

EPISODE 6: INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

EDITOR'S NOTE: This transcript has been lightly edited for clarity. For media inquiries related to *Survivors*, or to obtain a copy of this podcast and/or its transcripts for broadcast or educational purposes, please reach out to news@cjsw.com.

DISCLAIMER / CONTENT WARNING: Please be advised: the following program contains stories and accounts of true events from the lives of residential school survivors. Due to the sensitive subject matter, some participants decided to remain anonymous.

These testimonials may include accounts of physical and sexual abuse and may be triggering to some listeners. If you or someone you know is experiencing pain or distress as a result of the residential school experience, you're not alone. Please call the Residential School Crisis Line at 1-866-925-4419. They are there to help and they're available 24 hours a day.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: Oki nikyokowawaa. Kiitkanakyimatyinohpowawaa. Nohkkyistyikoyii nitakokapayanakippa kitawasinnonii. Anakaa asiksikkapoyiwaa. Anakaa siksikaityitapiwaa. Anakokaa siksikawaa kainaiwaa pikanii. Oki aniksyii matsyitopikskii. Anikaa innestyokakstyimanii. Siksikainnestyisinii. Anikyikokyawaa saahsiwaa sahsahsokitakiwaa. Anikyokyawaa nityiyanakipaa nohkakyistiyii.

Welcome, my relatives. I'd just like to acknowledge the land that we reside in: the land of the Blackfoot-speaking nations at Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, and also, after Treaty Number 7, we also acknowledge Stoney Nakoda and Tsuut'ina. A rightful acknowledgement of the people and the land that we reside in.

CAMERON SIFERD: This is *Survivors*: an eight-episode podcast made in partnership with CJSW and the Department of Canadian Heritage, providing insight into the lived experience of residential school survivors and their families.

The residential school system ran across Canada from 1883 to 1996. Throughout its lifetime, over 150,000 Indigenous children were removed from their homes, stripped of their cultures and forced through a system created to destroy their senses of identity. The lasting negative impact of the residential school system continues to devastate communities of survivors.

My name is Cameron Siferd. I'm a Métis individual studying the topics of sociology and international Indigenous studies at the University of Calgary.

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GRACE HEAVY RUNNER / POKSIKAINAKI: Oki, hello, my name is Grace Heavy Runner. My Blackfoot name is Poksikainaki. I am from Kainai First Nation, Alberta. I'm a residential school survivor who attended the St. Mary's Residential School, which operated from 1898 to 1988. This is my story, but also the story of many.

CAMERON SIFERD: Everything in life is intricately connected, like a web of string. When you pull one strand, another tightens. When you cut strings, the web starts to come apart. Residential schools, through their very purpose, were to cut ties of the Indigenous peoples to their traditions and cultures. This was every aspect: ways to hunt and eat, ways to create a shelter or keep warm, ways to communicate, stories, lessons, and how to traditionally raise one's children.

Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, professor and expert in Native American collective trauma and mental health, outlines that "survivors of the residential school system face cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences."

GRACE HEAVY RUNNER / POKSIKAINAKI: Today the effects of residential school have plagued many Indigenous families from all over Canada. When I think about trauma and intergenerational trauma, which is directly linked to the residential schools, I think about my late brother Sheldon James, and my late sister Tara. When the residential school closed, both my brother and I moved back to the Blood Reserve. That only lasted three years, living with my parents, because of the alcohol they consumed.

I decided, at 14 years old, I would take my brother and I and go live in a foster home, because my parents could not care for us any longer. Alcohol was accepted and was the norm, but it was also a deadly fate for many. I lost my baby sister who didn't attend residential school, but died at the age of 18 in a car accident, and alcohol was involved. I lost my brother due to an overdose in 2008. I have two nephews without a mother and father. I am the oldest out of my siblings, but yet they left before me.

CHEYENNE MCGINNIS / NAATOIYIKI: Oki, nitannikko Naatoiyiki. Nyomhtoto kainaiwaa. So, hello, my name is Cheyenne, or Naatoiyiki, which translates to Holy Whistle in the Blackfoot language.

I remember learning about these schools when I was about five or six years old. We had just moved from the city of Calgary to the Blood Tribe Reserve. My grandmother was working at a daycare that was set up in one of the old residential schools. And I had

never seen a building like that. So I was kind of shocked by what it was. I started asking my mother lots of questions. I was a very precocious child. So, maybe some of the questions I was asking her, she wasn't really ready to tell me those stories at that time. But she always tried to give me age-appropriate stories and kind of give me an understanding of what those schools were. She told me that my grandmother and my grandfather had both attended those schools when they were younger, and that she also went to day school and kind of explained that they were taken away from the culture and taken away from their families for a time. And just that it was really an effect on how they were today and kind of tried to explain that was why my grandparents maybe did things the way they did sometimes or were the way they were.

CAMERON SIFERD: The Indigenous family is large and made up of many members filling many roles. This was not the image that Canada was interested in. When John A. McDonald talked about keeping children from parents, it was only the beginning. Things falling outside the colonial image were not going to be allowed. In 1921, aspects of everyday life were outlawed: dancing, ceremonies, and even the movement.

Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, made the government's position on Indigenous life very clear: "It is observed with alarm, that the holding of dances by the Indians on their reserves is on the increase. You should suppress any dances which cause waste of time, interfere with the occupations of the Indians, or encourage them in sloth and idleness. You should also dissuade and, if possible, prevent them from leaving their reserves for the purpose of attending fairs, exhibitions, etc."

BEVERLEY JACOBS / GOWEHGYUSEH: Greetings of peace to all of you. Mohawk Nation comes from the bigger, or the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. I am a lawyer. I am the Associate Dean (Academic) of the Faculty of Law, University of Windsor. But most importantly, I am a member at Six Nations of Grand River territory, and I live here. I have a little law practice here as well.

So because we come from that matriarchal society, right, our clans, our nations, our ceremonies, everything is through our mothers. And because my grandmother was in, she was in the Mohawk Institute, so it impacted, you know, our, like I said, our whole matriarchal, matrilineal side. So as part of that, language issues, right, our loss of language, loss of family, because my grandmother refused to be Mohawk. She refused to speak the language, she became very Christian. She did not raise any of her children through any traditional ceremonies, or, you know, our longhouse ceremonies. So, and

that was all completely cut off. Some want to learn, there's some coming back, but it's so difficult for them to return to something that they've never been raised with. And it's really sad to see that and to, and to know where the source is. The source is the fucking Canadian government and their residential school policy.

CHEYENNE MCGINNIS / NAATOIYIKI: I went to school and I got to come home at the end of the day and be with my family, and my mom telling me that that wasn't my grandparents' experience, it was a little bit heartbreaking just to understand that, to think of how they didn't have their parents there all the time and how at that age, my age, they were going to these schools and it was just to put myself in their shoes, it was just a little bit, uh, very heartbreaking, I guess is the only word I can really say about it.

CAMERON SIFERD: There was no choice if children were to attend the schools, as parents faced fines and jail time if they refused. Forced or armed seizure was not uncommon. One key factor being that, until 1960, Canada's First Nations people were not considered full citizens, and thus were wards of the state. As generation after generation was forced through a system designed to assimilate and enfranchise, the damage could be seen.

The removal of children damaged whole communities. Every child was a son or daughter, niece or nephew. Every child was a vital, important aspect in the Indigenous family unit. The removal of children was a grave offence to the parents, or any other adults, who at the time were deemed too old to learn or be of any use to the new Canadian civilization. From then on, every generation that was sent after the next would grow up further removed, placed in an institution, which was worlds away from where they came from, the ways of their families, their identity. We were fortunate enough to get a chance to speak to creative writer and Indigenous author Judy Everson.

JUDY EVERSON: Growing up my dad would, he did all kinds of jobs because, again, he only had, I think a grade three or four at the most, maybe even a grade two level of literacy. He would be a truck driver to feed us, he would be a construction worker and mechanic and business owner. He would do what he could just to help.

One of the moments that I best remember that had to do with my dad was when he... when my niece and my kids, later in the years, they would always say, you know, "Grandpa, I love you, I love you." And he would just nod and then smile. And, um, he kept, they kept on him, saying, "I love you, I love you." And then finally, he says, "I love you." And it was, it just, you know, warmed my heart so much. And then at the same time

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it broke it, because I never got those words that my nieces and my kids got, and I felt so overwhelmed, I guess you would say, but I also felt so full of love, because I knew my dad loved us all.

CAMERON SIFERD: Roughly 40 years after the outlaw of Indigenous dancing and celebration came the Sixties Scoop. Despite the name, the practice took place starting in the '50s and it has been argued that the process has never ended. It was a systematic and forceful removal of children from Indigenous families into foster care. The nuclear Christian family was the ideal to the powers that be. Those ideas do not translate directly on to the Indigenous traditional ways of life. For example, because of a difference in value of personal effects, many of the children taken from families had only been considered poor, but otherwise providing for their children. A specific example was the idea of food. Someone may not have a stock of food at home when they rely on hunting. This sort of behavior was not in line with the Canadian ideal, though.

Tens of thousands of children were taken from their parents. This practice was a direct extension of the goal of the residential school. The majority of Indigenous children were dispersed among settler, non-Indigenous families. Many of the adopted were chosen out of catalogs of Indigenous children. Looking again at the words of Charles Angus, the department believed that moving children into foster care could eradicate Indian identity more effectively and cheaply than maintaining the residential schools.

BEVERLEY JACOBS / GOWEHGYUSEH: My grandmother ended up in a violent relationship, in an addicted, you know, alcoholic home, my mother was raised with that. Fortunately, my mother married a traditional man, which is why I am the way I am. That I was able to be raised that way, my mom made a conscious choice to not want to live that way. But there were still impacts of violence and abuse and sexual violence.

CAMERON SIFERD: The problems of education in the residential school system, failing to provide the skills and training needed to compete against the public school system are plentiful. This was not the only problem. For many students, the life training skills just were not there. The lack of care and effort that went into teaching the children of the residential school system did not provide properly in the ways of teaching aspects such as parenting skills and abilities. Combined with the fact that the students were specifically taken and kept away from their homes, which completely removed the family

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from the equation, the result for many were a mire of compounding hurdles upon leaving the schools.

It was common for someone to leave the school without any idea what was next. Many carried scars that were physical and mental. The abuse that was received throughout the life of the residential school system was brutal, and the effects were lasting. So many children that left the schools faced intrusive thoughts and memories along with nightmares brought on by the institution. Behaviors associated with dissociation were common.

IRENE YOUNG PINE: My parents split up when I was five. My dad remarried, and my mom, being a single parent, she herself didn't know how to be a parent. So, you know, this is where we really felt the struggle was living with a parent who was in the residential school in an era that was still run by the nuns and the priests. And we were the first generation that didn't go to the residential school when the nuns and priests were there, because, by that time, the Reserve took over. So, it was totally different. But, it's not to say that we didn't feel those effects, because we did, because we are raised by the parents that had no parenting, that were abused in all shapes and forms, you know, especially the sexual abuse is very, um, a very delicate thing that we still deal with today.

CAMERON SIFERD: Many parents who provided for their children, as the government intended, still felt the effects of growing up in an institution. It is common for families who have been affected by the residential school system to have a difficult time showing warm emotions, or displaying physical affection like hugging one's children. Consultants who are working with the Assembly of First Nations, a political organization dedicated to the advocacy of First Nations issues, found near the end of their residential schooling, that the survivors of the Indian residential school system have in many cases continued to have their lives shaped by the experiences in the schools. Persons who attended these schools continue to struggle with their identity after years of being taught to hate themselves and their culture.

The residential school led to a disruption in the transference of parenting skills from one generation to the next. Without these skills, many survivors had difficulties in raising their own children. In residential schools, they learned that adults often exert power and control through abuse. These lessons learned in childhood are often repeated in adulthood, with the result that some survivors of the residential school system inflicted abuse upon their own children. These children in turn may use the same tools on their own children.

IRENE YOUNG PINE: Even though I wasn't raised in the old ways, because my mom took us away, it was her way of surviving and taking care of us. With whatever happened to her in her life, she thought, "I'm taking my children out of this." Unfortunately, you know, it brought us to a different level of stress, being a family in inner-city Edmonton, with no family there, isolating yourself and that stuff was, you know, it's not healing, it doesn't help. A lot of the difficulty lies in our social conditions, of our makeup, of the way we think and the way we behave. So that's the disconnection [between] our hearts and our heads. It's twisted, the ladder of violence and the effects that we felt have made a lot of people hurt so bad inside.

CAMERON SIFERD: It was not uncommon for children to come out of the residential school system having felt little to no positive attention or affection in their entire experience at the school. With little to no support, those that left the school had to deal with the traumas they'd experienced while trying to establish and stabilize their lives.

GITZ CRAZYBOY: Oki, nikyokowa nitahnikko Paahkyikoyii... My name is Gitz Crazyboy. I am Blackfoot and Dene.

I'm thankful that they did the job that they did, because they really did their best to try to protect me. Although it didn't, I mean, they did their best, but there's things that happened to me in my childhood that, even though they tried to protect me, still happened, but I am thankful that they did try to. It's just different, like, this whole thing is degrees for people.

I take comfort because I look at some of my uncles and aunties who were just drunk, just [drinking] the whole time, um, had families and they seemed happy and then something happened and everything fell apart. And I remember that being in, like, the late '80s, '90s. They all had families, they're all doing amazing things and then, I don't know what happened, but it seems like everybody just fragmented and everything fell apart.

But I take comfort in John Trudell's poetry about the drunken Indian. The drunken Indian made way for a lot of things, a lot of resiliency, he broke ground for, like, freedom fighters and water protectors. And the way that John Trudell frames the drunken Indian is [as] the person who had their culture essentially ripped from them, and was told to be this assimilated person. But in an act of rebellion, they didn't want to be that anymore. They didn't want to be this thing that these white people wanted them to be, this assimilated human being. And they didn't want to be this, and then they didn't

really know how to retrace or reconnect in a healthy way back to their culture, and their identity. And maybe it wasn't there for them. Because some of these communities got really heavily colonized. So they chose that other path, which was, like, "I'm just going to be this, I'm just going to drink, I'm just going to be this thing that is neither anything. I'm going to be this person." And in that act of rebellion, they were able to do things that normally we wouldn't really see.

BETTY LOU CRAZY BOY: Then I went to residential school, like my parents, to my siblings to me, so the, uh, trauma continued. Then it continued to my children, it affected them. But they didn't go through the trauma and all that, but still, they were victims of it because my parental skills and my lifestyle was not, you know, healthy.

CAMERON SIFERD: June 11, 2008: then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper offered an apology to the students of the residential school system. The apology included a note of the removal of children from parents: "We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from the rich and vibrant cultures and traditions, that it created a void in many lives and communities. And we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that in separating the children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children, and sowed the seeds for generations to follow."

This apology was received to mixed response. Some felt that the apology was well-spoken, a positive first step forward for the government. Many felt otherwise, that the apology was hollow and an empty gesture, which was a way to fall back on empty words. Aside from the policies that followed, the origin and sincerity of the apology have come into question.

CHEYENNE MCGINNIS / NATOYIHKII: The apology was nice. And that was a good step by Stephen Harper to do that, I will commend him on that and his work in doing that, because it helped to heal the wound. It gave presence to the situation. It made it a situation that was worth listening to for Canadians, and I think that that's a role that government also has, is to reach Canadians and to have them, to have them listen to our stories through education, I think is, that's where the reform is going to happen, is through education. And through listening and just respect for each other. These effects are so far-reaching, and I can't even really start to understand how much of an effect it's had on my life even before I was born.

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CAMERON SIFERD: This apology, the studies and programs that followed, were an opportunity for the government to step up and make an attempt to correct the crimes of the past. This held the potential for programs to work with Indigenous communities, and help them reclaim some of what they had taken away. Unfortunately, the results just are not there. Less than a decade later, despite making up just 7.7% of the total population, in 2016, 52% of the children making up the foster care system were Indigenous. This amounts to more than three times the number of children that were enrolled in the residential school system at its peak.

BEVERLEY JACOBS / GOWEHGYUSEH: Where is that acknowledgement of all of the losses and all of the hurt, all of the impacts? You know, our young people are having to see it and feel it and know that it has existed. And also trying to figure out how to survive in this world today. And all I can say is to know who you are, know where you come from. Know your land and know your history, your family history and things in the past that have had an impact on your own families and, and to heal, to understand relationships to language and land and ceremonies and... because that's our strength.

There's a world of addictions and those things that have been used to help cover up our hurts and pains. And I think knowing how to deal with all of that is difficult today but, also, I think, coming to terms with knowing who you are and the strength of being an Indigenous person and the strength of who we are and where we come from.

CAMERON SIFERD: The amount of overrepresentation in the foster care and justice systems reflect the attitude of colonial supremacy and the hurdles, unjust, racist laws put in place by the government to dominate, control, and eliminate Indigenous people and culture from this country. Many of the effects of these old residential school methods can be felt with a blistering severity today through both direct experience, as well as the plethora of examples of antagonistic bureaucracy, doublespeak, and disingenuous treatment that continued after the schools to the present.

Reports have recommended that keeping the family together as much as possible as well as introducing policy sensitive to the legacy of the residential school system in the current education system are extremely beneficial to Indigenous children with a familial connection to the residential school system. Further education of Indigenous culture in the classroom, inclusive cultural events, and courses improve performance and retention of knowledge in students who have been affected intergenerationally.

Unfortunately, pushback remains. In October of 2020, documents were leaked, which included recommendations by the United Conservative Party of Alberta to

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remove all mention of residential schools until after grade four, with a further note to wait until grade nine, when the children were more mature. The irony, of course, lies in the fact that the average age of a child in grade nine is 14, while the ages of mandatory attendance in the residential school system were from ages 7 to 16. The premier, Jason Kenney, responded to accusations that the provincial government was trying to hide its dark past and clean up the image of its history by attacking the credibility of those questioning the notes, as well as making vague statements that call back to the empty doublespeak of the past.

JUDY EVERSON: I want to have it all out so that we can start healing as a nation, as a community, and come together. And I'm hoping that our leaders will find some common ground to understand us, to understand what not only our generation that was in residential school or day schools, but where we actually come together to heal together and just to be really on the same page because even though they say they understand, they know, they this and that. No, they don't. They haven't been through it because it not only hurt the people that, the generation, like I said, that went to residential and day schools. It's hurting like two generations past: my generation and my children's generation.

SKIP WOLFLEG / AKAINIHKASIMI: My name is Clarence Wolfleg Jr. People call me Skip.

They call it the "The All-People Song." It actually originates from the Blood Tribe. We all kind of learn this song, it's like the first honour song we all learn. If somebody tells you, "can you sing a song for these people, these students that are graduating? Can you sing a song for a person that we're honoring?"

CAMERON SIFERD: This podcast was produced by Grace Heavy Runner, Cam Siferd, Hannah Many Guns, and Jasmine Vickaryous, with music by Matthew Cardinal and Skip Wolfleg. Special thanks to all those who shared stories about their residential school experience. This podcast was made in partnership with CJSW and the Department of Canadian Heritage.

JASMINE VICKARYOUS: If you or someone you know is experiencing pain or distress as a result of the residential school experience, you're not alone. Please call the Residential School Crisis Line at 1-866-925-4419. They are there to help and they're available 24 hours a day.

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