

There are so many stories, where do you start? One girl I know she got to the school, she was quite nice. Eventually she became a snob. She became, 'hoity' and didn't want to talk to any of us anymore. We used to think that she thought she was better than us. We thought this because she always used to get candy and stuff. We thought she was getting special treatment. I know now that it was anger in her. She was probably told not to tell. There were things that happened there that never got looked into.

I had this really good friend there. One day she said, "That's it! That's it!" I asked her, "*What are you talking about?*" She replied, "I've decided I'm not going to do anything here anymore." I fearfully replied, "*You can't do that, you're gonna get in trouble.*" She said, "I don't give a shit anymore. I don't care." As I said earlier, everyday we had all this work to do. I would look out the window and see her out there dancing

around. She loved dancing. The nuns would get mad at her. “I don’t give a shit, I’m not listening to you,” she would say.

One day she came over to me and said “I’m gonna tell you something and you better believe me. If you’re my friend you will believe me. Don’t let anybody else tell you otherwise. I’m going home.” Shocked, I asked, “*What?*” She said “Yea, they decided to send me home because I won’t do anything.” I thought holly cow. Then she said, “you just be happy for me, I’m going home. I’m going to be back with my Mom.”

Well then, someone told me that she was going to Riverview or Esondale or someplace like that. I told them, “*No she’s not. She’s going home.*” They said, “No, she’s going to an asylum.” I said “*No she’s not.*” So I went to ask her and she said “I thought you weren’t gonna listen to any of that garbage. I told you where I was going. You can believe them if you want, but you won’t be my friend any more.” So I always believed her.

About two or three years ago, when I was at a workshop in Chemainus, one of my friends mentioned that she had trip to Riverview for a course she was taking. When she was there, they were walking around and all of a sudden she heard someone call her name. She wondered, who would know her there. When she turned around she was so surprised to see her cousin there. That is where they sent her. Wow, I didn’t know where they had sent her. I wanted to believe that she had gone home like she told me. That was the first time I ever heard where they sent her. I felt so sad, I cried so hard to learn about my dear friend.

That was pretty sad when I heard the real truth about her. There was absolutely nothing wrong with her. I found out years later that she had been raped at Kuper and that

is why she said to hell with everything. Her sister found her in a cold shower curled up in ball. After she was raped, she just got tough. She died not too long ago. She was from Saanich. I never did get to see her. I kind of felt lost after she left Kuper.

You know the thing that got me too afterwards was that these people (the Church staff) were people of God. Well, we were children of God. She was sent to Riverview because she had been abused and wouldn't listen to them anymore. She didn't do anything wrong, she was raped.

I don't know who raped her, but a Brother got transferred out of Kuper Island because he was abusing some of the girls. I remember a Father calling some of us girls into his office to ask us whether or not we had contact with this particular Brother. The Father called me into his office and asked how I was doing. Then he commented, "You're doing pretty good in school here. You're getting to be quite a nice looking young lady you know." I felt embarrassed by his comments. "You're a beautiful young lady," he said. Finally he said, "I want to ask you a question and answer me truthfully. Think really hard about it before you answer. Have you every seen this Brother by yourself?" I sat there thinking and then replied, "Yea." the Father got up and left the office. He never even asked me where, when or anything. Two days later that Brother was transferred out. I never knew why, but I thought it was my fault that this had happened. The day I saw that Brother by myself, he was walking down the hallway one way and I was walking down the hallway the other way, both of us were by ourselves going opposite directions. I was alone. He was alone.

I used to blame myself for that Brother leaving. Yet, on the boys' side it was probably a blessing. That Brother was really mean. Apparently he was the one that raped my friend and a number of other girls.

### **Family**

One of the hardest things for me while in residential school was not being allowed to be in contact with my brothers and sisters. We were told that if we got caught even looking at our brothers we would be punished. I don't really recall what kind of trouble we would get into, but we weren't allowed to look at them. At that time my brothers Emerson, Richard and Arnold were there. My sister Donna was there as well but she was a senior so I didn't get to see her often. Seniors were not allowed to hang out with the intermediates. They said it was "childish" to hang out with some one younger.

Emerson was older than myself. I would see him in school when I was going to classes because we were in the same grade. That was the only time I would get to see him. The only time I would see my brothers Richard and Arnold was in Church. Sometimes they would peek over to check if I was there. I would always try sit in the same place so they knew where to look. I would just nod at them.

We did what we could to communicate. If I was walking around and spotted one of my brothers, I would quickly twirl around and swing my arm over my head. I would pretend that I was just swinging my arm. But we knew that we were keeping in touch.

When my younger sister Rosetta came to residential school I ended up being her charge. I used to think that maybe they put me in charge of my younger sister so that I would teach her how it was. Since I have left residential school, I have realized that rarely did they put one family member in charge of another.

I remembered Rosetta wet the bed. I knew what would happen if she got caught wetting the bed so I tried my best to protect her. I would get up around 3:00 am, sneak upstairs, change her sheets, and throw them in the laundry and then return to my room. However, one night I slept in. The next morning when I woke up she was being dragged all the way down the stairs to the showers. They threw her into the shower naked, turned on the cold water and then paraded all the other girls by her so they would know what would happen to them if they wet the bed. Total humiliation. She was only six years old. After that incident, I got mad at her. I knew that I had to get tough with her to make her stop wetting the bed or this would happen to her all the time.

I thought about that, holy cow you sure learned to toughen up -- to protect yourself and to protect others. I was so hurt by that incident -- having to go view her like that and having everybody else view her like that. It was weird. I felt guilty about that for a long time -- **A LONG TIME**. I was only about twelve years old myself. I tried to protect her, but she got caught in the end anyway. I think it happened more than once. The first time I was really hurt about it, but after that I got angry. In some ways, I think they knew that if I was her charge that I would be tough on her. They knew I would try protecting her from the humiliation and abuse. They knew I would do their dirty work by teaching Rosie how to protect herself.

Once I wrote this poem about residential school. In this poem I said, "my heart was crying" it really was. Sometimes in a normal situation I can talk about what happened in residential school. But, when I picture everything it just so hard. As long as I don't picture anything, I can talk about it.

It is so hard for me because I lost so many brothers and sisters at a very young age. You know, so many things happened there. So many things happened that we will never hear about, it's too late because too many are dead. We know they suffered at residential school.

It was so damaging. **IT WAS SO DAMAGING.** We weren't really like brother and sister after residential school. Even when I tried to be with my sisters it was like there was something we didn't want each other to know about. It will always be like that, that's what it feels like, like we will never be close. Hopefully one day we will be close again.

Since my brothers died I know I have gone backwards a whole lot. I don't want to face things. It is when people mention names, that is when I start to break down. I'm angry. In residential school you learn to cope. But when there are so many tragic events like deaths, you can't protect yourself. If you had known my brothers before residential school you would have seen a totally different people.

Emerson was a totally different person. He was always helping my dad, doing everything with my dad. My dad taught a lot of the Indian culture. When they started the canoe project he was listening to everything my dad told him to do. Emerson was thirteen when he went to residential school. They destroyed him there. Once he left residential school, he used to get mad at us when we would even mention it. Even when we went on a trip to Kuper Island he told us to "shut up." He didn't want anything to do with Kuper Island at all, not even to talk about it. He never wanted to hear the Father's name. I wish Emerson had the opportunities that Delmar did, a chance to be a strong person.

I know that after he was in residence he became an angry, angry, angry person. He would do things like taunt me until I was angry. It is very hard to make me angry, but

he could do it to the point where I would be throwing things at him. I think it was tougher on the boys' side. They had to break them down, so it had to have been tougher. I mean, boys are tough to begin with. Especially native boys because they had to learn to provide for their families back home and so they were brought up with a bit more discipline. Especially back then, they had to carry wood, chop wood and stuff like that when they were only like six or seven years old. So at a very early age they were physically building themselves up.

Emerson didn't go to Kuper Island until he was thirteen years old; he was already a strong young man. It must have taken a lot, but they broke him. I can remember the day that Emerson and I had our spirits broken. It was sad. It was really sad for me.

I remember being broken. I remember that. It was actually before Emerson. It's a story in itself. It all started off when I had to clean the senior girls' bathrooms upstairs. Sister Lucille was in charge of making sure we did a good job. She was a mean person. She said to me "I thought you were told to clean this washroom." I told her "*I did.*" She asked, "What are those on the floor there." I was surprised to see those two pieces of toilet paper and said, "*They weren't there when I cleaned it up.*" She yelled, "Well they are there now." "*Well they weren't there when I cleaned this up,*" I repeated.

By this time I was starting to build enough courage to answer back because school was nearly over I knew I wouldn't have to depend on them much longer. That's where it started. After this incident I had to go to school. Emerson used to sit in the desk right beside me. This Sister came into class and was asking questions. She asked me a question but I didn't know the answer. She said, "there you go already, you're nothing but boy crazy now just because you're growing up and everything you think you're pretty hot or

something like that. All you're going to end up is to be a dirty drunken Indian living on the reserve with lots of dirty kids." I started to cry.

Emerson said, "You can't talk to my sister like that. Apologize to her." The Sister said, "I will not. If you want to talk to me like that you can go up to visit Father." Emerson snapped, "I won't do that. You have got to apologize to my sister." Now, she was getting really angry. Emerson told her that he wasn't going to leave. All the other boys in the class stood up. She told them all to sit down. None of them would. So she said "Okay. This is the way it's going to be, if you guys aren't going to see Father Dunlop then I'm going to go up and get him myself." So off she went.

When she returned, Father Dunlop called all of the boys up to his office. Each of them got the strap. But, Delmar and Emerson got strapped and beaten the worst because they refused to cry. That's what broke him. Emerson couldn't even put his arms down because it hurt so badly. He had to hold his hands up for a week.

When he was finally able to use his hands again he went out to play soccer. It was a very cold day and the cold dried his skin. When I saw his hands I told him, "*Holy, you should put some cream on your hands.*" He said, "No, I'm not going to do that." He rubbed his hands together; his skin was all cracked and bleeding.

He told me "I don't give a shit anymore now." "*You can't talk like that,*" I told him. He said "like hell I can't. I can fucking well say whatever I want." "*Emerson you're going to get in trouble.*" "I don't give a shit." And he didn't. I could see it in his eyes. They weren't alive anymore. Our spirits were broken.

It's just so painful -- a painful situation that we're in. I can remember Randy. He was a happy, happy person. He was always telling jokes at the snap of a finger. He would

be telling jokes or teasing you all the time. Rodney was the same way. But they took the road of self-destruction. We couldn't stop them.

When I first went back to Kuper Island about seven years ago, there was nothing there but this great big lump in the ground. When I looked at it the only way I could think of describing it was, it looked like a great big graveyard of lost souls. Not a graveyard per se - but broken spirits. I think residential school caused a lot of deaths in my family. I don't think they wanted any of us to be normal because if we had been, this would have come out a long time ago. So they had to break every one of us. And, they did a good job.

There were seventeen of us children in my family. One died when she was only six months old, she was the third oldest. Except the oldest, the rest of us all went to residential school. Now, there are only four of us left.

All of them have died since 1965, most of them between the ages of 16 – 22 -- very young. Two of my siblings died when they were 53. Three of my siblings were around 40 when they died. The rest were very young. Richard was only 14. Richard died while he was at Kuper Island. They said suicide, but I don't think he committed suicide. Too many things happened. That is a story in itself.

### **Don't tell anybody I told you**

My family was really angry when I started going through my healing. Everybody thought I was crazy. They didn't want anything to do with me. Even my own children didn't want anything to do with me. No one wanted to talk to me about what I was feeling. We all learned this in residential school -- not to acknowledge our feelings. And here I was going through all this crazy emotional stuff that I didn't even know where it was coming from. Sometimes I would just all of a sudden start to cry. I felt like I was

going crazy. Then my kids, even my son, said “Why are you doing this to yourself? Why don’t you just stop it?” It was just crazy - it was craziness. I didn’t know who I was. That’s what I felt like. The only way I can describe it is like a puppet. Everybody was pulling on my strings and I was doing the dance. Healing meant breaking all those strings. I wanted to know who I was. I even got to the point where I didn’t visit any of my relatives. It’s almost like you can bounce back and forth from one thing to another. That’s a part of taking care of yourself. You can be talking and cry about something, and if you change the subject, you can get away from that pain. Being taught not to feel, it was easier to change the subject than stay in that pain. I don’t know. I know you have to acknowledge your feelings and everything, but those kind of things have been with me all my life, its been happening since I was 11 years old, for thirty or forty years now. How can I all of a sudden change to acknowledging my feelings? Just like with the snap of my fingers. It will always be that way for me. Get near the pain and then back out of it, you know retreat. The pain of being away from the family, the pain of not acknowledging your family, the pain of having someone in your family get angry with you. You had to protect yourself in some way -- nobody else was going to.

We were told on our first day in that place not to talk about them, it was instilled in us. So here I was starting to talk about them, coming out with it. We weren’t supposed to talk about the Priests, Brothers, and Sisters because they were the “Holy” people. That was it, end of story. If we talked, we would burn in hell forever. I remember when I first started talking about what happened in residential school, I could only whisper. I couldn’t talk out loud about it. Every time I talked to someone I would whisper, “*don’t tell anybody I told you this.*” That was about seven years ago.

I think it started when I went to a peer-counselling course at UVic. It was a weeklong training session. The facilitator asked us to talk about ourselves. We were asked questions like "What was your happiest moment? What was your saddest moment?" It wasn't about the residential school, but I guess it was just talking about yourself.

It was horrible. I was lucky I met a man in the group that told me if I ever needed any help to call him. About a week later things started to happen, I was like a boiling pot. I had no idea what was happening. I was all in turmoil. So, I phoned him. We were on the phone for four hours before he felt I was calm enough. At this time I was suicidal. At the same time I didn't know what was happening. This went on for quite some time. I trusted him enough to tell him what was going on for me. He put me in touch with a counsellor. That was when I started to talk about the residential school. I just got stronger and stronger after that.

So many weird things used to go on there. Sometimes I wish that I could remember everything and get it all over and done with. Then I could say that I don't have to deal with any more and none of the residential school memories are going to come forward. But, that is not the way it is, memories come when they come. And, they are taking their time too! However, it has been a long time since I've been like really overwhelmed. Things aren't hitting me like they used to hit me. When I first started healing, there was no stopping the pain. Now it's not quite as painful.

Some memories are still painful. I still have a few things that I have to deal with. It seems like the more I avoid dealing with the painful memories, the more I run away. I tend to do that. I get myself involved in things I shouldn't get involved with. I don't

drink, its Bingo. I spend most of my time at bingo when I'm in pain. Bingo has become a place where I feel like I can get away from everything and be with people.

### **Three precious years**

My happiest times were the three years before residential school and after the Nanaimo Indian Hospital. Before I began my healing that was all I could remember -- those three precious years. All those years in that hospital and I couldn't remember a happy time. I was four when I went to the hospital and was there for five years. I only got to see my Mom and Dad about once or twice a year. It was too far for them to travel. They must have been living in Pauquachin at that time.

I would like to talk about the years between the hospital and residential school. We were a family. We had lots of friends. It was just fun. There were no restrictions; you weren't inhibited by guilt or shame. That's what the residential school did, they made you feel shameful. If you were running and your skirt happened to flip up, they told you that you were showing off. So, when we did play we were so afraid of doing something wrong.

I always remember this time playing on my sister's old bike. The bike had been thrown in the bushes, but we decided to take it out and play with it. This old bike didn't even have tires on it. It didn't matter, we rode this bike up and down the road anyway just the way it was. We went up the hill and then rode it down. I was coming down this hill so fast that I couldn't stop. Fortunately, my younger brother, who was about three years old, stopped me. Nobody else could stop me because they were all laughing so hard. I was totally freaked out. Those are the kind of things that we did. We just had a great time. We played. We were kids.

We used to play tag with all the kids around. Most of the time I was 'it' because I couldn't run very fast after being in the hospital all that time. They were pretty tough and I wasn't. Sometimes I would hear my sister say "let's go on the roof, she can't catch us there." So they would all climb up onto the roof and taunt me "Come on you chicken!" First I would say "No!" Then I begin to think, I'll show you. So I climbed onto the roof, and by the time I got up there they were all on the ground looking up at me. Then, I couldn't get down. My older brothers came up and rescued me.

I remember the first time my sister put me on a swing, she said, "hold on tight." So I would hold on tight and she would say, teasing, "Make a face." So there I would be sitting on the swing, holding on tight, making a face and she would push me. Plunk. I fell right off the swing. It was so much fun. I can really remember that.

### **Conclusion**

I can only imagine the grief that my Mom and Dad must have experienced when they got the letters saying they had to send us to Kuper Island. My Mom, Dad, and my paternal grandparents all went to Kuper Island. We had three full generations of family that went to residential school, as well as some of the great-grandchildren -- that is four generations in one family. It is unbelievable.

My parents didn't talk much about what went on in residential school for them. Mom used to tell us this story about catching a Nun and Priest in bed together. After they had been caught they used to give her gum, chocolate, and treats. Once they got tired of giving her treats, they were really mean to her. Mom was scared of them. It is obvious why my mom told us not to run away. The only other thing that Mom used to say is that she would not teach us to speak our language because we would get in trouble. I never

understood why at that time, now I do. All I remember Dad ever saying about the school was that all he ever did was farm work. I think that that is why Dad moved down to Saanich, to try and get away from the residential school. He knew they had his name. I think he thought that if he moved far away they would not find us kids. I think he tried to protect us. If someone hadn't made that call to welfare, we might not have had to go to residential school. It might have been just that one phone call. To this day I wonder who did that? Who caused us all this grief? Who caused our whole family all this grief? I don't remember who of us were at Kuper at specific times, but I do know that it just kept on going. When I got out, someone else went in. When Lynn got out, someone else went in. We never ever were a family all together after that.

I went to Mission Residential School when I got out of Kuper. When I went through my healing I thought that my parents didn't want me. They took me to the Nanaimo Indian Hospital for 5 years, then they sent me to Kuper Island for 4 years, then I went to St. Mary's in Mission for 2 years. By the time I was 18, I had only spend 6 years at home. Government policy took me from my parents. My parents wanted me. How dare they, hey. How dare the Government do that to us. That is cruel. We only went home for Christmas and summer holidays. Many people tried their best to be strong and survive in that place. But some were not able to survive when they left.

I tried to commit suicide a number of times. One time I was down by the drive-in theater on Tillicum Road around the time that the movie was starting. I just walked right into the traffic and walked down the yellow line with my arms wide open hoping somebody would either hit me or grab my arm. When I came out of it one of my sisters and her husband were driving by. I just sort of snapped out of it and started talking to her.

I don't think she even saw me on the road. I was totally sober when this incident happened. Then I headed home. I was hoping that nobody had noticed me. The next thing I knew, the cops came along to pick me up but I was already at the corner of my place of residence. They asked me "Where are you going? Where do you live?" "*Right there,*" I pointed. They asked, "Are you sure? We had a report that somebody was walking in the middle of the road and you fit the description." "*Oh, that wasn't me,*" I promptly replied. They walked me to the door.

This was shortly after my sister died. It was just that space that I was in, absolute grief. It's almost like you totally give up, total helplessness. Let's end it now. You don't want to live anymore. The losses become unbearable. Losing your brothers and sisters is like losing your best friends, or your child. With my younger sister, it was absolutely like losing a child because I looked after her right from the time she was born. Even at residential school I was her charge. So it really hit me when she died. Devastated me is more like it.

She was only 22 when she died. She died in Lummi in a car accident. Just about killed my whole family. Four of my brothers and sisters were on the car when they crashed. She was the only one who didn't live. She was going to have her baby that Monday. Mom told her not to go to Lummi because they were going to induce labour if she didn't have her baby by Monday. She died on Saturday.

You hear of people who have not even experienced death in their family and you wonder -- Why us? Sometimes you think that maybe you are doing something wrong. Maybe the Creator wants you to wake up or something. We have lost so many family members within our own families. I lost a son. My sister lost a daughter; another sister

lost two children; one brother lost two; another brother lost one, it just goes on. It just never seemed like it was going to end.

Our lives are so intense and full of loss. Lots of other things go along with loss, like self-esteem and being able to do things for ourselves. I think the loss of self-esteem and ability to take care of ourselves has a lot to do with how we are today. Especially for the guys, when we left residential school we were not even educated enough to get a good job. They didn't teach you anything there. The education was as limited as the student that could read the slowest. That was our education. I can remember trying to go ahead in math but once I couldn't figure it out myself, I had to stop and wait for everyone else to catch up to where I was.

I was an 'A' student for grades five and six but Sister Lucille started saying negative things to me and my grades dropped. She would humiliate me. Eventually, she knew she had me. She used to ask these stupid questions to try trick me into answering them. I used to try get at her though. There were some things that I instigated. I don't even know if she knew I did or not. But it got to a point where it got ridiculous afterwards. She knew there was something going on.

When the Sisters asked a question, they would never pick the students who had their hands up. I noticed this and told my friends. So every time she asked a question, we all raised our hands. Well, I'm not going to ask you guys, you know the answer. So she would go to somebody else. Soon other people caught on to what we were doing, and they started raising their hands too. Next thing you know the whole class had their hands raised. So, she started selecting people.

This one time I remember another humiliating effort on her part. “Who knows the difference between a hardware store and a department store?” The Sister asked me. I said, “*A hardware store sells things like China*” and she snippily interrupted, “and Japan, and Europe.” Everybody laughed. She laughed as loud as she could. I was so angry with her. I hated her at that point. She couldn’t have done anything more to me. Humiliation.

That is what happened to us. We were just children. How dare they do this to us? Just because we weren’t white? Did that mean we weren’t children of God? We prayed differently. We did things differently from them. But I’ll bet you anything that we were “Holier” than them. I heard this story once. When the Jesuits came to Canada they met this Nation and asked them what the word for sin was in their language. The natives never had a word for sin. The only thing they could say was that any crime against a child was the sin. We were children. What they did was a sin.

It really struck me when I went on this trip across Canada. I started talking about some of the residential school experiences. I told them I couldn’t even hold my child and tell them they were doing something really good. I couldn’t say, “*I’m really proud of you son. I’m really proud of you daughter.*” I couldn’t compliment them.

After I said this, this young man comes over and said, “You know, my mom went to residential school and all these years I’ve been trying to please her. I never thought that I might be doing it and she can’t tell me. Maybe she couldn’t tell me that she was pleased with me. You really opened my eyes up.” We need to talk about what happened at residential school and how it impacted our lives.

That is what I try to do when I work with the children. To tell them, “*Wow, you really do a good job.*” If they say I can’t do this, or mine is ugly or something like that

when they have completed a piece of work I teach them that they are just calling themselves down and I don't like to see that. "*This work is a part of you.*" It's funny how things can just totally change around in your views. Sometimes I think that in some ways you kind of get the gifts of some Elders when you go through some of the things that you've gone through. Not saying that I'm an Elder yet. But it's like preparation for being a good Elder, a teaching Elder. When I see the kids succeed it's very rewarding. I have seen so many students come into school and they were kind of hiding. They would not even raise their hands let alone participate. And then, to have them graduate and talk about their successes. It is really awesome to see. The successes help keep me strong.

I don't know, when I look at a Native child I see so much in their eyes. I don't think I'm being prejudice; it's just something about them that is there. They are so real or something. I know what I went through and I want to help our children -- our future leaders.

Isn't it ironic that a Brother who worked at Kuper Island Residential School would later practice the cultural things that we, as First Nation children, were severely punished for? Most of us were ashamed of our culture and tradition because we were taught that it was heathen. When we left that school, we steered away from our culture. But this Brother went on to learn our language and became more culturally literate than I. As well, he became an Indian dancer in our Big House. We were punished for speaking our language and practicing our culture, now this Brother was "cultural." I remember a girl having her head stuck in the toilet bowl for speaking her First language. I get angry when I remember this. This church person was now a part of something that he had

taught us to be ashamed of. Our culture and tradition could have supported us on our healing journey.

As for praying, we really did a lot of “prayer rambling.” It wasn’t until I realized that that was all I was doing that I felt really lost. I felt like I had nowhere to turn. One day I saw four or five eagles flying around in the sky. I was chilled. I realized that I can talk to the Creator straight from the heart and when I pray this way, things happen. The Creator has helped me heal from the past.

WHO ARE THEY?

This poem is dedicated to my brother Richard Thomas who died there at Kuper Island Residential School, at the age of fourteen.

There is something secret,  
There is something silent,  
There is something wrong,  
Amongst our people,  
Amongst our people.

We were told we had to go,  
We were told our parents would go to jail,  
We were told we'd lose our siblings,  
So, we had to go,  
We had to go.

We were taken from our parents,  
We were taken from our homes,  
We were taken from the love we needed,  
Where were we going?  
Where were we going?

Some of our parents knew,  
Some of our grandparents knew,  
Some of our relatives knew,  
But we didn't,  
We didn't.

We turned around, our parents were crying,  
We turned around, we were crying,  
We turned around, everyone was crying,  
We didn't want to go,  
We didn't want to go.

We got into the big boat,  
We got to the long wharf, and looked up,  
We got to where, there was a huge building,  
We're going to get lost!  
We're going to get lost!

We were told not to talk,  
We were told no one would listen.  
We were told we would burn forever,  
So we kept silent, so silent,  
Some are silent forevermore.

You can't look at your brothers,  
You can't wave at your brothers,  
You can't smile at your brothers,  
My heart is crying,  
My heart is crying.

Why can't I see them?  
Why can't I comfort them?  
Why can't I help them?  
I've always looked after them,  
I've always looked after them.

They say you'll chase the boys,  
They say you're boy crazy,  
They say you'll get in trouble,  
We're afraid to do anything,  
We're afraid to do anything.

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| <p>You took away our clothes,<br/> You took away your hair,<br/> You took away our language,<br/> Now he have to learn about us,<br/> We have to learn about us.</p> <p>We were given a number,<br/> We were given a locker,<br/> We were given jobs to do,<br/> We don't want to be here,<br/> We don't want to be here.</p> <p>Some were physically hurt,<br/> Some were mentally hurt,<br/> Some were emotionally hurt,<br/> We have to take back our lives,<br/> We have to take back our lives.</p> <p>We weren't allowed to cry,<br/> We weren't allowed to get angry,<br/> We weren't allowed to do things for<br/> ourselves,<br/> How do we do these,<br/> How do we do these?</p> <p>I don't want to be Indian,<br/> I don't want to be stupid,<br/> I don't want to be dirty,<br/> I wish I could be whiter in colour,<br/> I wish I could be whiter in colour.</p> <p>Who do we know anymore?<br/> Who are my angry brothers?<br/> Who are my sisters?<br/> We will never be the same,<br/> We will never be the same.</p> <p>We have friends who are closer,<br/> We have friends who we talk to<br/> more,<br/> We have friends who we tell our<br/> deepest,<br/> Why can't we talk to you<br/> brothers and sisters?<br/> Why can't we talk to you<br/> brothers and sisters?</p> | <p>They held our people's spirits,<br/> They held our people's hearts,<br/> They held our people's dignity,<br/> It is time to break away,<br/> It is time to break away.</p> <p>It is time to pick ourselves up,<br/> It is time to speak out,<br/> It is time to stand tall,<br/> It is time to listen to listen to our hearts,<br/> Time to listen to our hearts.</p> <p>We don't want to destroy<br/> ourselves,<br/> We don't want to drink to<br/> forget,<br/> We don't want to do drugs to<br/> escape,<br/> We want to live free,<br/> We want to live free forever<br/> more.</p> <p>Everything that has happened,<br/> Everything that has been done,<br/> Everything that we had to endure,<br/> All of this will make us a stronger nation,<br/> A stronger nation.</p> <p>We want to feel free,<br/> We want to live clean,<br/> We want to help each other,<br/> Understand what has happened to us,<br/> Understand what has happened to us.</p> <p>To know this is our history,<br/> To know this is our past,<br/> To know this is our present,<br/> To know this is <b>our</b> past lives,<br/> To know this is <b>our</b> past lives.</p> <p>It is time to sing out loud!<br/> It is time to dance freely!<br/> It is time to come back to our culture,<br/> It is time to open ourselves,<br/> It is time to open ourselves to all that is<br/> good.</p> |
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| <p>We will never forget,<br/>We can try,<br/>We can try to forgive,<br/>We can try,<br/>We can try to heal,<br/>We can try,<br/>We can,<br/>We can!</p> <p>We survived!! We Survived!!<br/>Hytch-ca, Hytch-ca, Hytch-ca!</p> | <p><b>BESIDES:</b></p> <p>Who are they that wanted to change us?<br/>Who are they that wanted us to be<br/>different from who we are?<br/>Who are they that wanted to change our<br/>lives?<br/>Was it the government?<br/>Was it the Church?<br/><b>WAS IT BOTH?</b></p> |
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## CHAPTER FIVE SELETZE'S STORY

### Introduction: Delmar Johnnie Seletze

Delmar Johnnie was born in 1946 and raised in Khenipsen, which is one of the seven Cowichan Tribes in Duncan, BC. Delmar is both an artist and a storyteller.

Delmar's Indian name is Seletze, which was given to him by his Grandmother and belonged to his Great-grandfather. The teachings of his Elders are a sacred part of his own personal transformation.

As a young boy Delmar frequently fished at the river near his home. Across the water he would watch an Old Man clean fish. While the Old Man was cleaning fish he would sing. One day Delmar's Grandmother overheard him singing this song. She asked him where he had learned the song. His Grandmother told him that this was a thank you song that belonged to his Great-grandfather who lives in the Spirit World. This song beats through Delmar's Soul.

### Delmar's Story

#### Pardon who?

About ten years ago I received a pile of papers in the mail. Included in this package was a letter that stated "if you complete these forms the Crown will 'pardon' you for all the crimes that you have committed."

As I read through the papers I realized that they were from the time I was a teenager. Having been around the courthouse, I knew that when you commit a crime as a juvenile, those records should not follow you into your adult life, after so many years these records are to be destroyed. My documents were not destroyed. My file went right back to when I was nine years old. In my file there was a comment:

**Delmar is like that because his mother was in Esondale, his mother had a mental disorder and Delmar inherited a part of his mother's mental disability. He is unstable. He should be watched very closely because he will commit worse crimes.**

They wrote this about me when I was nine years old. I was deeply shocked that they still had these documents on me. People could still look them up and read this about me and about my mother being in that institution. I had no idea why she was there but I do believe it is because of the "system" that she ended up that way, she simply could not take it anymore.

Now, here they are giving me this package of papers saying that if I fill them out I will be forgiven by the Crown, by Canada, and by the whole English rule. I will be pardoned. I become so angry, even now after years of sobriety, that they come to this country and try to assimilate me, physically abuse me, sexually abuse me and now they want me to get down on my knees and beg them for forgiveness. What made me so mad was that they believed because I had straightened my life around and had become a counsellor that I was now "*worthy*" of being "*pardoned*" by the Crown. It was a slap in my face.

I was so angered at that. I am not going to get down on my knees and beg those people for forgiveness. They stated, "You will have a clean slate. If you cross the Canada/US border and they run a check on you, you will have no felonies." I was thinking, well, I've been across the border all this time and nobody has run a check on my name. Now, those people who punished my people and me for a long time, those people who caused me to be so angry and commit all these crimes, want me to ask for forgiveness.

Their system didn't all of a sudden stop and say "woo, wait a minute Delmar, you're going down the wrong trail here. We're sorry for what we did to you. Let us make it up to you. Come sit with me by the river and we'll teach you how to change your lifestyle so you are not a menace to society." They didn't do that. I had to come to that place on my own. And, I am not thoroughly pleased with the Church or the governments for me having to come to this place on my own. Although I'm a whole lot healthier I still kind of harbour the idea that I want to go after the governments and the church and stick this blame on them. I want them to say, "We are sorry." I want to give them a package of papers and say *"if you complete these papers and do these things right for my people, then I will forgive you. I will forgive you for making me this way."* Every now and then I think, oh, now I've become just like them and I hate that thought.

I want the Catholic Church and the government to apologize to my children for them being born to this father that was an alcoholic. I was a violent, mean, obnoxious alcoholic that drove their mothers to leaving me. To apologize for the hard and angry feelings that their mothers feel towards me and to any other families that I affected. That's the kind of apology that I want from them. Instead of me apologizing and asking to have my slate cleaned, they should be apologizing and asking to have their slate cleaned.

I mean, they made me. They created me. I wasn't born like this. In my culture I was born pure and clean. Everything that I ended up was learned behaviour that the residential school system taught me. The governments inflicted the residential school system upon my people. Consequently, they created that unwell, angry, violent person. I

want the Church and Canada to apologize to all the women in my life, all my children, and to all of our People.

### **Creating the character Delmar Johnnie**

They started creating this character when he was six years old when they brought him to this school. The first day I went to residential school I got beaten up by another Indian kid. The whole system was based on survival of the fittest. Consequently, the first thing I learned was that I would have to fight if I wanted to be a survivor. I remember later on that first day when I finally caught up with my older brother I said, *"I want to go home now. I've had it with this place."* My brother said "you idiot, don't you know? We're here for the rest of our life." I couldn't believe that. I couldn't understand not being able to leave this place.

From that day on I learned to fight. I'd fight my family. I'd fight my friends. I didn't even trust my brother. They broke that family connection inside me. That was their game plan -- break the family up. Then I didn't trust anybody but most of all I didn't trust or like white people -- any kind of white people.

But, I didn't trust Indians either. We were all Indians in this place and we all had to compete for everything. We had to compete for affection. We had to compete for food. I remember many times being starved. The hungriness would anger me, and hungrier I got the meaner I got. So because of these things as I grew up I became meaner.

When I was about ten or eleven years old I was tired of these bigger boys beating on me. They would threaten, "I want your dessert kid. Give me your dessert and I will protect you." So, I would give up my dessert. Finally one day I said, *"there has to be a way around this. I am tired of not eating an apple. I am tired of not eating an orange. I*

*am tired of seeing apple pie show up and not being able to eat it because some big kid is eating it.*” So four of us (Edward, Larry, Elmer and myself) decided to beat the bigger boys up. We knew we could not beat all of them up at the same time because they were so much bigger than us, but we knew four of us could beat up one of them. So we agreed on that. Now we had to make a plan. A number of my friends had gripes against my brother. So we decided that we would beat up my brother first. We were going to tell him “no more desserts.” I called him behind the gym where my friends were waiting for us. We told him, “We’ve had it with this dessert thing. You’ve got to stop bothering us.” He laughed and said, “What are you guys going to do? What are you punks going to do? You punks gonna beat me up?” He laughed. We jumped him and beat him up. I remember that was one of my biggest thrills. I think about how sad that was - beating up my brother so that he doesn’t have to force his rule on my friends and me. Then we started picking on some of the other big boys so that we didn’t have to give up desserts to them. Because of the system, I turned against my own blood. I had beaten up my brother and went on to beat up the other bigger boys. We told them they were not getting our desserts anymore. This didn’t work for very long because a few of them got together and said “you four little punks are going to get it now.”

Then, I realized that I liked beets. I would eat anything and everything just to get full. Half the school, I think, didn’t like beets. Everybody had to stay in the dining room until they ate their whole meal. The Brother would stand behind us to make sure we all ate our beets. I would eat all my beets then would ask my friends “*do you want that?*” They would say “no.” “*Well, for your dessert, I will eat your beets.*” Soon the big boys started to see that I was eating the beets and came over and said, “Hey kid, eat my beets

or I'll beat you up." I would say, "*No, beat me up. I'd rather have a beating than eat your beets. Unless, you give me your dessert too.*" "Well, I've already eaten my dessert." "*Well, no deal then. Give me your dessert and I'll eat your beets.*" Then the whole system turned around. Many of my friends started to acquire a taste for beets so that we could get full, eat desserts, and get protection. "*You protect me. If anything happens to me, you must protect me or I will never eat your beets again.*" And, it worked.

However, there were some things that I could not change even by fighting and being tough. One of those things was being left-handed. I remember when I was in grade two I drew this picture with my left hand. I don't remember what it was but Leonard Sawyer and Edward George really liked it. Sister Mary A came by and said "My, my. Sign that." I couldn't sign my initials with my right hand. She started to hit me with a ruler. She didn't see me draw that picture. She didn't have any proof, but she said she knew I did it with my left hand. She started to punish me without asking me "did you do it?" She started to punish me without "cause" and didn't even give me the opportunity to either lie or tell the truth.

Sister Mary A said that I was evil, a product of the devil and that is the reason I ended up left-handed. There was something wrong with left handed people and I was one of them, and damn it, she was going to beat that evil out of me. She beat me. She whooped my hand for doing artwork with my left hand.

Just before this incident one of the bigger boys said "I can't do nothing right, every time I turn around somebody's strapping me. I know that if you cry they won't hit you very long. They go easy on you. I'm never going to cry. I'm never going to cry. I will let them beat me all they want, but I won't give them the satisfaction of seeing me

cry.” At that very young age I adapted. That was Philip Wilson he was one of the intermediate boys then.

Then, there was this other guy that said, “cry, for heaven’s sake, as soon as they hit you, cry. You cry, you scream and then you walk away and you don’t even have a bruise. Heck, it only hurts for a little while. But look at you. Look at your knuckles.” My hands were all bruised and swollen and I couldn’t even hold anything.

Sister Mary A started to whip me, and it hurt like hell. She wasn’t whooping me on my palm; she was hitting my knuckles with a ruler. It annoyed her that I wouldn’t cry. She grabbed me by my ears and pulled me out of the desk. She knelt me down and in front of the whole class and said, “Take a look at this pagan, take a look at this product of the devil. He is left handed, we’re going to beat that out of him” After she beat me up she made me sit at the front of the class on this high stool wearing a long orange hat on my head. She instructed me to say all the prayers that I knew. I only knew part of the “Our Father” and part of the “Hail Mary.” I sat there praying but it wasn’t loud enough, then it wasn’t sincere enough. Sister Mary A strapped me again. I missed supper. I think I missed a lot of suppers because I know I was hungry all the time.

Each day I would be heading to bed so tired and worn out. Somebody would lean over and whisper, “Pssst, you did well today, you never cried, don’t let them break you.” It was like “hoooo” that’s all I needed. I would fall asleep and cry. In the morning they would say, “you were crying in your sleep.” I would reply, “*Yea, I can’t help it.*” “That’s okay, there is nothing wrong with that, so long as you don’t cry in front of them.”

Eventually, to stop me from using my left hand, Sister Mary A started to tie my hand to my leg and force me to hold my pencil with my right hand. I had to do math and

everything with my right hand. She would find an excuse to untie my hand and make me put it on the desk. I think she was trying to tempt me to use it so she would have an excuse to strap me. I would have my back to her but my friend would motion to me when she was coming. Once, just as she was swinging the ruler, I moved my hand and she hit the desk. The whole class laughed. I had a grin on my face and she hit me across the face with that ruler. Back on the floor and its like “oh shit!” At that time I knew pulling my hand away was wrong. Sister Mary A brought me up front, knelt me at her desk and strapped me. She hit me on the back with the ruler a few times. She asked the class “You guys think this is funny?” I thought, oh, can’t do that again. She said, “This man is not afraid of me.” Yet, I was deathly afraid of her. I was afraid she was going to kill me. I didn’t know what it was like to die, but I felt like I wanted to die.

This time, she went to the next classroom and came back with Sister Mary F. Sister Mary F used to point her finger at us when she spoke and everyone used to imitate her. She was busy pointing her finger at me and saying that her wrath would come down on me if I: didn’t conform, didn’t change my attitude, didn’t start doing things right. As she was talking I was looking at her cross. I would focus on her cross and black gown. Soon her finger was coming and I glanced over at her finger and grinned. She turned around and left. I remember the chatter of her beads as she walked down the hallway. She came back with this thing that reminded me of those old leather things that the barbers used to use with a metal thing across the end. She folded it in half and whooped me, both hands. “This one for not learning; this one for being evil; this one for being evil because I was a product of my mother and father.” On and on she went degrading my family. Sister Mary F used to degrade people I didn’t even know -- like my mother and father. She tried

to make me feel like I should be glad to be in residence because they were going to save me. If I believed in this Jesus Christ, I would be saved.

I guess I wasn't converting as quickly as they wanted so they started waking me up at 5:00 in the morning to go to church. If there was a towel at the end of your bed you would be woken up for early morning mass. They would wake me up and I would say *"that's not my towel, my towel is here."* But they would say it didn't matter whose towel it was, it was at the end of my bed. I would have to get up. Eventually I just gave up. I started thinking that it must be Brother F who comes in during the night and put the towel there.

Brother TF was a shorthaired army kind of character. He was involved in a lot of my beatings too. I think about that. How long would you go to jail for trying to do that to a kid in this day and age? He punished me this TF. Once, he strapped and strapped me but I refused to cry. So, he tied my hands together and strung me in the shower. As I hung there naked he strapped me on my butt. I still wouldn't cry. He hit me a couple times right in the cock. Jesus, like you know when you want to die. And I cried, but I wouldn't cry out loud. That irked him. I couldn't stand any more. I was hanging there and I swear that I was bleeding down below. Tears were running down my face it hurt so badly. Then he left and it was like oh shit, you know -- I'm going to die. Even then, when I was hanging there I couldn't figure out what I did wrong to deserve such a beating. TF brought all the boys, about 60 of them and marched them in to look at me. He hit me in the cock again and laughed "look, look at him, he is never going to be a man, even when he grows up. This is a shame; he is a product of the devil. He doesn't even have all his

parts.” Some of the older kids laughed. But there was a lot of silence in there. After that beating I was sent to the infirmary.

I hated the infirmary. I was in there and I was in so much pain from the beating. This Nun came in and she was going to make a man out of me. I could stand the beatings. I could stand the beatings, but I couldn’t stand being sexually abused. To be so young and have things changed. I would get aroused, and then all of a sudden it grows and it starts to get exciting. Nobody tells you these things. Then, getting beat up because I couldn’t keep an erection until she was sexually satisfied. These conflicting feelings were too confusing. I heard from some of the other guys that one of the young boys who were sexually abused tried to talk to someone about it. Then all the older boys started saying “Shit, you should like it you lucky son-of-a-bitch, better than having a man come after you. Better what you’re getting -- damn you.” Other boys started to beat him up because there was a woman liking him. I couldn’t say anything to anybody.

Sister Mary D, Sister Mary L, Sister Mary F, Sister Mary A, Sister Mary R,  
Brother TF, Father M, and Father D -- they did this to me. They abused me.

### **The character**

I didn’t fit into the community when I got out of residential school. I especially didn’t fit in at Green Point, which is where my family was from. I was one of those who had left, and now was returning an educated kid. The boys in the neighborhood hated me for that. I came out of there when I was in grade eight going into grade nine. Two of the kids I tried to hang out with were Bradley and Gordie. Both of them had been in residential school. They weren’t there long. I don’t know why. But, by the time I came out of there I was different. I did a lot of stupid things to try fit in.

I remember that awkwardness of always having the questions in my face, “are you still a virgin?” Then they would tease and say, “Yea, you’re still a virgin you idiot. What are you going to do, save yourself until you’re twenty-one?” When I finally saw my dad he asked, “you a virgin yet kid? What are you saving it for? That’s why you’ve got pimples on your face. You’ve got so much of it, its just busting out all over.” It was like god, you can’t tell anybody. I thought of saying *“Hey, before I was nine, and continuous for a while, I’ve been sleeping with a grown woman. Ah, you know, it wasn’t all that great. I never got good at it so I decided to quit.”* I would think up these things that I could say to them, but I never did.

One day we were sitting in front of the pool hall in China Town and this girl came by. Her name was Doris and she used to run around with everybody. As she walked down the street everybody was ogling at her. She never even looked at us -- we were just punks. As she came by she stopped and asked “any of you young boys got a match?” Everybody is kind of like oh, and digging around and trying to find a match. She looked at me and said, “Hey, who’s the new guy? Has anybody had him yet?” Everybody started to giggle. One of the guys said, “No, he’s gay. He’s a fag. He’s going to be a beatnik. He likes boys. He was in residential school. Some guy’s been fucking this guy. Now, he doesn’t like girls.” Doris came and stood by me “is that right. You don’t like girls?” All these things were going through inside me. You assholes. You fucking assholes. I just looked at her and said, *“You’re not worth fucking. I could turn you around, stick it in your ass and you’d probably enjoy it. It’s supposed to fucking hurt.”* Everybody laughed and somebody shouted “told you he was gay.”

From then on everybody started thinking that. They said things like, watch the way he walks, there is something wrong with the guy. You know, its like when I came out of residential school I thought I'd leave all that stuff behind. Now I get out into my own community and its like maybe there is something wrong with me. You can't win. I would look at myself and I swear that there was something wrong with me. I was ugly. I was any ugly kid. Now I was growing up and was going to be even uglier. People used to say that I was such a fine looking young man. I hated them for saying that because I didn't like how I looked. Women tried me and they didn't like me. Now, people thought that guys liked me, or I liked guys. It didn't seem to matter what I did or whom I talked to.

When I was on the soccer team I was ashamed to shower with the guys because I didn't want anybody looking at my private parts. TF that son-of-a-bitch. I hated him. Finally one day I went in and showered. My cousin (and good friend) Norman was in there. He looked at me and said "we're alone here you know. Are you after me?" I said, "No." He looked at me and asked, "Are you really like that?" Again, I replied, "No." Norman looked at me and said, "Holy shit, I believe you. Something happened to you in there ain't it?" I said, "Yea."

That was that. We were sitting there getting dressed and everybody else was already on the cars. Sammy came in and said, "Come on you guys. You guys getting married or what?" Norman said, "I don't want to hear what happened in there. I don't want to know what's going on with you. I like that you can play soccer well. You do that and you just stay the fuck away from me and we'll be all right. I don't mind you as a

friend but don't fucking talk to me. People already think we're funny." Norman walked out. I wouldn't sit close to him. I wouldn't talk to him.

Norman lived just down the road from me and eventually we became good buddies. We would go camping together. People would ask him "what's it like camping with that guy? Does he try anything?" Norman would say, "No, he's a guy. He hunts and he listens because I teach him how to hunt. If I eat raw clams, he'll eat raw clams. He wants to learn everything. He wants to know how to do everything. I think he is trying to be a man. Just leave him alone." Somebody said something to Norman and he starting getting into fights with them. Then all of a sudden I thought maybe I'd do that too.

From then on I had figured out how to get the best of anybody. It didn't matter what I had to do, when all else failed I could use violence, use anger, or just act crazy. When you go crazy everybody fears you. Everybody hates crazy people. When people found out that my mother had been in Esondale they started looking at me like I was crazy too. So I acted crazy. For a time there when I got out of residential school I drank and acted crazy and everybody was afraid of me. I terrorized people. I would even terrorize people that were bigger than me -- people who could beat me up. People were afraid of me. So in order to vent my anger of TF for punishing me I would terrorize other people.

I remember once when these guys showed up and said "there's a car down there with some beer in it." So I went down there, broke in and took the beer. We started drinking. After one beer I felt this surge come on. I didn't like the taste of that stuff. It tasted like somebody's warm piss or something. I thought, "Ugh, people drink this?" But, all of my friends were just guzzling it down. You can't pack it around town so you would

have to drink three or four bottles and then go back. They said the rush is to drink it real fast. Then, when you go back to the pool hall and sit down you will feel the surge come all over you. So I drank the one beer and felt a twinge of it.

We all went back to the pool hall. All of a sudden I stood up in the hall and yelled, *“Okay mother fuckers, who thinks I’m gay?”* My Uncle Felix said “you’re fucking gay!” I turned around and punched him right in the mouth. He was bigger than me. He said, “you little shit, I don’t want to wreck anything in here. You fucking little shit you’re pissed.” I said, *“Fuck you, fuck you and all your family. Fuck you and all those mother fuckers.”* He said, “Who the fuck turned this kid on? I’m gonna take this little shit outside and beat the piss out of him.” He walked upstairs and had me by the neck. I was standing there looking at him and thinking, holy shit, had a beer, started to feel this way, feel like I can take on the world, and now this big son-of-a-bitch is going to beat the hell out of me! I said, *“You want to wrestle or do you want to box? I want to wrestle so we can get close. You might beat me up but I’ll enjoy it.”* He yelled, “you fucking little queer.” I grabbed my nuts with both hands and he backed up. As he backed up I kicked him right in the balls. I just kicked him, and kicked him and kicked him. All of a sudden it was like whew, he was just laying there, twitching, bleeding all over the place.

I walked back to the car, got another beer, guzzled it and felt the rush they talked about. When I was done, I threw the bottle down and walked back holding my breath. I walked into the pool hall and said *“which other asshole thinks I’m fucking gay?”* Everybody just looked at me and asked, “What happened to Felix?” *“Your fucking cousin is out there because he said I was fucking gay. Who else wants to say I’m gay? I killed*

*him. I had a knife and I stabbed the death out of him. He's dead. I've got a knife out there. Anybody else want to come out? I'm not scared of you fuckers.*” They were all looking at me thinking, holy shit the kid's crazy.

Finally somebody went out and said Felix is lying there bleeding. They were going to call the cops. Gordie came up to me and said “you crazy shit you don't stab people.” I said, “*I didn't stab him.*” Then he grabbed me and said, “you're all right kid.” Son-of-a-bitch that feels good. I'm all right!

Gordie just snapped his fingers and all our friends got up and we walked out of the pool hall. Late Ramsey turned around and said, “my friend isn't fucking gay, you guys got it?” Nobody said anything. We all walked out. We walked home giggling and laughing. “Are you gay?” “*Fuck you!*” “Where did you get that idea?” I explained that I was scared of Felix and when I hit him he went down. When I walked back into the pool hall all of Felix's friends -- the Black hawks -- were standing there. I knew those guys don't let anybody beat up their friends, they would gang up on me. So I said I had a knife so they wouldn't come after me. Felix never said anything to me after that. Even though we paddled canoe together he never spoke to me. But, everyone stopped saying I was gay.

Beat Ramsey up. Beat Bradley up. Gordie said, “Jesus, you're a really nice guy when you're sober. You just smell a beer cap and you go nuts.”

This one guy came into the bar, looked at me and said “Delmar I am sick and tired of you beating me up. I'm gonna go home and get my gun and come over here and shoot you.” I said, “*Okay, do it.*” In my drunkenness I broke into his house while he was passed out. I piled kindling, paper and wood under his bed. I sat there and waited for him to

wake up. About 10:00 the next morning this guy and his girlfriend woke up. I said, "*You see, you threatened to shoot me last night. Maybe you don't remember. But, you threatened to shoot me. Now look under your bed.*" He looked and said, "What the heck is all this wood doing here?" I lit a match and started lighting the paper. He asked, "What are you doing?" I told him "*I'm going to burn you in your bed with who ever you're with. I could have did it last night. You would be dead now. But I just want you to know that if you try to put this out I'm going to beat you up right here, right now. You ever threatened me again, I'll burn you, your whole family. I'll kill everybody that you ever liked.*" I walked out of the house and he put the fire out. From then on he was totally afraid of me. He never gave me any trouble again. He still doesn't like me today. I see him out there. I've been sober for seventeen years but he still doesn't trust me. I think he is still afraid of me because I was that character.

I terrorized lots of people that way. Just horrified them. I'd show up and be so angry and do crazy things because, heck my mother was crazy. I found out that she was only in Esondale for three months. What the hay. How come they turned her loose? Maybe it was a mistake. When I think about that I think I used that craziness to survive.

When I was drinking I didn't care about anything. I didn't care about bleeding or pain or anything. But the minute I was sober I was afraid that something might happen to me that would hurt. When I was sitting there with a gun in my mouth the only thing that kept me from pulling the trigger was I was afraid of the pain. I wanted to shoot my heart. I wanted to shoot my stomach. But I thought what if I'm alive for three months in the hospital and in pain; I couldn't stand that. I would rather die than stand the pain. I was afraid that I would break down before I died. I learned in residential school never be

broken. Don't let them break you, all the students used to say. So I used to think that if I got into a fight and was beaten to death that would not be giving in. I would have died fighting and that would be the ultimate dream. I often think that I was given the fear of pain and the fear of blood to keep me alive.

Many of my friends committed suicide. I was only nineteen when my first friend shot himself. It seemed like every six or eight months after that another friend was dead. The day we stole the beer and went into the pool hall and raised hell, there were seven of us. Today, there is only my cousin Norman and myself. Because of the memories, we can only stand to be around each other for about five minutes.

Once we were sitting in the pub and Norman commented, "You know sometimes I can still see the gang sitting over there - Ramsey, Gordie, Jimmy Boy, and Fancie. They are sitting there laughing and asking me to come on over. What are you still doing in that pile of shit? Come on, join us. It is nice over here." Norman freaked me out with this statement. I had tried to commit suicide enough to know that my cousin was talking about committing suicide. Then he said, "You know the worst thing that could happen? When one of us dies, the other will be here alone. It is going to be holy hell for whoever is the last one."

### **Relationships**

Having been sexually abused by a female caused a lot of damage to the women in my life. I was told in residence, and believed, that I would never be good enough. I would never be able to satisfy a woman because I would never be a man. I also believed that I would never be a good father. Much of my decision-making was based on what they told and taught me in residential school. I believed what they told me was the truth.

When I talked to the newspaper a while back about Kuper Island Residential School I talked about being sexually abused. But, even then, I purposely left out the fact that a woman abused me. I left that out because I was still ashamed of being abused by a woman. It seemed like it would have been safer and less shameful to be abused by a man.

I was at a meeting one night and this guy was talking about being abused by one of the nuns at Kuper. One of the older men said “hell, if one of those nuns started to have sex with me I would still be there.” Everybody had a good laugh at that comment. That kind of sticks out in my mind. The whole shame of being abused by that nun is still here. I mean I am fifty-two years old and have been sober for 17 years and yet when I come to this place I still have this tremendous shame that a woman did that to me. Some days I get so angry and tell myself that I have a right to hate her -- it was wrong what she did to me. At only ten years old, she beat me because I couldn't keep an erection. Her actions have affected all my sex life and still ventures into my sex life today.

I didn't want that treatment from them. To this day I hate getting sick. It is getting easier though. I have a hard time letting Vicky look after me. I can't stand it -- I can't stand getting sick.

Relationships with women have always been hard for me. When things got too good I would kill the relationship because I was afraid of having a good relationship. I didn't know what it was like to have somebody love me. It pissed me off when they said, “I love you Delmar.” Why, why do they love me, there is nothing here. I remember hollering at them. There is nothing here to love. I don't even love myself. Why do you love me? Love would end the relationship. If I couldn't make them mad enough so that

they would leave, I would leave. I would walk away and say, *"They will be better off without me."* I often think about all of the women and children that I have hurt in my life.

One time when a lot of my family were together we were talking about how many children I have. Most of my family just kind of laughed and said, "you're a stud, you're really a stud." I got really angry and said *"you guys don't understand. Those women I was in love with. I wanted to have a life with them. But, the minute they started to love me it didn't feel good."* As long as we were drinking things didn't matter, but when we were sober and they loved me I would self-destruct and sabotage the relationship. I didn't believe that I was lovable. I felt this way because of what happened in residential school.

My first relationship lasted seven years. We stayed together this long because neither of us gave a shit. We would always end up together because we were the last ones at the party. During these seven years we had four children. Eventually I ended up so wild that I shot the house with a gun. I made four of them strip down and crawl out. As they were naked crawling out I was yelling at them *"Say all the prayers you know. I can't fucking hear you. Say them louder."*

For this I was charged with assault with a deadly weapon. At the trial I got eight months, eight months, eight months and eight months to be served consecutively. While in the courtroom I got so angry I yelled, *"Fuck you Judge, what do you think I am, a stupid fucking Indian?"* And got two years less a day. The day I got out she packed up the kids and left for the States.

There was another time that I just went crazy and sabotaged a relationship. This time it was with Deb. We had two children Larissa and Nolan. I had to work on my truck one day and when I went to get my tools some of them had been moved. I went and got

Deb, Larissa and Nolan and made them stand together. As they stood there I yelled, “*These are mine. See them? Don’t fucking touch them.*” At this time I had been sober for a while but I still acted like that drunken character.

I often think about all of these women and children that I have hurt in my life.

***I WANT THE CHURCH AND CANADA TO APOLOGIZE  
TO ALL OF THESE WOMEN.***

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**Children**

I think about my children all the time. I have children down in the States from my first marriage. I was very unhealthy at that time in my life. I did an awful lot of drinking, an awful lot of partying and had children. I wasn’t around for the raising of these children. Just as soon as we had a child I was in the bar partying and celebrating saying, “*I had a girl*” or “*I had a boy*” and giving out cigars.

I remember once going to the hospital in my drunkenness. I walked into the maternity ward looking for my wife and child. They weren’t there. I was angry and raising hell with the staff. They checked their records and informed me that my wife and child had gone home four days ago. I was drunk all that time and thought it was like yesterday. The sadness of that. Sometimes I would get home after two weeks of drinking and finally get to see the child. I would be breathing on the child. Thinking about the sadness around that whole atmosphere that my children were born into. Then, being so violent towards their mother that she had to leave the country for fear of her life. Of course, taking the children with her.

A few years ago my third oldest child came home. She was twenty-six years old. I had seen her a couple summers ago but didn't know her. She came into my house and sat and talked to me. She looks so much like Larissa that it was actually shocking for a while. Here I was spending time with this strong woman that was my child from years ago. I kind of remember when she was young. I kind of remember, in a drunken blur, when she left. Losing my family was just another excuse to drink.

About ten years ago this young man shows up at my door. I answered the door and this little guy was standing there looking at me. He asked, "Is this where the asshole Delmar Johnnie lives?" I looked at him and thought, oh shit who is this? I always had this fear that someday, somebody's kid would remember me beating up his father, uncle, brother, grandfather or something and look for me to even the score. So, I thought, what is this kid going to do? Jesus, I've had a really hard day at work and I don't need this. So, I closed the door. He rang the doorbell again and continued pounding on the door. Vicky asked, "Who's that?" I told her "*I don't know. Some kid out there looking for an asshole named Delmar Johnnie.*" I really didn't believe, at that time, that I was an asshole. I had changed my life around. I went back to the door and opened it up, looked this little guy right in the face. He asked again "is this where the asshole Delmar Johnnie lives?" I said, "*I am the asshole Delmar Johnnie. Who the hell are you?*" He said, "Well, I'm the asshole's son." I thought, ohh I don't even know this guy from Adam. So I said, "*What the hell's your name?*" He said "Delmar Johnnie." Holy smokes, my heart just went haaaa, the kid was only a year old when his mother left and I never really saw him. I heard that his Aunts looked after him. We had two more children but I never really seen them either. When his mother left the country she changed their last names to Joseph. My

son went on to tell me that all his life he had asked about his father. His family would respond by saying “oh that asshole Delmar Johnnie” and tell him what kind of a bugger I was, how mean I was, how ugly I was, and that I was good for nothing. So, he had come to meet me himself.

At that particular time I was counselling. While he was at my place he would come with me to the office. As we would be driving down the road I would be waving at people. He would ask, “Who’s that?” I would tell him. “Who’s that?” I would tell him. Pretty soon I was explaining who everyone was. He said, “Dad, you know everyone around here. They all like you.” I explained to him that in this line of work I meet a lot of people and help their children. He said “They kind of like you. I hate to say it but I think you’re a nice guy.” Good grief, my own son is calling me a nice guy, my own son that I didn’t know for all these years. He commented that I was nothing like what he imagined. So those people down there had this image of me and my children grew up only knowing that. What did the rest of my kids grow up with? This is where I want the apology to go. The Church and Canada are responsible for that -- I want to hold them responsible for it.

***I WANT THE CHURCH AND CANADA TO APOLOGIZE  
TO ALL OF THESE CHILDREN.***

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**Culture and tradition**

Our people were so strong that amidst all the drinking and partying, the sad times of losing their children were still able to hang onto the traditions, the culture and the language. They didn’t give up. I think that’s a big part of what saved our community. It saved my life. Our old People were strong -- they held onto our culture.

For a long time the Elders would talk to me. They would say, “Go out there and learn. Learn the white man’s way because there is no money in the Indian language.” So I went out there and logged and eventually went back to school and got an education.

Finally I started to understand some of the Hul’qumi’num language and what it meant. Now I realize how fortunate I am that my ancestors were so strong. They believed in equality. They believed that somewhere along the line that if we saved the culture and tradition our younger people would benefit from it. They knew that and hung onto that belief. The Elders suffered and paid dearly for hanging onto this belief.

I don’t know why, but the Elders knew that it would be a waste of time to try teaching the cultural and traditional ways immediately after I returned from residential school. They knew that I distrusted everybody and everything because of all the abuse I received in residence. They would wait to share the teachings. When they could see that I was ready to listen, they started sharing the teachings.

These teachings were such a gift because after the treatment I received in residential school I had a hard time praying to anybody or anything. I felt that if I prayed, I would be accepting what the Church and Canada did to me in residential school. Prayer became very hypocritical. After years of doing horrendous things and being bailed out by my Grandmother I went to treatment. I joined an Alcoholics Anonymous program and sobered up. At this time I started going back to the longhouse and listening to the teachings. I realized then that these teaching had been saved for all these years and now they would help strengthen me.

One of the teachings that I received from the sweat lodge was that the key to a better way of life is to create happiness each day. This happiness will become a memory

and the more happy memories we have the smaller the miserable times in our lives become. What an exciting way to look at healing, to create happiness in our lives.

Ironically, when I began to see the benefits of the cultural and traditional ways I became very angry. I was angry because in residence I was sexually, verbally, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually abused and now I was learning about a better way of life. I was learning how to take care of myself. Residential school kept this from me. The Church and Canada kept this from our People.

***I WANT THE CHURCH AND CANADA TO APOLOGIZE  
TO OUR PEOPLE.***

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**Healing**

Healing in our culture is about the advancement of the human being. Healing is believing that we can be spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally balanced. In such, we are always healing. We are always becoming healthier human beings.

Whereas, in residence I was taught that if healing needed to happen then there must be something “wrong” with that individual. If you have something wrong then you must admit that you are not up to par, not equal, below average, you are a loser. This does not feel good. With this belief, once you reach a certain stage you are “perfect” or healed. Once healed, there is no room for error because obviously there is only one way to go and that is down. In my belief, in the Creator, I believe that I can become the healthiest ‘me.’

It is comforting to know that I am doing the best I can everyday because memories carry pain. I’m glad I didn’t like pain because it helped me not remember. When I was drinking I was so miserable. I was an asshole. Once I was in Powell River

and this guy said, “When I drank I was a drunken asshole. When I sobered up I was a sober asshole.” What he said made so much sense. I knew then that I needed to change my attitude and my behaviours because I was still dealing with the pain.

I had been sober for eight years when I was sitting painting a picture and for some reason I starting looking at my hand. Sister Mary A used to punish me because I was left-handed. They said I was a product of the devil and I was going to be worse. But, I was a good artist even then. I realized that for years I had punished myself by drinking, drugging and fighting.

Food is another painful memory. Because I remember the pain of being hungry most of the time in residence I now use food as a way of feeding pain. Even with others, I try feed their pain. If something upsets or hurts my daughter who is nine years old, the first thing I want to do is feed her. Once I remember something happened to her at school and she was really upset. Without even thinking about it I took her to 7-11. There I was asking her “*What do you want? You can have anything you want.*” She was looking at me kind of puzzled, “Dad, I’m not hungry.”

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### **Fuchsia**

Right now if you tried to hold the priests, brothers, and nuns responsible they would say they were not to blame. I don’t believe that for a second. I think they knew exactly what they were doing. They were out to break us -- mind, body, soul and emotion. I think they did a good chunk of that to our people, but I don’t think they fully succeeded because many of us are starting to understand there is a better life to be had.

Some people never saw that there was a better way of life. I think about Emerson. They killed him. All of those dark painful secrets died with him. Each time the secrets die with someone, Canada and the Church look more innocent. That Canada and the Church could appear innocent makes me angry. Every time I go back and remember something from residential school I am afraid. I fear the shame and the pain of being abused. But, each time I go back it gets a little easier. I have pride in myself. I can walk with my family and hold my head up. I can go to the Big House and sit with my family and that will help me get through this stuff.

But there is so much happiness to be had. Many of our people, especially those my age, really struggle. Many of my classmates still carry the residential school issues with them. They make decisions based on times in residence, whereas with me, I don't do that much any more. I don't think that I degrade myself or put myself down as much as I used to.

Sometimes, though, I still momentarily question myself. For example, one night after a Council meeting this fellow said "something good must have happened to you in there. I mean look at you, you stopped drinking, you've helped a lot of our people, and you've really turned your life around. Didn't residential school give you the will to survive?" His comments made me so angry. I thought, well maybe if I didn't go to residential school I couldn't have been tough and mean enough to make it this far in my life. But it didn't matter how I thought about it, the answer was "*NO!*"

They weren't trying to teach me to survive; their intention was to defeat me. They wanted me to be a white person with no culture or tradition. Everything good that happened in my life happened when I got sick and tired of being sick and tired.

But definitely the residential school stuff still controls how I feel about myself. It's still there, the doubt in myself. While I am in the place of transition where I am learning more and more about the sweat, hearing and learning about pipe carriers, sun dances and healers I realize I still have a ways to go. Sometimes I see it really clearly that I need to know that I still have a way to go. I think if I ever get to the place where I believe that I have made it, that I am healed, I might stop striving to move forward and the past may catch up to me. The minute I stop taking care of myself and feel too comfortable that old character that I practiced for so long is right back.

I need to constantly be aware of the characteristics of that 'character.' I consciously work at getting rid of the language and changing the negative thinking. The other day I went outside and there was garbage all over the yard. The dogs got it. "*God damn!*" The language came back just like that, cussing and swearing. I was thinking that I would buy a bee bee gun and those dogs are gonna get it. I didn't need to be talking or thinking like that. Who forgot the garbage out there? I did. I was going to put the garbage in the truck and take it down to the road to be picked up. When I was packing it out to the truck something happened and I put it down and forgot about it. So here I am thinking I don't need to be acting like this. So I picked up the garbage. But it is all these little things that bring me back and pretty soon I am cussing and swearing.

Those parts of my drinking days are still there. I don't think they impact my decision making these days, but they are still there. I need to be aware of them so that I can continue to work at getting those behaviors out of my life and then I can let go of that drinking part. I know very clearly today that I am not going to drink. My morning prayers

often are that I be strong enough to go to bed sober tonight. These things are coming a little more natural.

When I was in counselling they asked me to remember a happy time from when I was a child. I really struggled, but after about three days I remembered a time at Green Point before residential school. I remember sitting in a plum tree eating plums. I remembered that happiness. So I think when I was about thirty-seven the counsellor said you should treat yourself to some kind of happiness. It was the right time of year so down I went to Green Point to the plum tree. I climbed up the tree. It was neat connecting with the kid in myself. The plums didn't taste the way I remember. The day after, I knew the plums didn't taste the way I remember, I got sick. I had diarrhea and was shaking. I ate so many plums that my stomach was hurting. So there I was, thirty-seven years old, sitting up in this tree remembering happiness.

At that time I could only remember one happy time at residential school, which was leaving. I could remember funny times, but it was more laughing at people or making fun of people. The only good times I can remember from residence were stealing apples or carrots, hiding them, and then being able to eat. Eight years, only one happy time.

Leaving that was the happiest time. I packed the little suitcase they gave because they said it was mine. I never looked in it because they said, "the school is going to be very generous with you Delmar and let you take the clothes you have on because you do not have any other clothes." So I was leaving. I walked down to the boat and never looked back. I remember thinking please don't let the boat break down. I doubted that I was really going to Chemainus. Finally we arrived in Chemainus and as I was walking up

the dock someone said, “Here is your ticket, the bus is right there. I was on my way home to Duncan.

When I finally got to Uncle Sam’s, Norman was sitting there. “What a funny looking kid” he said. I put my suitcase down and said “*You get off your porch and come here, I’m gonna beat you up.*” He said, “You must be Popsy.” I hadn’t heard that in such a long time, that was my nickname before I went away. A few of my family still call me that. I said “*Yea, that’s me.*” He said, “Hi, I’m your cousin Norman.” “*Well, don’t ever call me a funny looking kid again or I will beat you up.*” “Sure sound tough, skinny thing like you” he laughed. “You don’t have to be so tough any more this is home not school,” Norman said.

“What you got in your suitcase?” he asked. “*I don’t know*” I replied. “Well let’s look,” he said. So we opened it up. There was a little pair of short pants and a little short shirt. These were the clothes I wore when I went there. Norman laughed and laughed, “These socks and these little shoes! You got a kid someplace?” I said “*No. They told me these were mine.*” “It must have been your old clothes when you first went there. You were gone a long time you know.”

Later that summer when Grama came home she saw the suitcase and asked, “What’s in there? I remember that suitcase.” I opened it up and she started to cry, not loud, just tears rolling down her cheeks. I couldn’t understand it. “These were the clothes you took when you went to school,” Grama cried. “Could I have them?” I said “*Sure.*” “Could I have your suitcase?” she asked. “*Sure, I don’t want them. I’m done with that place.*”

I couldn't understand why she cried. I didn't understand why I went to residential school until I sobered up. Once I sobered up I remembered how hard she fought to keep us from that place and they threatened to send her to jail if she didn't let us go there. It must have hurt her an awful lot. I heard stories about my Grandmother trying to find us and not knowing what school we were in. They lied to her as to our whereabouts. And, here I was so close to where Grama lived. She must have been really troubled and pained to lose us to that school, and then to be reminded of losing us by seeing my tiny little belongings in that suitcase.

They said so many things that were untrue. They told me my Grandmother had died and that there was nobody home to care for us. They told me that they were generous to me. They told me I was a product of the devil because I was left-handed. It took a long time to work through the damage that residential school created.

Sister Mary A used to beat me up so much. She used to tell me that I was stupid and dumb and that "you will be really lucky if you even make it to grade eight."

Even when I went back to school and was a straight "A" student I lacked confidence. I had internalized all that they told me in that place. Vicky would tell people that I was a straight "A" student and I found that very painful. It hurt me that she was telling people. Even when I looked at the grades I thought I could do better. I should have worked harder. I used to hide all of my certificates; I didn't like to show them anywhere. Vicky would say "you should put them up somewhere." I would say "*No. It kind of says that I am smart.*" Vicky would say, "Well, you are smart." Today, I am starting to believe that I am smart and it feels really good.

Wow! Thinking about this stuff and I think my story should end in fuchsia colours, a scene with Vicky, Rose, Robina and myself. In this scene, I am a good husband and a good father. Basically, I am none of the things they said I was in residential school. I have moved beyond that. The story will end with a family. Not just a family, a wonderful family.

What a great picture to be sitting here with my daughters. They will never know anything about that time except what's on the film and what I tell them. Sometimes I look at Rosie vibrating with laughter and excitement about something and all I want to do is protect her so she can always feel that way. Just like when Vicky tickles me. Sometimes I choke on the laughter. Its like I can't laugh too much. I am learning what I missed out on as a kid, for me drinking was normal. Now, I live with my wife and our two children -- this is normal. It is so exciting to be able to be here at this time. I am creating a different image, an image of what a healthy man is.

Some of my biggest thrills are driving Rosie to school and walking down to Green Point with my youngest daughter. I tell her "*This is my home. This is where I grew up.*" I refuse to tell her about the eight years in residential school. When I really look at it, it was only that small number of eight years that has caused a whole lot of damage in my life. Up until I was thirty-five I was really miserable and created a lot of damage. Both intentionally and unintentionally I hurt so many people. I blame Canada and the Catholic Church for the decisions I made for the first thirty-five years of my life. I chose to drink and do drugs and live the craziness of addictions and bad residential school memories.

I have children and grandchildren. I have missed their lives. I don't have memories of holding them or walking with them or any of this stuff. So right now, this part of my life is exciting because I can do these things for these children I have with me.

So this is a wonderful life. I go hunting and fishing. I pick fresh flowers. I have a partner who has time to listen, even when she's busy. I have a chance to offer my youngest daughters a healthy father in all its wonderfulness. This part just excites me. As an artist this time makes me think of fuchsia colours. These fuchsia colours kind of come but they are not a flat colour, they are little designs shooting by and that is what my happiness is like. It is really exciting. I am so glad to be here experiencing this.

## **MEMORIES**

### **HAPPY MEMORIES**

#### **HELP PUSH THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL DOWN**

\* \* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER SIX LA'HAL'UWITS's STORY

### Introduction: Herman Thomas

I am La'hal'uwits, a direct descendent of the Taatka people whose traditional territory is Valdez Island. This territory includes all the surrounding small islands. My father was Herman Joseph Thomas. I have the honour of sharing his Indian name -- La'hal'uwits. My mother was Beatrice Dorothy Johnny whose traditional territory was Nanaimo.

I am also a close relative to the author Robina Thomas. Robina's grandmother and my grandmother were sisters from Nanaimo First Nation. I am grateful that my cousin asked me to be one of three people she would interview regarding Kuper Island Residential School. I did not realize that the school affected me as much as it had. Now I realize that every decision I make is based on the impact of residential school. I am going to counselling now and am changing the decisions and choices that I make. I am a hundred times less angry. Thank you my dear cousin Robina.

La'hal'U'Wits  
Herman Thomas  
Thomas & Thomas Exporters

### Hermans' Story

I sort of vaguely remember seeing my Mom read this letter, but I can't remember her reaction. I remember that I was in Grade 6. I don't remember who was holding my hand but I remember crying and hollering at my Mom, saying, "I'm not going to love you no more for sending me away to Kuper Island." I remember that. **Only** after listening to all these other stories, it kicked in -- my parents didn't send me to Kuper.

### Life in residence

I can still remember what happened on a daily basis. The Brother would clap his hands two or three times. As soon as we heard that clap, we fell off our beds and started praying. What prayer, I don't remember. The Brother would lead, of course. Then, we'd go wash up, change, go downstairs, get our mops and start cleaning wherever we were designated to clean. And then eat.

When I first arrived at Kuper Island, I didn't know my catechism; I don't know how long it took them to figure it out – probably not very long. They thought I should know, 'Our Father', 'Hail Mary', 'Act of Contrition' and other Catholic prayers. Because I didn't know any of these prayers they placed me in grade five. So I lost a year of education because of that. I was pretty upset about that.

They forced us to be altar boys. We had no choice. I didn't like that much either. I think they did this because I didn't know all the prayers they thought I should. I remember they used to tell us that all our ancestors were in Limbo, a place between Heaven and Hell and if we said enough hosannas we would free a soul from Limbo to Heaven. They told us that these ejaculations had specific points, 2, 5, 10, or 100 points. They actually made us believe that. So out of fear of, I guess the people that must have died, I remember really praying a lot trying to get somebody out of Limbo – who, I don't know.

Of course I remember all the times that we cleaned the main building. It would become so clean. When I got out of residential school I kept the cleanliness a part of my life. Lin, my wife, couldn't figure out why I was so meticulous. I was this way in restaurants as well as when I was eating at home. I have to pile the dishes, make sure

everything is all set; I removed all the crumbs from the table into my hand and then placed the crumbs on the plate. I had to explain to her that it was residential school. It was so ingrained in me. I wouldn't even stop trying not to do it. I think occasionally I would look at it and say, *"Nah, I'm not gonna to do it. Ah hell, I'm gonna do it."* Because I seen it as something I wanted to be anyway, is to be a clean person.

In residential school we had to run every day. I think we had to (I could be wrong by a mile or two) run a mile before breakfast and a mile after breakfast, a mile before lunch, a mile after lunch, a mile after school, a mile before supper, a mile after supper, and then a mile before we went to sleep. So, we ran a good 8 miles every day of our lives while there. And then on Sundays, I think, we got to take a trip to the South end of Kuper Island. We had a picnic down there, they called it, and then we'd have to run back. Everybody ran back, from the oldest to the youngest. There were three categories of children, the juniors, intermediates, and seniors. I was a senior all the time I was there.

We would run back from the South end of the island. It was about 5 miles. I remember it took me 35 minutes. We were fast after running every day. Richard Thorne used to always come first, then Danny Seymour, Clarence James, and then me, fourth. It was competitive. I always tried to come in third, but I never did. It was a thrill, it was exciting to compete and have fun running. The terrain was rough so we had to be very goat-like in terms of running over holes and rocks. That part of it was easy because back home we lived in the country.

Eating, we were told to eat everything, and it was pretty bad food. But we got accustomed to it or we were punished. Brian James was a senior when I was there; he was a big fellow for his age. Anyway, he wouldn't eat his mush. Brother Furlong was

patrolling up and down the aisles to making sure people were eating. Brian wasn't eating. Brother Furlong and Brian had words. The Brother pushed Brian's face right into the hot mush. Brian got mad and the Brother dragged him upstairs. Brother Furlong was probably going to slap him but Brian started fighting him. We all laughed with anticipation, hoping that Brian would win because they were actually having a fistfight. They'd go up one flight of stairs, and Brian would come down, then he'd run up and the Brother would come flying down and they'd make it up to the a 2nd flight of stairs. It was just a free-for-all fight between a teenager and a full-grown man. He had to eat his mush.

### Family

Family -- residential school really took its toll on our families. In residential school they kept us segregated. Even if they were my brothers and sisters, we were not allowed to mingle. They kept us *very* separate, distinctly doing different things. It makes me think that they were so smart that government and church that they made sure we were never united as cultured people, as a family, or as a people. It was a whole strategy. That's what they did at residential school, and it worked. It kept them in power. They made sure we were separate, the same way their governmental system is structured. Nobody knows what each other's doing. They stay in power and that's the problem. So I think they were very successful with what they were doing.

Every one of my siblings went to residential school. I don't remember who was there when. Two years ago I was talking to brother Walter, he says, "Oh yeah, I remember Michael David when I was in school..." I responded, "*Jesus, Walter, this makes me really angry.*" He says, "Why?" "*Because I don't remember you going there.*"

I don't remember who went there after I got out. I think it's a mental block. I just didn't care who went there after that and I just went on with my daily life, so to speak. What held me together is the simple fact that my mother was there. My father had a different whole lifestyle. He was a manly man who drank a lot. He was just an authority, the ultimate say in terms of, 'you guys behave, or else'. But Mom was the loving, caring one, as mothers are, I guess. I came home to that so I'm instantly having fun because my Mom and other siblings were there.

When I was drinking I hated my father. We were at a stalemate because he tried to control me and I wouldn't let anyone control me. We were mad at each other. Not so much that I hated my father because in reality, I did love my Dad, I know that. It came to such an extreme. Dad was passed out on the bed. I picked up a 22, loaded it, walked to my Dad and I pointed the gun at his mouth. I cocked the gun and was standing there getting ready to pull the trigger and put this dog out of his misery. This absolute rage is the extreme effect of anger. I was at that place where I wanted to get more violent and stop something that was hurting my family.

My older brother walked in and says, "Herman, what are you doing?" I said, "*I'm gonna put this dog out of his misery.*" So he says, "You can't do that. That's my Dad. That's your Dad." I said, "*No, it's not. I refuse to accept that. That's not a Dad.*" He was behind me and said, "Don't do it then. That's your brothers' and sisters' Dad."

I was lucky my brother was smart enough to think and say that. I said, "OK", and released the catch so it went in safety. He said, "Let's go up the mountain." So we went. Nobody knew that. That's how close I got to destroying something that was hurting in the family. I think that was more an impact of residential school than what I thought it was.

These things have made me want to continue fighting the government. They **still** continue to destroy the families of all the people that were at residential school.

Anger and rage, I think is associated with having no love. If you have no love, you have rage. If you have no love, you have anger. And so, I think that's part and parcel, it's not just the simple act of being there. It's having no love -- period. You become a shell, sort of. And then, that anger created the fearlessness. I think the "no fear" means an accelerated amount of anger.

I know that anger is one issue for the reason I am the way I am, because I was there. We have the capability of showing compassion but not love, because love is a different issue altogether. But we have heart and compassion for our people because we were all there. I have compassion for the person I see downtown who is so alcoholic or drug addicted when I know they went to residential school. I have compassion for that person. I feel bad for that person. I feel sadness for that person because I know the reason they are the way they are is because of residential school.

Unfortunately, sometimes I jeopardize my own life, my own well being trying to be a saviour of these people. These people who were not able spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally to fight the effects of residential school.

### **I'm a survivor**

We didn't know what effects residential schools had on our lives. As we continued to live our lives, the impact of residential school became noticeable. I learned from the many experiences in residential school that I had to take control of my own life. Sometimes this control meant rejecting anything that represented residential school. Other times it meant educating myself. The anger and hate in residential school prepared

me to compete in any way that I could against government, churches and other structures that oppress people. At first, this 'control' was on a sub-conscious level. As I became more aware of the impact of residential school, this has become more conscious.

I was watching this television program on juveniles who had experienced trauma in their lives; the psychologist was talking about how sometimes these people would intentionally inflict pain to their bodies. He explained that the reason they hurt themselves is to say to society, "I'm a survivor. No matter what you do to me, you can't hurt me." This program helped me understand why we used to break glass and carve our initials into our arms. The cuts were deep. Then we'd laugh at each other. We thought this proved how strong we were. "You can't hurt us. We can't feel pain." When we were teenagers and started smoking, we would burn our initials into our arms. I remember a guy tried to stop me but I wouldn't stop. I wanted to prove to him that I could endure more pain than he could. So I did that. Now, I understand why I did those self-destructive things. So unafraid, fearless of anything – of pain or death, but specifically I developed the ability to reject anything that was associated with residential school.

When I arrived at Kuper Island, I didn't know the Catholic Prayers. They forced me to become an altar boy, I guess so that I would learn the prayers. Once I left residence, I wouldn't go to church except for funerals, even then I was reluctant. Anyway, this one day a priest stopped me and asked in his friendly manner, "When are you coming to Church?" I remember I used every foul word that I could muster up and told him where to go. The Church controlled us when we were in residential school. They would not control my life now that I had left that place.

Residential school taught me that if I didn't look after myself, no one would look after me. When I was in residential school, they did not look after me. And, at that time I believed that my parents had abandoned me by sending me to that place. I learned at that point that I would have to look after myself.

My mind is at war all the time. I am always on the defense. Nobody controls me, nobody will beat me, nothing is going to stop me, and nothing will hurt me. Residential school tried to do all these things to us, but they did not succeed. Now, it is up to me to stay in control of my life.

Many things happened in residential school that developed that fearlessness in us. I remember being called to the dentist's office from the school. I spent four hours in there. I have a suspicion they never used anesthetic because it was so painful. When the dentist was done, my jaw was sore.

When I was older I got an abscessed tooth. The soonest appointment I could get was 30 days later in Victoria. The dentist wanted to put me to sleep when they pulled the tooth, but I wouldn't let them because I did not trust them after what had happened in residential school when they worked on my teeth. So, when the pain was too much for me to handle, I thought, oh hell, I'll pull it out myself. I took a pair of pliers with good grip, went to the bathroom, and pulled my tooth out. Unfortunately, only half of my tooth came out. It didn't bother me and I think it's because I went through it before, and now I had learned to endure the pain.

In residential school they put us through so much unnecessary pain. I don't know why they did it, but they used to give us Exlax. They didn't tell me what Exlax was or why they were giving it to us. Anyway, they would give it to us late at night. One time, I

don't know why, but I asked them for another one. They gave me another exlax, so I had two. I remember suffering. I was in the washroom crying. I was in so much pain because there was nothing to pass. And they didn't care. It was crazy. There was nothing wrong with our bowel movements, but they gave us exlax. They gave me two exlax and never told me the effects. I guess its "lessons learned" sort of thing.

When we left residential school, this sense of fearlessness played itself out in very dangerous ways. My friend died of tuberculosis because he chose not to go to a doctor because he distrusted them. He chose death instead of following the doctor's orders. Anyways, we used to walk along the road and talk about things like pain and how fearless we were. I don't think we classified ourselves as crazy. But, we used to play games like chicken. Anyway, those big chipper trucks that carry sawdust used to go up and down the road where we lived. As we heard the trucks rumbling down the road, we were having this conversation, "Do you think we're destined to die or are we predestined to die on a specific day in our life in the future?"

It didn't really matter what the answer was, we agreed that we would show each other that we feared nothing, not even death. So we stood on the road one at a time as those great big chipper trucks came speeding around the corner. The trucks literally stopped inches away from us. We laughed and did it again. We'd just laugh and walk away.

My resistance to anything that was residential school was not always dangerous. When we were in residential school, I was in the band. We had white outfits with red stripes. I played the snare drum. When we became good enough, we went to Cowichan

and competed in the British Columbia Music Festival. We won first place. I became a pretty good musician.

Years later, my parents met this man who had a one-man band. They talked to him about me being a good musician. He came to see me and asked, “Do you want to be part of my band?” I said, “*No, I don't want to be part of your band.*” My parents, specifically my Dad, didn't like that. This music thing was a part of the residential school, so I refused. My parents never knew my reason for rejecting the offer to be a part of this band.

Resistance is a powerful thing. Of course, I guess everyone remembers the big food shipment coming into the school. Everyone would try run down to the wharf and help bring the food to the school. We would try sneak fresh fruit out of the boxes. This food shipment was for the elite people, the nuns and the brothers and the priests. They had the fresh food, mean while, we were eating terrible food and often hungry.

Because I was raised mostly on traditional food, I didn't know the difference between bad or good meat. But I do remember the fruit. Oddly enough, even last night, everyone was eating oranges and bananas and the kids were told to ask, “Uncle, do you want one?” I replied, “*No, I don't want one.*” I sort of wanted one, but the other half, 51% says, “No, I don't want one.” Again, this stems from residential school. This fresh fruit thing is a residential school thing; only the residential school elite was allowed fruit, now I don't want fresh fruit. Occasionally I will go and get one, but not very often. I still have this internal fight. Should I get one or shouldn't I get one? There are two people inside me, one “yes” and one “no”. So I guess that was a real struggle as an Indian person, being raised on seafood, bannock, and traditional foods then suddenly to be at

that school and eating all their junk food. Must have been pretty tough for us. So for me today, I still resist some of their food.

The need to stay in control has proven very useful in some aspects of my life. I quit using drugs and drinking when I realized that they were taking control of my life. I swore that nothing would control my life, and the drugs and alcohol were ruining my life. The sense of being out of control reminded me of what residential school tried to do, control and ruin me. In a weird sort of way, the drugs and alcohol were residential school stuff and I knew they could not beat me again. I thought this is the last time you will ever beat me because I am going to quit.

My Father, Mother, and Grandparents taught me to love culture by practical methods; nobody can take that away from me. Residential school tried. When I got out of residential school, my thinking was reinforced that nobody can hurt me or take anything away from me ever again. You can't take my culture away. You can't take any rights away that I've got. I hate the government for what they did, and I hate anyone who oppresses the people.

When I began my job with the Union of BC Indian Chiefs I was in my glory. I was going to be working with Chiefs and fighting the government, structures, and the churches. This is how I became who I am, pure hate for government, and pure hate for what society has done to us, to our people. I now have the determination to work for change. I tell people, apply yourself. I hope that I can affect somebody by telling them "You CAN do it." I never say it except by example, "*I am no one special, I am just like you.*"

My inner strength forced me to constantly educate myself. If I didn't know something, I would go out and find the answer myself. So now I'm thinking, how can I beat the system? I'm not as smart as you guys. Then I realized that this was another level of being defeated -- education. It's a paper war, a language war. It's a status quo system. It's an academic thing. You're accepted if you're a peer. If you're academically down there, they won't talk to you, what a condescending attitude. You're taught that -- to be very competitive. That's how they keep everybody separated.

I learned lots from George and Rosalee at the UBCIC. They taught me how to manage, be a leader, be compassionate, listening to people, how to stay focused. I learned to write and analyze political letters. Soon they were asking me what else do you want to do? I said, "*Teach me to manage this organization.*" UBCIC had 75 inside staff and 125 field staff. And this is how I managed myself. I always want to learn more, to understand more. I always want to be the best that I can in all the jobs I have.

George taught me to think as a nation, where you buy as a nation. He taught me that government is so fearful of our cultural power and unity; they have to keep us separated. We're too strategically set in front of major oceans and rivers and airways and railways cars. So we can use that as a threat to government every now and then. We could shut down the province of British Columbia. We can stop trains, boats and cars. So it was based on economics. So now as a nation, I see we have to be economically and politically organized. We **have** to be united when we speak because culturally they want to keep us divided. We can start slowly coming together under different agreements.

So now, it's the government's sovereign policy that is hurting my people. I'm good at what I'm doing and I've told the government, "*You created me and I'm good at*

*what I'm doing. There are a lot of us out there that are angry and we are not going away. It's only the beginning.*" All of these experiences at residential school contributed to the development of my warrior spirit. I am Lu'hal'uwits.

### **Snuw'uy'ul**

We were healthy in the first place because we lived in the country. The mountains were our playgrounds; the rivers were our swimming pool. Cold didn't bother us because we'd wade up to our chests in the icy waters of the winter and it wouldn't bother us. We could go up the mountain and we could come down in the dark with our eyes closed. We knew where every bush was, every hole, and we wouldn't be lost.

We lived on seafood in them days. I remember that it was our task, my older brothers and I, to start a fire outside. We got a big galvanized tub full of water, put it on the fire to cook all the different kinds of seafood. The Uncles and Dads or whoever was out gathering food would come back with a whole two sacks of crabs. Another time it would be a whole two sacks of oysters. Or another day it was littleneck clams. We were just like eagles and bears eating in the river. We would sit there as a family, outside eating and just having a gay time eating all our cultural foods. I remember we used to eat sea urchins and octopus as well. I remember I ate that -- seafood in abundance -- no limits. Seafood was abundant in our ocean.

All of these things were a part of our Snuw'uy'ul. Snuw'uy'ul is our way of life. It's our systems of governance, our culture, our tradition, our language, our spirituality, and our teachings. It is about our way of being on Mother Earth. That is how I was raised. These are the teachings that my parents were starting to share. All of this was taken from me at residential school.

Now, as a treaty negotiator, I see treaty as an opportunity to integrate Snuw'uy'ul. Treaties cannot be about negotiations, they need to be about total control of our traditional forms of governance and jurisdiction. This tradition, Snuw'uy'ul, needs to be our constitution. So I think that's where I'm going as an individual, an Indian warrior who's looking into the future. There's nobody like this person, this warrior. I'm the spokesperson in terms of many, many issues. As a warrior, the war is still getting finer; it's about forever -- for the yet unborn.

We cannot separate the heart, the culture, Snuw'uy'ul from the treaty process. So, in terms of Snuw'uy'ul, when we talk about governance, jurisdiction and laws, to me what would be the most fundamental law would be to love and respect life. If you really believed in that as an Elder and you taught people to respect life, more specifically "love" life, then would you harm other people? Would you even harm yourself? Would there be suicide in our society? Never! There would never be that. So if you just focus on the whole universe in terms of where we lived in the territories and that means you wouldn't go destroy the grass or the trees or the animals. You wouldn't go crush a butterfly. I think that's what our old people taught -- to love and respect life.

As a people, we need to focus on what was destroyed because of contact in 1846 of the first residential school. We need to use the teachings of Snuw'uy'ul and redevelop policies that strengthen the family unit. When they took Herman away and placed him in residential school, it broke my Mom's heart. Why? Because Herman was not at home any more. I'm assuming that when we were in residential school, the saving grace for her, would be the fact that there were other children still at home.

## Conclusions

It has been an extraordinary life that I have lived -- without a shadow of a doubt. I am indeed a survivor of a holocaust equal to the Jewish holocaust. The only difference is we were not murdered. To live was worse than death. We did not know who we were in terms of identity. I am glad to say that I finally understand why I made the decisions I made during my life. Residential school did have a total effect on my life and will continue to form my character the rest of my entire life. Since I left residential school, it has not been difficult making choices. There has never been a moment in my post-residential school life that I lost focus.

In regards to helping, fighting, protecting oppressed people, I would stand and fight for their rights whether it was an individual or a collective group. That has been, and continues to be, my goal. My motives and the decisions I make are based on the goal of enhancing the identity of First Nations people – politically, economically, financially. I am looking forward to being an Elder and hopefully being able to make decisions emphasizing the interests of First Nations people.

I feel that I am of the past; an Indian who grew up culturally and then was dumped into white society with no teachers and no support. There were hundreds of us in this process of destruction conducted by the Catholic churches with the blessing of the Department of Indian Affairs.

My final emphasis concerning the long-term effects of the Department of Indian Affairs is this, I say that racism is alive and well in Canada. Canada professes to be a humane society, the best in the world, and advocates that often. I say they are hypocrites. DIA is a sovereign police force in disguise. They have been in my life since birth and

continue to be even today. What race of people in the world must exist in a democratic society with laws such as these?

This is, and shall be, my struggle – to assist First Nations in freeing themselves from the shackles of all Governments in Canada. To do this requires people like myself and many, many more that can now teach our people how to survive in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. People like myself, will be the generation of Elders that can give direction to the young. We are becoming, once again, balanced in mind and body and prepared to teach the youth how to survive politically and economically in the new world. We will train these youth to be the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warriors.

My entire life has been fighting for people. What about Herman? What does he want? Its time for him to consider himself in this new identity that shall be created. It is going to be difficult to think in terms ‘I’ when my entire life has focused on the ‘we’ and the collective group.

Hy’chka

La’hal’uwits

## CHAPTER SEVEN CHARACTERS AND MASKS: AN ANALYSIS

As time went on, I began to wonder, “so what?” How do I begin to make sense of (analyse) all that I have learned over these past years? What is most important to say? And, what about identity? This journey has been fraught with contradictions, at times incredibly difficult and other times, extraordinarily wonderful. Without the gift of storytelling, I would never have learned what I did. Storytelling provided an opportunity to engage with the storytellers in a more intimate way. The relationships that developed were invaluable and fluid. By this I mean, when I had questions or thoughts I contacted the storytellers directly and the storytellers did the same. As the relationships between the storytellers and myself developed, the storytellers began to phone me with new thoughts, feelings, and memories of residential school. These relationships became the framework of this work.

Research was not the only involvement that I had with residential school over these past years. My cousin, Art Thompson, was preparing to go to court. Art was suing Canada and the United Church of Canada for the abuse he endured while in the Port Alberni Residential School. His court date was set for August 16<sup>th</sup> and 17, 1999. Art’s case was unique in that his testimony went uncontested, as he had been offered a settlement. Art agreed to the settlement only if he could testify, uncontested, and have his story documented in the hopes that the documentation would offer support to other residential school victims seeking justice through the legal system.

Art began his testimony by sharing his lineage, both matrilineal and patrilineal. He shared the lines of Chieftainships, dances, songs, and names. In this, Art included

knowledge of both the Ditidaht and Coast Salish language and culture. These stories began to shed light on the rich and various options available to him had the residential school experience not taken him from his family and community and shattered his world.

For two days Art recounted the innumerable abuses that he endured during the years that he resided in the Port Alberni Residential School. After only hours in the courtroom, I remember gently tapping my face, not out of nervousness, but to ensure that I was conscious and what I was hearing was not a horrible nightmare. And, for the second time in my life I was forced to ask my Spirit to sit beside me and allow this process to be a mental one. The story was so tragic and unreal that I knew my Spirit needed protection. I wondered then, if my Spirit needed to be protected, what about Art, his Mother, wife, their children and families? And what happened to the Spirits of the thousands of children who were forced by the Canadian Government to attend these institutions?

Prior to Art's court case, one of the offenders named in his case had already been sentenced. In the sentencing, Judge John Hogarth stated:

As far as the victims of the accused in this matter are concerned, the Indian Residential School system was nothing but a form of Institutionalized Pedophilia, and the accused, as far as they are concerned, being children at the time, was a sexual terrorist (Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, 1996, viii).

As I continued trying to make sense of all this residential stuff, I looked around the courtroom. To my left was Art's mother, Ida. Aunty Ida was sitting on the bench, sobbing and gently rocking back and forth in somewhat of a fetal position. What could she possibly be thinking, his mother, listening to her son disclose unimaginable abuse endured at the hands of the State and the Church? Before me sat Art's wife Charlene. She too sat, head down, sobbing. On either side of her, sat their daughters, too sobbing. The

courtroom was full of family there to support Art and his journey to heal. Family members sat silently each with their own gaze of disbelief, sadness, and hurt. Residential school happened to our family and continues to affect our families to this day. Art claims that an important part of his healing has been telling his story - freeing his soul.

In his conclusion, Art testified that residential school had made him into this “character” that was able to survive by wearing “masks” (of alcohol, drugs, abuse, violence, etc.) which supported the behaviour of this nasty character. Then I began to think, so too did my storytellers speak of being “characters” that the schools created.

It was as if the storytellers somehow felt as if the “character” and the character’s behaviour was not a part of who they were as human beings, it was outside of their true beings. How then do you create characters? When I think of “characters” and “masks” I often go to the place of thinking of people in books, plays, movies or theatre. The characters I think of are people who are directed to “act” in a certain way so as to portray the “character” they are to represent.

### **Breaking the Spirits: A play**

A not so long time ago, on an Island just east of Chemainus, the Canadian Government and the Roman Catholic Church jointly scripted a play. The setting for this play was Kuper Island, specifically Kuper Island Indian Industrial School. The play was funded by the Federal Government of Canada and directed by the Roman Catholic Church. The plot of this play was assimilation, and I would add genocide. The characters in this play, *Breaking the Spirits*, were First Nations children from Indian reservations throughout British Columbia.

This play took place over approximately a hundred year span, but focused more specifically on the sixty-year time frame between 1920 and the 1980's. It was during this time that the *Indian Act* was amended and it was compulsory that First Nations children attend residential school. Children were removed from their parents, family, and community and brought to Kuper Island. Children in residential schools were isolated and separated from any emotional support they may have. The children in the school were separated by age and gender.

The development of the characters began as soon as the children arrived on the Island. The children were immediately stripped of any personal identity. All the girls were given similar haircuts and the boys had their heads shaved. Children were given numbers that, in many ways became their identity until they left the school. The numbers identified their lockers, uniforms, and any records that were kept (i.e. punishment record books simply stated the child first name and identity number).

Assimilation is the act of integrating or incorporating. A policy of assimilation, then, for First Nations people would mean foregoing their ways of knowing and integrating into the dominant society. As the plot of this play was assimilation and genocide, these children would not be allowed to speak their language, practice their culture and traditions. In fact, in this play the children who did speak their language or practice their culture and traditions would be severely punished for doing so. Children would be publicly humiliated, beaten, sexually abused, emotionally abused, deprived of food, segregated from their family, segregated by age groupings from their peers, and forced to pray to a "God" of which they knew nothing.

Assimilation required that First Nations children became Christians and be taught the “correct” way of knowing and being - the Christian way. To support and enforce Christian values and beliefs, the children were taught that all they knew and thought about their culture and tradition was pagan and wrong. It was exactly this process, the denial of who they were as human beings, which was the foundation of creating characters. The First Nations children that attended these institutions were forced to become someone or something that they were not.

In the late 1970's through to the 1980's the residential school began closing down. The First Nations children who attended these institutions would then be sent home or to boarding schools throughout the province. Children in general were at the school until they were teenagers. There was not an absolute age at which these children were sent home. The children who were 'hard to handle' were sent home earlier. I have also heard that the children that cost too much to feed and clothe would be sent home.

This play was interactive and had not ended when these children returned home. However the directors neglected to inform them that, for them, the play was over - the character they had played did not exist outside of residence. No, in fact, many of these children continued to act out their characters for years. As the characters were developed through the witnessing of, and infliction of, trauma such as emotional, verbal, physical, sexual abuse, and not “acting lessons” the character became a part of whom they were.

The ending for this play is tragic. For many, they knew within their own being that the character they acted out was nasty and unbecoming. Some would struggle, but eventually find a way to cast off the character and the numerous masks they had

developed. Others never found the way to cast off their character, instead they learned to incorporate the character into their being and survive as the character.

### **Behind masks and characters**

I will examine the development of characters, masks and healing through the use of four separate masks. Three of the four masks are traditional Coast Salish Masks. I will begin those sections with the legend that these masks carry. The fourth mask that I will use is a mask borrowed from the ‘other’ side (a non-traditional mask). The masks have been collaboratively selected between the Storytellers and myself.

The direction I will follow (east to west) is a borrowed teaching from the east -- the Medicine Wheel. Bopp et al (1989) describe the Medicine Wheel as:

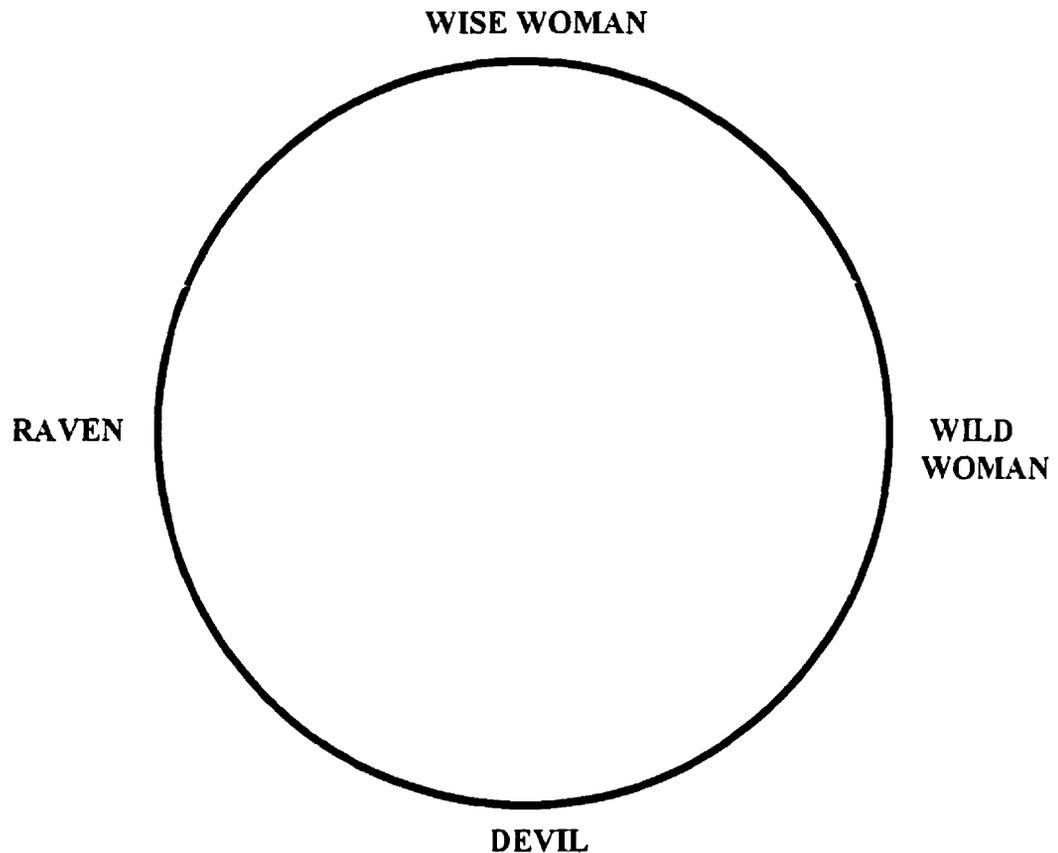
... an ancient symbol used by almost all the Native people of North and South America. There are many different ways that this basic concept is expressed: the four grandfathers, the four winds, the four cardinal directions, and many other relationships that can be expressed in sets of four. Just like a mirror can be used to see things not normally visible (e.g. behind us or around a corner), the medicine wheel can be used to help us see or understand things we can't quite see or understand because they are ideas and not physical objects (p.9).

I will begin in the East, which is the beginning of all things, of birth and rebirth, of renewal, a place of “innocence, guilelessness, spontaneity, joy and the capacity to believe in the unseen” (Bopp et al, 1989, p. 42). In the East, I will look through the Wild Woman mask. Wild Woman represents the time prior to residential school when First Nations children resided in their communities with their families. Wild Woman represents the child – the individual that the child was developing into.

To the south, I will glare through the mask of the devil. This mask will represent the time that children were in residential school. Through the devil, I will look at the development of characters through exposure to, and experiencing of “evil.”

Carrying on around the circle to the west, I will look through the Raven mask. Raven has been chosen to represent the time after students leave residence, but prior to commencing their healing journey. Raven will help us see the “acting out” that the characters do prior to commencing their healing journeys.

Finally, I will gaze through the mask of the Wise Woman. Wise Woman was chosen to represent the time when the storytellers commence their healing journeys. This time includes having to cast aside the characters that they have, in the past, acted out. This is a time of reclaiming self.



### **Wild Woman**

*Wild Woman was a woman who, it is told, during the night would gather up children and bring them to the other side of Mount Tzouhalem to feed to her own type. Each time the legend is told, it may sound a bit different, but the legend always has the same message. The legend may sound tragic and horrifying, but the teachings are about protecting children. Children are our future, and as such, invaluable. Through the various Wild Woman legends, children were taught the importance of being home before dark because this is when Wild Woman comes out. The legend also teaches the*

*importance of learning from our surroundings. For example, children were taught, "When you hear the Owl begin to 'hooo' and whistle, it is time to head for home" because dusk and evening are approaching. We can see that if we told our children this story today, we would probably include teachings about protecting themselves from strangers, sexual predators, and the unknown. The "unknown" is on the other side of Mount Tzouhalem where no one has dared to travel. The teachings are unlimited and all used to protect our children. Their families and communities, prior to residential school, protected First Nations children.*

Prior to residential school, life was different for First Nations children. Children were a vital part not only of their biological family but also their communities. Children lived a life that allowed them to learn from their environments. Traditional child rearing practices "emerged from cultures where the central purpose of life was the education and empowerment of children" (Brendtro et al, p.35).

I would like to talk about the years between the hospital and residential school. We were a family. We had lots of friends. It was just fun. There were no restrictions; you weren't inhibited by guilt or shame (Belvie).

Herman fondly shared memories of the time before Kuper Island Indian Industrial School.

The mountains were our playground, the rivers were our swimming pool. Cold didn't bother us because we'd wade up to our chests in the winter and it wouldn't bother us. We could go up the mountain and we could come down with our eyes closed because we knew where every bush was, every hole, and we wouldn't be lost.

Delmar, too, remembers the time prior to residential school. “I remembered a time at Green Point before residential school. I remember sitting in a plum tree eating plums. I remembered that happiness.” Herman too remembered the food from home:

We had a lot of seafood in them days... The Uncles and Dads, or who’s coming home, and one day it would be a whole two sacks of crabs, another time it would be a whole two sacks of oysters. Or another day, it’s just the little clams – the littlenecks.

Happiness is exactly what they all remembered. They were happy to be with family, in their communities and able to eat food they enjoyed until they were full.

Belvie speaks of her brother Emerson prior to residential school. “Emerson was a totally different person. He was always helping my dad, doing everything with my dad. My dad taught a lot of Indian culture. When they started the canoe project he was listening to everything my dad told him to do.”

Wild Woman, she taught parents to protect their children. Children were sacred and would be trained from birth for the various roles that they would need to play in their communities. As such, parents did what they could to protect their children from harm. Belvie sorrowfully recalls when a social worker arrived at their house to remove the children, “Mom wouldn’t let them in the house. Mom called us to block the door with our bodies so they couldn’t push their way in.” Belvie’s mother was not going to allow anybody to walk into her home and take her children without a fight. However, as residential school was now mandatory, the parents’ will to protect their children was not enough. The Department of Indian Affairs threatened parents if they refused to send their children to residence.

For parents, not being able to protect their children and keep them at home was very devastating. For them, it was like death -- as if their children died. “Mom and Dad,

they were crying. It really seemed like there was a death in our family because the only time we had seen them cry like that was when there was a death” (Belvie). Parents experienced immense grief because they came to believe they were incapable of fulfilling their duty to protect their children.

For the children, when they knew they would have to leave home and attend residential school it was equally devastating. Even as young people they knew what lay ahead of them would be difficult because they would not be with their parents and extended family. Belvie had seen the grief in her parents’ eyes when they returned after dropping the other children off at Chemainus. Now, there was a similar letter in the mail and Belvie and her sister thought it might be for them to also have to go to Kuper. “We opened the letter and sure enough it had my name on it. We burnt it not thinking they would contact us again.” The next letter Belvie’s parents received from the Department of Indian Affairs was very threatening. First Nations parents and children did what they could to resist attending residential school.

### **Devil**

*You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)*

Choosing a mask to represent the time that First Nations children were in residence was our most difficult task. We finally decided that there was not a traditional Coast Salish mask or legend that was horrible enough to represent the atrocities of

residential school. We decided to borrow a mask from the other side – the Church. We thought the use of a traditional Coast Salish mask would be contradictory because the goal of residential school was assimilation, which denied First Nations children their culture and tradition. The devil will represent the single most harmful event that First Nations people would endure – residential schools.

The storytellers in this research, upon leaving Kuper Island, often referred to themselves as characters. “They started creating the character when he was six years old when they brought him to this school” (Delmar). Belvie referred to herself not as a character, but as a puppet with everybody pulling strings and making her dance. How do you create such characters?

In residential school, these characters were created through trauma. The trauma was physical, sexual, mental, and emotional abuse. Erik Erikson describes an eight-stage model of identity development. The fifth stage of his model is identity versus role confusion, which begins around age five or six (Middleton-Moz, 1989, p.23). This is the age that many First Nations were sent to residential school. “Children learn their relative worth to community and world during this stage of development. They need to learn that what they do is valuable” (p.50). This is not the experience that First Nations would receive at residential school. In fact, considering that the Department of Indian Affairs’ policy was directed towards elevating “the Indian from his condition of savagery,” worth and value were far from the goal. (Quoted in Milloy, 1999, p.3). Residential school was a policy of assimilation, which in and of itself carries the concept of white superiority, not value and worth.

It is well documented, and noted in the literature review of this study that Canada and the Churches knew that they must break the link between children and their families because “the influence of the wigwam was stronger than the influence of the school” (quoted in Milloy, p. 24). This process began when First Nations children were taken from their families, removing them from the communities and finally placing them in residential schools. Judith Herman (1992) asserts that in order for the perpetrator to have total control, isolation and separation become necessary (p.79). First Nations children were isolated and separated from their families and communities as well as each other when they were in residence.

They kept us very separate, distinctly doing different things and it makes me think that they were so smart that government and church that they do that to us to make sure we're never united as cultured people, as a culture, as a family, or as a people. And it's a whole strategy. That's what they did at residential school, and it worked (Herman).

Students were told they were not allowed to communicate with other family members who were in residence. “We were told that if we got caught even looking at our brothers we would be punished” (Belvie). Students did what they could to maintain contact with their brothers and sisters who were also at Kuper.

I would always try sit in the same place so they knew where to look. I would just nod at them... We did what we could to communicate...if I was walking around and spotted one of my brothers, I would quickly twirl around and swing my arm over my head (Belvie).

This began a life of ineffective communication. A nod, a twirl, or a raised eyebrow became the only means to communicate with loved ones.

As stated above, one of the goals of the Church was to “christianize the pagans.” Many tactics were employed to meet this end. All control was taken from the children and placed in the hands of the school staff. The tactics used to maintain total control

included the use of shame, guilt and humiliation, which in turn became the process of witnessing and living through constant trauma. Children always feared what might or would happen next. “They weren’t trying to teach me to survive, their intention was to defeat me. They wanted me to be a white person with no culture of tradition” (Delmar).

When students arrived at residential school, they were immediately stripped of any individual identity. “On the first day you had everything that was ‘you’ taken away and were given uniforms” (Belvie). This was the beginning of forming ‘characters.’ Children were no longer individuals. In residential school, children were assigned numbers. These numbers marked everything in residence that was yours or made reference to you. “My number was 28. I was number 28 for the four years that I was there” (Belvie).

The ability to make choices was completely taken from these students. On a daily basis, students followed a strict routine.

We got up at 6:00 each morning, 5:30 if you went to mass... After we showered, we got dressed, made our beds, and went upstairs to do the same thing with the younger kids... Then we went down for breakfast. After breakfast we worked until school started. Morning chores included things like washing out the toilet bowls, sweeping the stairs, sweeping the hallways, or things like that. Then off to school we would go. We weren’t really being educated; just taught how to work, clean anyway. Slave – slave labour that is what we were... And then, after school we were either in the sewing room or laundry room (Belvie).

Herman also remembers the daily routine very clearly.

The Brother would clap his hands two or three times. As soon as we heard that clap, we fell off their beds and started praying. What prayer, I don’t remember... Then we’d go wash up, change, go downstairs, get out mops and start cleaning wherever we were designated to clean. And then eat.

Most students remember the ‘routine,’ that is how strictly it was enforced. Some of the chores children were expected to perform were dangerous and they were not

adequately trained. “One of the chores that the older girls did was run the roller to iron the sheets, pillowcases and stuff like that. The linen was ironed for the priests, brothers and sisters. I saw a couple of girls get their hands pulled threw the roller. That was pretty awful” (Belvie).

In residential school, children were ‘taught’ lessons through humiliation and abuse. Humiliation was used to control and deter others from misbehaving. Students learned from witnessing other students being publicly humiliated what would happen if they disobeyed.

I was evil, a product of the devil and that is the reason I ended up left-handed. There was something wrong with left-handed people and I was one of them, and damn it, she was going to beat the evil out of me. She beat me. She whooped my hand for doing artwork with my left hand.

After this incident, Delmar was dragged to the front of the classroom and the Sister said, “Take a look at this pagan, take a look at this product of the devil. He is left-handed. We’re going to beat that out of him.” He was made to sit on a stool with an orange dunce hat on his head and recite Christian prayers. Children were not only spiritually, emotionally and physically abused, they were publicly humiliated. “The profound sense of inner badness becomes the core around which the abused child’s identity is formed, and it persists into adult life” (J. Herman, 105).

Belvie’s younger sister used to wet the bed. Each evening Belvie would wake up in the middle of the night, sneak up to her sister’s bed, change the sheets and then return to bed. One night she slept through. She awoke to see her little sister being dragged down to the showers. Then, they paraded all the other girls past her little naked body under the shower. This would happen to them too if they wet the bed. “Total humiliation. She was only six years old” (Belvie).

These students were beaten with hands, fists, and straps. Delmar remembers being beaten with a barber-looking strap with a metal clip at the end. To show resistance and strength, some children would advise "...never cry, don't let them break you." Yet, other children advised "cry for heaven's sake, as soon as they hit you, you cry, you scream and then you walk away and you don't even have a bruise." Either way, these were incredible acts of resistance. When Delmar would head to bed at night older students would assure him, "psst, you did well today, you never cried, don't let them break you." But sometimes in his sleep he would cry. The older students supported him by stating, "That's okay, there is nothing wrong with that, so long as you don't cry in front of them."

However, all the advice that students gave each other was not sufficient to protect them. Once Delmar was beaten and refused to cry. The Brother stripped him, hung him by his hands to the shower, beat his private parts and then marched the other boys by, ordering them "Look at him, he is not even going to be a man when he grows up. This is a shame, you product of the devil. He doesn't even have all his parts." Delmar still doesn't know what he did to deserve this beating.

Children were sometimes forced to see things and other times saw things they pretended not to. "I used to sleep in the bunk that was right up against the wall behind the door... I remember a nun would come in and take girls out... I remember seeing changes in some of the girls that were taken out" (Belvie).

Being "broken" J. Herman (1992) believes has two stages. In the first stage, victims begin to shut down. They shut down their feelings, thoughts, and initiative. They act, as what Henry Krystal (in J. Herman, 1992) refers to as "robotization" – machine like. The second stage of being broken is when the victims begin to lose the will to live.

Suicide, as well has a couple of faces. One is absolute resistance – the victim is willing to end his/her own life to resist being a victim any longer. The other face, which is similar, but passive as opposed to aggressive resistance, is losing the will to live (Herman, 1992, p.84-85). Belvie refers to this process as “broken spirits.”

“I can remember the day that Emerson and I had our spirits broken” (Belvie). Emerson, Belvie’s older brother, was upset with a Sister that was publicly shaming her. Emerson demanded that the Sister apologize. For this, Emerson was beaten. After this Emerson told Belvie “I don’t give shit.” “And he didn’t. I could see it in his eyes. They weren’t alive anymore. Our spirits were broken” (Belvie). Both Belvie and Emerson were willing to resist and fight even though they knew the consequences.

Belvie remembers when her really good friend was ‘broken.’ A Brother in residence raped her. She came to Belvie one day and claimed “I’ve decided I’m not going to do anything here anymore...I don’t give a shit anymore. I don’t care.” Eventually this young woman was sent to Riverview. “She didn’t do anything wrong, she was raped” (Belvie).

These are examples of the phases of being broken that J. Herman refers to – these students chose to resist being passive victims. Being broken for these students forced them to ‘stop caring.’ They stopped caring about the strict residential school rules and expectations. They decided they would not allow the humiliation to continue unchallenged. While they resisted the authoritative rule of the staff, they remained victims, they could only have comfort in knowing that they were doing what they could to oppose and reject what the staff were doing.

The contradictions learned in residential school played a pivotal role in the development of the character. Some cried, others never cried. They learned this through the reactions of the staff that were obviously not predictable or trustworthy.

By training children to be obedient, we teach them to be machines in the hands of others. By punishing rebellion, we teach children to manipulate and deceive to escape authority (Brendtro et al, p. 21).

Once students had their spirits broken, they would knowingly oppose the rule and order of the Brothers and Sisters. They did this knowing they would definitely be punished.

Delmar remembers being beaten and told he would never be a man and then later being sexually abused by a Sister who was “going to make a man out of him.” This young man was sexually aroused, and then beaten because he could not hold an erection until the grown woman was sexually satisfied.

Emerson knew that if he talked back to the Sister he would be punished. Nevertheless, he made the decision to defend his sister and demand that the Sister apologize to Belvie. Emerson was not allowed to speak back to the Sister and consequently not allowed to support his own sister.

Eventually the contradictions and unpredictability teach you to doubt yourself. We learn through predictability how to: trust, maneuver in the world, make choices, create choices, and take care of ourselves. Through constant contradiction, the students constantly wondered whether or not they had the ability to make ‘correct’ choices. The characters learned through contradictions and unpredictability. Eventually, students would internalize this self-doubt. Self-doubt forces the character to not fully examine the various choices they might have in a given situation. They have learned that most often the choice they make will be wrong. The inability to make choices was further enforced

by the rigidly structured daily routine. Life in residence was totally controlled by the staff and consequently, the students' lives were void of any choice or decision-making.

Having no power or ability to make choices, the students began to look at other students to gain power. "This whole system was based on survival of the fittest. Consequently, the first thing I learned was that I would have to fight if I wanted to be a survivor" (Delmar). Everything was a competition. Students learned to compete for everything - fight to win. Food became a main event. When you were hungry all the time and somebody had food -- you fought for it. "I remember many times being starved. The hungriness would anger me, the hungrier I got the meaner I was" (Delmar). Eventually, groups of boys learned that they could demand favours if they protected smaller younger boys. The boys would form gangs and demand food for favours such as protection from other gangs. Again, these gangs would fight each other, even if the other gang members were family. One of Delmar's memories is of fighting his older brother so that he would not take food from him any more.

We jumped him and beat him up. I remember that was one of my biggest thrills. I think about how sad that was – beating up my brother so that he doesn't have to force his rule on my friends and me (Delmar).

In residence, First Nations were systematically stripped of any individuality. The process began the moment children were taken from their homes and continued upon arrival in residential school. Children were forced to wear uniforms, have similar haircuts, and were assigned numbers. The residential school staff strictly controlled life. The restricted daily routine left First Nations children without the necessary skills to make choices and decisions. Some children may have been fortunate enough to escape physical and sexual abuse but all students regularly witnessed traumatic events.

The residential school experience would be the foundation upon which the characters developed their identities.

Repeated trauma in adult life erodes the structure of the personality already formed, but repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality (J. Herman, p.96).

### **Raven**

*Once upon a time, Raven was sitting in a tree along the river's edge. Raven could see these great big red shiny objects in the water. Raven dove down into the river, but when he got there the red things disappeared. Up he flew, shaking off his wet feathers, back into the tree. Down he looked, once again he could see this delicious looking red objects in the water. He waited, watched and planned his next move. When he was positive, he dove once again into the river. Again, the enticing objects disappeared as he hit the river. Raven began to wonder if his eyes were failing him. Why, could he not get these objects? He is a fine fisherman. Maybe these red things were not there? Was this possible? Raven sat perched in the tree for the longest time closely observing the big red shiny objects in the water. Swoosh, down he dove. Once again, the big red shiny objects disappeared. Dismayed, Raven sat there trying to figure out what was going on. As Raven sat there, he heard a noise overhead. As he looked up, to his surprise, he saw these big juicy red cherries in the tree. All this time, Raven was diving in the water trying to get these big red shiny objects, and they were just above his head.*

This legend is to teach us to look within and around ourselves when we are searching for answers. We often have the necessary resources to solve our own problems, but fail to see our own inner strengths. Raven teaches us that if we are observant we can act with certainty. For the time when students left residential school, Raven will represent strength, support, protection and guidance. Raven, being a trickster represents many things. For students, when they returned into their communities after leaving residence, they needed Raven to support them in many ways.

Many abused children cling to the hope that growing up will bring escape and freedom. But the personality formed in an environment of coercive control is not well adapted to adult life. The survivor is left with fundamental problems in basic trust, autonomy, and initiative... She is still a prisoner of her childhood; attempting to create a new life, she reencounters the trauma (J. Herman, 1992, p.110).

For residential school children, leaving was a bittersweet event. They were so excited to finally leave residence, but when they arrived home they soon realized they didn't fit. They did not feel that they belonged in their communities. Delmar remembers returning, "I didn't fit in the community, and I didn't fit in Green Point. I was one of them that left and went away. I was an educated kid and all the other boys in the neighborhood hated me for that." Herman states,

We did not know who we were in terms of identity... I feel that I am of the past, an Indian who grew up culturally and then was dumped into white society with no teachers and no support.

In residence, children were not allowed to communicate with other family members. Now, all of a sudden they are out of residence and back with their family and were unable and afraid to communicate with and amongst each other. The family connection was broken down. "We weren't really like brothers and sisters after

residential school. Even when I tried to be with my sisters it was like there was something we didn't want each other to know about" (Belvie).

The residential school experience taught the students many things. Most of the teachings were not positive or useful. Herman stated, when speaking to the Government, "You created me." "I had developed a number of characters in my life and I relied on those characters to save me from whatever (Delmar)." Residential school taught these students to do whatever they needed to do in order to survive.

From the time I left residence on, I had figured out how to get the best of anybody. It didn't matter what I had to do, when all else failed I could use violence, use anger, or just act crazy. When you go crazy everybody fears you. Everybody hates crazy people... I terrorized people (Delmar).

J. Herman (1992), in her book *Trauma and Recovery: the aftermath of violence - from domestic abuse to political terror* speaks to the fact that once victims are freed, they must develop a new identity which incorporates the period of time that they were in captivity. For residential school students, this incorporation includes spiritual, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Not a well-balanced experience to incorporate into their character.

Even after leaving residence, and being sober, one storyteller recalls playing what he referred to as head games and "inflicting punishment" on people. He now knows that the abusive behaviour was indicative of the anger he was carrying around inside himself. For victims of trauma, this is not unusual. As stated by J. Herman (1992), "Thus, former prisoners carry their captor's hatred with them even after release, and sometimes they continue to carry out their captor's destructive purposes with their own hands" (p.95). Because people were afraid of Delmar, he claims "In order to vent my anger of TF for

punishing me I would terrorize other people.” But at the same time, as in the case with Herman and Delmar, they also terrorized themselves through self-inflicted pain.

Herman remembers inflicting pain upon himself as a sign of strength “I’m a survivor.” It was like a notion that nothing can hurt me - I have survived so much that nothing can harm me now. J. Herman (1992), when discussing self-mutilation that is linked to childhood abuse describes this destructive behaviour as a way to relieve the inner turmoil, or internalized trauma. The physical pain becomes easier to handle than the emotional and psychological pain that they experience all the time. “We used to break glass and carve our initials in our arms. The cuts were deep. Then we’d laugh at each other. We thought this proved how strong we were. You can’t hurt us. We can’t feel pain” (Herman). For Herman, it was his way of relieving the inner pain and a sign of strength, that they could not hurt him anymore. He had become stronger in spite of the their abuse. In fact, no one would ever be able to hurt him after the residential school experience.

When talking about anger, Herman states that he believes anger and love are connected. “Anger and rage, I think is associated with having no love. If you have no love, you have rage. If you have no love, you have anger.” He continues and connects anger with fear, “I think the ‘no fear’ means an accelerated amount of anger – anger creates that ‘no fear.’” Being in residence and being deprived of the necessary love, children become hurt and hardened. They learn how to survive without love. Consequently they substitute love with anger. As Herman demonstrates, this anger too plays itself out in many self-destructive ways.

“In residence they told me I was evil, a product of the devil, and that I would never amount to very much. (Delmar).” When you hear this message almost daily, as was the case with many residential school students, this negativity becomes internalized. Delmar began to punish himself for being “worthless” once the Church was not there to punish him. The self-inflicted punishment took on the form of drinking, drugging, and violence. Brendtro et al, in *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our hope for the future* state that “without autonomy, people begin to feel like pawns in a game with no control of the destiny” (p.43). Youth will seek alternative means to gain power. These alternatives include drugs, alcohol and joining gangs.

When it is impossible to avoid the reality of the abuse, the child must construct some system of meaning that justifies it. Inevitably the child concludes that her innate badness is the cause. The child seizes upon this explanation early and clings to it tenaciously for it enables her to preserve a sense of meaning, hope and power. If she is bad, then her parents are good (J. Herman, 1992, p.103).

Residential school staff, as the parents or caretakers of the children, made it impossible for the children to avoid their reality, and the children blamed themselves for their situation. The notion of innate badness, J. Herman (1992) asserts, becomes the core upon which the children develop their identity (p.108). “I didn’t believe that I could be loved” (Delmar). This sense of being unlovable played itself out in many ways.

Suicide was one way that the character acted out being unlovable. “I sat there with a gun in my mouth many times and really believed that I’m going to die today and there is a better life on the other side of it for me.” Even though Delmar did not want to live anymore, he had come to believe that possibly death could bring him a better life.

Suicides are far too common for the students that attended residential school. “I was like a boiling pot. I had no idea what was happening. I was all in turmoil” (Belvie). Belvie claims that at this time, she was suicidal.

It was just that space that I was in, absolute grief. It’s almost like you totally give up, total helplessness. Let’s end it now. You don’t want to live anymore. The losses become unbearable. Losing your brothers and sister is like losing your best friend, or your child.

There is evidence of violent suicidal deaths. However, we cannot dismiss the slow, painful deaths of drugs and alcohol. These too are forms of suicide. “I think about Emerson, I really think they killed him. Those dark secrets died with him. Each time the secrets die with someone, the government looks more innocent.” Perhaps, Emerson was never able to speak of residential school, and what happened to him in that place killed him. Rather than being able to cast aside the character that residential school created for him, Emerson slowly and painfully killed the character. Emerson found his place on the streets. Emerson knew how to belong there.

The notion of being unlovable is devastating. For many students, the inability to love or be loved was acted out in their inability to be in relationships. Judith Herman writes, “Once the victim is free, every relationship is confronted with the basic question of trust.” The victim needs to know whose side the other person is on. As in the case of residential school, their internalized trauma leads them immediately to believe that the other is on the side of the perpetrator (p.92).

“They broke that family connection inside of me...I didn’t trust anybody. (Delmar)” “Having been sexually abused by a female really did a lot of damage to the women I was with because I always had this thought in my head that I would never be good enough...” Delmar discusses the guilt, he as a child felt, associated with being

sexually abused because he had experienced momentary sexual gratification. For him, the pleasure became further proof of his innate badness (J. Herman, 1992, p. 104)

Relationships were difficult for many former students. If we look closely at “internalized hatred” or “internalized trauma” the inability to form relationships makes sense. They were told they were not good people, not lovable and not worthy. “Intimate relationships are driven by the need for protection and care and haunted by the fear of abandonment and exploitation” (p. 111). Delmar says he used to intentionally sabotage relationships. If he was feeling loved he would ask, “I don’t even love myself. Why do you love me?”

“I think about my children an awful lot. I have children down in the States from my first marriage. I was very unhealthy at that time in my life. I did an awful lot of drinking, an awful lot of partying and had children. I wasn’t around for the raising of these children” (Delmar). First Nations children were taken away from their families; parents or family did not raise them. They were not raised in a loving supportive environment with strong parental role modeling. “I couldn’t even hold my child and tell them they were doing something really good” (Belvie). No, mean, violent, nasty people raised them.

When students left residential school, they “acted” exactly as they were taught. They were taught through humiliation, shame and guilt that they were innately bad characters. Raven, as trickster, wanted the students to realize that the character they were acting out was not the human being they wanted to be. They would need to look for ways to cast aside the character. Healing would provide the necessary tools to cast aside the character and nurture the human being. Raven helped the storytellers survive through this

experience and wanted them to look within themselves for the various gifts that the Creator had given them. Raven wanted the storytellers to look inward for the cherries they each possessed.

### **Wise Woman**

*Wise Woman is our Mother. She is our Grandmothers. She is a healer. She is the giver of life. She is the carrier of culture and tradition. Wise Woman is all of the wonderful women in your life. Wise Woman is a teacher who knows when we are ready to begin our journey. Women have always played an important role in the lives of First Nations people. The women in First Nations communities played vital roles.*

Herman's father used to tell him, "You learn to respect women. Your mother's a woman, your grandmother's a woman, and your sisters are women."

Wise Woman has many lessons for us when we are willing to learn them. Most of these lessons will only begin when we start to speak about what happened in residential school. "We weren't supposed to talk about the Priests, Brothers, and Sisters because they were the "Holy" people. That was it, end of story. If we talked, we would burn in hell forever" When Belvie first started speaking about her experiences at residential school and the impact they had on her life, she could only whisper. Even after all of these years she was cautious and would tell those she shared her story with "don't tell any one I told you this." However, she also says that the more she speaks the easier it gets. "I fear the shame and the pain of being abused. But each time I go back it gets a little easier" (Delmar).

... It is time to take the first step and let others know they are not alone in the suffering. No matter how painful, the stories of our people must be told and heard. Through sharing our past, we can begin to heal ourselves, our communities, and our people as we look to a better tomorrow. (Phil Fontaine as quoted in Knockwood, 1992, back cover).

Healing included helping residential school survivors put their experiences into perspective. Putting their 'experiences' into perspective took many forms. Herman claims that a part of his healing was realizing that all the anger he had within himself should be directed at bad policies rather than 'white' people. For years, he hated white people because that is what he saw as a child – white people destroying his life. So for Herman, the realization that his anger should be directed at bad policies was healing.

But it was government policy that took me from my parents, not that my parents didn't want me. How dare they, hey. How dare the Government do that to us. That is cruel. We only went home Christmas and summer holidays. Many people tried their best to be strong and survive in that place (Belvie).

One of the most important lessons for former residential school students was finding out that their parents did not send them to residential school. All three of the storytellers blamed their parents for their experiences in residential school because they thought their parents sent them there. J. Herman claims that victims often blame the other parent for not protecting them from the abuse (p. 101). They should have cared enough to ensure the children were safe. In fact, the Church and the Federal Government were responsible for the abuse these children endured.

I couldn't understand why she cried. I didn't understand why I went to residential school until I sobered up. Once I sobered up I remembered how hard she fought to keep us from that place and they threatened to send her to jail if she didn't let us go there. It must have hurt her an awful lot. I heard stories about my Grandmother trying to find us and not knowing what school we were in. They lied to her about our whereabouts (Delmar).

This realization allowed students to begin to trust in family again. Rebuilding the family connection is an import starting point for healing.

Delmar remembers when he sobered up that the Elders were there to support him and share the teachings. “The Old People withheld the culture and tradition until they could see where I was ready to listen and they had to put up with my drinking and my fighting and my causing the family shame.” Wise Woman, she knows we need our culture and tradition. Delmar remembers how angry he was when he began his healing journey and realized that residential school had purposely kept all of these teachings from the students. But, Wise Woman, she knows that a part of healing from residential school begins with acceptance of self as a First Nations person. We, as First Nations people are not inferior, the residential school policy was based on racist ideology. Remembering that we once were a harmonious strong people. “Our people were so strong that amidst all the drinking and partying and the sad times and losing their children they still hung on to the traditions and the culture and the language...I think that’s a big part of what saved our community. It saved my life. (Delmar)”

For many residential school students, healing began with the acceptance of culture and tradition. Perhaps more specifically, students needed to re-introduce culture and tradition into their lives. “Healing is a way of life -- healing is advancement of the human being. Healing is being the ‘healthiest’ me (Delmar).” This is an example of the teachings about healing. Culture includes who we are and where we come from.

Another lesson Wise Woman has for us is to understand what has happened here. “The governments did this to our people” (Delmar).

I wasn't born like that. And, in my culture I was born pure and clean. Everything that I ended up in my life was learned behaviour. The residential school system taught me that. The residential school system taught me that. The government inflicted that residential school system upon my people; they created that unwell, angry, violent person (Delmar).

Wise Woman also wants students to look at the magnitude of the residential school experience. "Residential school did have a total effect on my life and will continue to form my character the rest of my entire life" (Herman). We need to constantly be aware of the character or it will creep back into our being.

Some days I get so angry and tell myself that I have a right to hate her – it was wrong what she did to me. At only ten years old, she beat me because I couldn't keep an erection. Her actions have effected all my sex life and still ventures into my sex life today (Delmar).

We need to be aware so that we do not revert back to residential school based decision-making.

The minute I stop taking care of myself and feel too comfortable that old character that I practiced for so long is right back... I need to constantly be aware of the characteristics of that character. I consciously work at getting rid of the language and changing the negative thinking (Delmar).

Only by acknowledging what happened and how it impacts our lives today can we begin to be in control of our lives today. By being in control of our lives today, we can resist the past. Wise Woman teaches us to put the residential school in perspective. It was massive, but we can still become healthy human beings because healing is becoming the healthiest person you can.

Wise Woman wants us to remember that we were only there for a small part of our lives. For Delmar, it was eight years. Healing began when he got "sick and tired of being sick and tired." Healing must be more than simply sobering up, quitting drugs and alcohol; it must be about consciously changing attitudes and behaviours. "We looked at

people as human beings and we treated them like human beings and you start respecting yourself first then you will start respecting others.” Changing his life, Delmar states started with changing his language and living a better life.

Herman used all that happened to him in residence to stay strong. He refused to accept anything that reminded him of residential school. He learned that “nobody controls me, nobody will beat me, nothing is going to stop me and nothing will hurt me.” Herman used this energy in his healing. “It’s pure hate for the government, pure hate for what society has done to us, to our people, and having the determination to change, to have an effect on somebody day by day.”

The desire to resist anything that was residential school has been a powerful survival tool as well. Herman remembers realizing drugs and alcohol were controlling his life. He had pledged that after leaving residence that nothing would ever control him again. He quit using drugs and alcohol.

Wise Woman teaches us that everything happens for a reason. So, for some, residential school must be viewed as a gift that must be shared. In other words, not that these students should minimize and not validate residential school experiences, but rather that they now have the duty to share their experiences. Some of these students are, and others are yet to be, our Elders. Their teachings will include all the teachings of Wise Woman. “I know what I went through and I want to help our children – our future leaders” (Belvie). Herman says that it is people like him that:

Can now teach our people how to survive in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. People like myself, will be the generation of Elders that can give direction to the young. We are becoming, once again, balanced in mind and body and prepared to teach the youth how to survive politically and economically in the new world. We will train these youth to be the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warriors.

Belvie, Delmar and Herman have all chosen to work in fields where they can support First Nations people in one way or another. Herman believes that a part of his healing has been to help others. The residential school experience has given him compassion to help others who have similar histories. They have decided to do whatever they can to ensure that First Nations people never have to go through what they went through. One of the teachings from the *Sacred Tree* is, “The hurt of one is the hurt of all, the honour of one is the honour of all” (Bopp et al, p.79). The storytellers, when they cast aside the ‘character,’ were left with an incredible amount of inner strength. The inner strength will assist them in helping others heal their hurt and find their honour.

Healing also includes creating happiness. If we create enough happiness, eventually the happy memories smother the miserable times in our lives. “Its memories, happy memories, that help push the residential school down.” There is a good life out there to be lived. “They were out to break us – mind, body, soul and emotion. I think they did a good chunk of that to our people, but I don’t think they fully succeeded because many of us are starting to understand there is a better life to be had” (Delmar).

Each morning upon rising, and each evening before sleeping, give thanks for the life within you and for all life, for the good things the Creator has given you and others and for the opportunity to grow a little more each day. Consider your thoughts and actions of the past day and seek for the courage and strength to be a better person. Seek for the things that will benefit everyone (Bopp et al, p.75).

## CHAPTER EIGHT SNUW'UY'UL

This journey has been a very long and treacherous one -- but a necessary one. I am not sure my journey will ever be over. Through storytelling and research, I realized a number of things. First, we must take storytelling seriously. Storytelling is a very powerful healing and teaching tool. The storytellers all shared the healing nature of the storytelling process. As the learner, I could not have possibly learned what I did without storytelling. I continue to be in awe of the storytellers' dedication, commitment and honesty. They were there for me in a way that I could never have expected. I am indebted to Belvie, Herman and Delmar for the gifts they have given me.

As well, through this research I learned that for First Nations people, we are only beginning the healing path that we need to be on. The Creator and our Ancestors will place markers on our path to assist us as they have done for me through this journey. But, we need to support each other in whatever way we can. We need to encourage other students to share their stories and free their souls. All of the Creator's children are an essential part of our Nations and we need to all work together to be the best we can. As more and more people join us on our healing journey, we will be a powerful people once again. The Creator has given us all the necessary resources to make our journey.

On this journey, I took many wrong turns. The most profound one for me was following a path that I was not intended to be on. This path was leading away from myself as a storyteller. I embarked on a journey of storytelling and then took an abrupt turn down the path of academia. Not that storytelling should be excluded from academia;

in fact I would argue the opposite. But storytelling needs to be the methodology and the process. The essence of my research is storytelling.

The storytelling journey (after the devastating detour) brought me closer to understanding Qwul'sih'yah'maht (Robina). The learning on this journey became as much about myself as it did about the storytellers. Throughout the journey, I called on Elders, the Creator and my Ancestors to guide, direct and support me. Hych'ka to them, they are always with me.

Another learning on my journey was about Snuw'uy'ul. Snuw'uy'ul is a Hul'qumi'num word representing our culture, tradition, language, spirituality, and teachings. In essence, Snuw'uy'ul is our way of life, our way of being on Mother Earth. It was not until I began to learn about Snuw'uy'ul that my grief and sadness around residential school made sense. I was finally able to completely understand the extent of the invasiveness of residential school policies. Assimilation and genocide went for that very part of our people, our Snuw'uy'ul. When I began to include the attack on our Tthulhwteen (the spiritual essence of our culture) as a part of assimilation I was able to finally perceive the magnitude of harm on our people. I was feeling in my sh-qwaluwun (heart) the attack on our Snuw'uy'ul. Now that we can clearly see how our spirits and hearts were attacked, we can assist each other. It is our responsibility to our People to take the gifts of knowledge that we have been given and support our People.

I need to take a rest now. My hands go up to you. I would like to thank you for sharing this journey with me. Hy'chka to the Creator, the Ancestors, the Grandmothers and Grandfathers for supporting me every step of this journey.

Qwul'sih'yah'maht

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## APPENDIX A

### CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH

#### KUPER ISLAND INDIAN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL - LIFE STORIES

My name is Robina Thomas. I am a member of the Lyackson Band of the Coast Salish nation. I live in Victoria and am presently attending the University of Victoria working towards my Master of Social Work degree. This project is a part of my degree requirements. My thesis supervisor is Leslie Brown. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research project or of me, you can call Leslie at (250)383-6450. My home telephone number is (250)381-6486. You can call either Leslie or myself collect if you have concerns or questions.

This research project will document the life histories of former Kuper Island Indian Industrial School (residential school) students. Documenting your life history will allow you, as a former residential school student, to tell your story in your words. Story telling will allow you to validate your pain, your experience, and your history as a residential school student. Grand Chief Phil Fontaine believes that "No matter how painful, the stories of our people must be told and heard. Through sharing our past, we can begin to heal ourselves, our communities, our people as we look to a better tomorrow."

The central focus of this project is your story - your life story will be a chapter of my thesis. I will set up individual personal interviews with you in a place that you choose. Documenting your life story will involve meeting with you three or four times and tape recording your story. Each interview or meeting will be approximately three to four hours in length. Your commitment to the project will require between twelve and fifteen hours. After each meeting, I will transcribe the recording of your story and bring the story back to you for additions, deletions, and/or changes. If you have shared something in an interview that you wish to keep confidential, this will be omitted from your story.

Through the use of your story, I will attempt to understand the impact of residential school, with a particular focus on identity and healing. Sharing and validating your story can be an empowering process. Story telling can be beneficial for not only you, but for other former residential students, your family, your community, and for all First Nations people. However, this process of "reliving" past often painful experiences can also be traumatic. These experiences may cause disruptions in your life. I will honour and support your way of dealing with trauma (traditional) as well as will provide you with a list of community resources.

Participation in this project is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time without explanation. If you begin with the project and find that for what ever reason you can not continue to participate, you can withdraw and all data collected up until that time will be returned to you and none of the information collected will be used for the completion of the thesis. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect upon services that you are currently receiving.

This is your story, you have the option to either use your own name or be assigned a code name which will be used throughout your story. If you choose to use your own name, your anonymity will be lost. All other parties identified in your story will be assigned coded names to protect their identity. In the event that your choose to use a code name, only you and the researcher will have access to this information and your identity will be protected. Data, written and audio taped will be secured in a locked filing cabinet. Immediately after transcribing tapes, the tapes (your story) will be erased. The transcribed interviews will be kept on the hard drive of my personal computer and secured with a password know only to me. Back up floppy disks will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. All information, including this consent form, will be kept in a

locked filing cabinet. My supervisor, Leslie Brown, and committee members Gord Bruyere and Christine Welsh may have access to your story, but all identifying information will have been coded prior to their seeing your story. Six months after the completion of my research project, all data collected will be destroyed.

**I understand the purpose, commitment and process of telling my story in this research project.**

**FULL NAME (PLEASE PRINT):**

\_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNATURE:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:**

\_\_\_\_\_