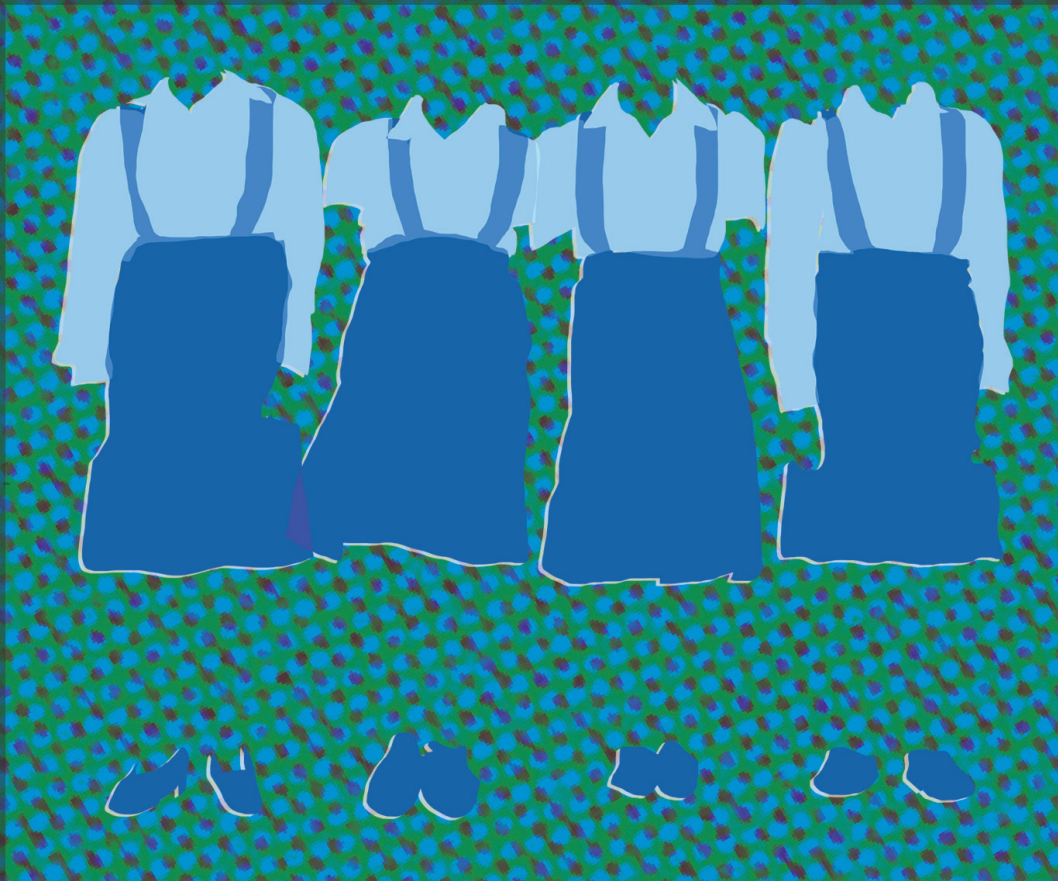


SURVIVORS



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CJSW

SURVIVORS

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DISCLAIMER / CONTENT WARNING:

Please be advised. This zine 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

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.

INTRODUCTION

The residential school system remains rooted in Canadian history, but its effects continue to ripple through the present and future.

Survivors is an eight-part podcast series created by CJSW Radio 90.9 FM in Mohkinstsis (Calgary) in partnership with the Government of Canada's Department of Canadian Heritage. Produced by Grace Heavy Runner, Cameron Siferd, and Jasmine Vickaryous, the project prioritizes Indigenous perspectives. Additionally, the podcast provides expert perspectives from community leaders, such as Clarence Wolfleg and the Honorable Murray Sinclair. While Survivors acts as a living piece of history, its mission is to detail how this system continuously impacts the present.

Featuring an original soundtrack from Amiswaci (Edmonton)-based musician, Matthew Cardinal, a member of the indie rock group nêhiyawak, the music was produced to capture the emotion and gravity of the experiences faced by the individuals who share their stories. Also included are original powwow songs from Clarence 'Skip' M. Wolfleg Jr., also known by his Blackfoot name, "Akainihkasimi," translating to "Many Names." Wolfleg Jr. explores the intention behind the inclusion of powwow music with the listener.

Survivors is a podcast created to acknowledge the importance of educating Canadians about the true history of the residential school system.



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EPISODE 1:

THE FIRST DAY

In episode one, we provide a general overview of the residential school system and its history. We also hear first-hand accounts about what it was like for children to be separated from their families and arrive at a residential school.

GRACE HEAVY RUNNER:

"I want to share my story and the story of other residential school survivors to raise awareness and aid in the healing process of our community. Presently, I'm a journalism student and a podcast producer. I'm a daughter, a sister, a mother and grandmother. Every generation of my family within living memory attended residential school. This is my story, but also the story of many. While my experience may have been different from others, there is a unifying impact felt by all generations. I want to share my stories and experiences living at the residential school. Thank you for taking this journey with me."

REBECCA MANY GREY HORSES/ I'TISNOHTISPIYAKI:

"When I entered residential school, it was very traumatizing. You leave a safe, sheltered environment to this really hostile environment. And you experienced so much trauma there from being attacked [by] your supervisors. And you're walking on eggshells all the time trying to survive, it's a very survival mode of existence. And so when this is going on, you're experiencing trauma after trauma, after trauma, from these abuses that are happening there. You know, when those traumas are not addressed, keep carrying that trauma with you, through the years as you age, you have to address them at some point or another. "

CAMERON SIFERD:

"The experience you hear in the stories from Grace and others may not come across as extreme or seem as horrific as the treatment outlined throughout history. Each individual's experience is subjective, and there was no one way to feel about the schools. There are former students who look back positively on their time in school. The reason for including these historical events is to display the experience of too many individuals who were at the very least, supposed to be provided care and education, and instead received pain, misery and trauma."

EPISODE 2:

THE AVERAGE DAY

In this episode, we explain the routines and schedules which shaped the average day of a child at a residential school. These include the school's curriculum, religious education, chores and labour, and recreational sports.

CAMERON SIFERD:

"The average day of the residential school system looked different for every individual student. There were systematic differences, which can be considered when attempting to gain an understanding of the experience of survivors of the school. To start off with boys and girls had their lives segregated from each other and would be treated and taught differently. The stories of survivors' experiences will vary school by school, depending on what era they went, which part of the country, which religious denomination, or whether it was after the government had taken over, how many students were enrolled, how many a child knew, and where they were from."

BETTY LOU CRAZY BOY:

"It was like we were caged! I felt like a caged animal, probed and hit and let out of the cage to eat or to go to the bathroom.

you're telling a kid in a mean way to do something, they're going to forget. But if you teach a child, [in] a loving way, when they do something wrong, they'll remember it. We were never taught that [way]. It was all cruelty."

CLARENCE WOLFLEG / MIIKSIKA'AM:

"There were four of us. When we want to shed our tears, there was a tree on the east side of the school. They were just little bushes at the time. We would sit there and we would say, "Boy, we had a tough day." We would all shed tears. We'd cry and hold onto each other. And today, one day I got called to give a tour of Old Sun College as Old Sun Indian Residential School the way it was when I went. And the people from the University of Calgary... I said, "Wait a minute." And when I looked at the place where those little shrubs were where we cried, they've grown up to be full, big trees."

REBECCA MANY GREY HORSES / I'TISNOHTISPIYAKI:

"I would like to address the youth that are still impacted by Indian residential schools and colonialism. I would like to call them back home and tell them that there's still a culture here. There's still a language. There's still elders that care and there are people; there's knowledge keepers that are healing from the impacts and that we're still here and that we would want them to heal from those impacts."

EPISODE 3: FORCED ASSIMILATION

Episode three discusses the loss of Indigenous languages and cultural practices, stemming from the separation of children from their families and communities. State policies (such as the Sixties Scoop) which contributed to forced assimilation are also reviewed.

BETTY LOU CRAZY BOY:

"When all the damage was done and everything and they let us go, there was so much damage done. You know, our language, our spirituality, we're forced to pray on our knees in some kind of, you know, damn language I didn't understand and kneel for hours. And then we had to repent our sins. Well, what sins do we have? We didn't have any! It was just that, our sins of – probably – our sins of talking in language, or believing in something. And then they all said we're all going to go to hell. And so the spirituality was based on fear."

GITZ CRAZYBOY:

"It's okay to be lost and messed up and angry about all the stuff, the things that happened to you. The children that are taken away, your brothers and sisters that might have taken away."

The family we lost to this life – it, that’s, you’re supposed to be messed up. The one person that gets you out of that is yourself. And one of the most powerful things that we have that a lot of the colonizers essentially don’t have is we have our culture. And we have our songs, we have our ceremonies, we have our stories. And when you begin to familiarize yourself with that, when you begin to think as an Indigenous person as those you know, so they always say, they say think in Indian. When you’re able to think as a Siksikaytyitapii or a niitsitapi person, like a real human being, and you go back into those old ways, the ancestors are there waiting for you. They’re there to take pity on you, they’re there to help you. And they can help you in ways that you can never imagine.”

GABRIELLE LINDSTROM / TSAPIINAKI:

“We don’t even know what we’re doing when it comes to raising our kids. I was raised by two residential school survivors. And so we have that kind of experience. What keeps us together is our spirituality and, and culture, you know, and, and that responsibility to at least try and live the best that we can, according to our peoples’ teachings, trying to learn the language and then, at the same time, trying to educate a very racist society. And a lot of times, it’s like, I feel like I’m spinning my wheels and trying to convince people that we’re good people; that – what happened to us? Like, it’s frustrating, because I shouldn’t be in a position where I have to teach people about the Indian residential school. Like, how is that possible, that people don’t even know?”

EPISODE 4: PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH

This episode takes a wide-ranging look at the detrimental effects of social and environmental factors in residential schools on the health of the children who attended them. These include malnutrition, disease, and abuse.

CAMERON SIFERD:

"Throughout the entire history of the residential schools, students face problems ranging from rancid food or being forcefully deprived [of] food, to forced sterilization and what some have called a purposeful spread of tuberculosis. The system itself allowed for common experiences of hunger and disgust. In general, the food was awful, and there wasn't enough of it. Macaroni or spaghetti was served four times in one week. Bologna is mentioned five times and the report from another noting one menu card recommended 8.5 pounds of minced meat for 50 children, meaning less than three ounces per child. Often, the food was rotten, bug-ridden, spoiled, or considered unfit for human consumption."

MELINDA BULL SHIELDS:

"The food was not good. I had stale bread, lumpy porridge. We had dairy cows on the place and the boys went out to milk them and worked the farm. But all the milk went to Cardston and we had powdered milk that was lumpy, it wasn't even mixed up good. And a lot of the food was burnt."

DALLAS YOUNG PINE:

"I'd seen a lot of people that were abused. We had kind of a privilege, on some weekends we would go home and then go back on Sunday evenings. You had to kind of, you know, wash up. I've seen kids being thrown in, you know, showers that were – you could see the steam coming out. That's how hot it was. Kids being thrown in those showers."

IRENE YOUNG PINE:

"Losing our brothers was a very hard thing to deal with. For me, I dealt with that in a very bad way, a decade of just... and finally, you know, I faced life and death at a point in my life where, um, I didn't have my children. I have four children. I told myself, "Do I want my children to be without a mom?" Like, I thought about all the things that I was lacking in my life, um, especially when it came to parenting. That's the awareness that they are lacking. They don't know what we've gone through and what we still continue to go through every day. But yet we still continue to wake up and we're still trying and we're still, you know, we're still here, and we're not going away."

EPISODE 5: RELIGION & THE CHURCH

The roles of various Christian churches (i.e., the Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican, and United Churches) in the establishment and administration of residential schools are examined in this episode. Contemporary acknowledgements and apologies on behalf of these churches are discussed, as are efforts to reclaim traditional Indigenous spiritual practices.

GRACE HEAVY RUNNER / POKSIKAINAKI:

"When I think back, I remember how religion played a big role when I attended the residential school. I felt so confused, especially at a very young age. I was brainwashed into thinking that my culture was nothing, and religion was everything. You were shunned if you didn't believe in Jesus Christ or attended church, so I did everything to be part of the Catholic religion."

STEVE KOOTENAY-JOBIN / NATOYA PIIKSKI:

"I sometimes, when explaining religion or spirituality, as a teaching when students come in, I always share, I'm like, you know, sometimes you don't know, I don't know who I'm referring

to, it could be whichever elder or whoever it is in my family, but these are all from them being taken away, Sixties Scoop, taken away by Mormons. This was one family going to a Christian residential school. It was another family going to a Catholic residential school. It's my father who's Métis. So this strong mix of Catholicism, and then also people in my family, you know, who broke free of those intergenerational trauma and effects of being forced into Christianity or Catholicism, who have started to go back to our ways."

ANONYMOUS:

"And they instilled in you to be afraid of everything. Every time they told you, if you didn't listen, you're going to go to hell. You're going to burn up in hell, and they show us pictures of a burning place with people burning and looking like they're trying to get out of the fire. I mean, of course, that kind of stuff that, between the ages, I mean, from grade ones to six, you'd be, you'd be traumatized seeing them. Soon as you get home, they talk about the devil and to me that's a lot of... I was scared half of the time."

EPISODE 6: INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

The experiences of those enduring social and psychological impacts of the residential school system are considered in the sixth episode of this series. Topics addressed range from substance use, disruptions to Indigenous family structures and parenting skills, and the continued wardship of Indigenous children under the Canadian Crown.

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."

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."

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."

EPISODE 7: TRUTH & RECONCILIATION

Closures of the residential school system and the 2008 apology by Prime Minister Stephen Harper are discussed, as are the establishment and recommendations of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In this episode, contributors reflect on the path forward, as well as the discovery of unmarked burial sites at various residential schools in 2021.

CAMERON SIFERD:

" "A dark chapter in Canadian history." This statement implies that the issues relating to the residential school system are in the past. It ignores the overrepresentation of children who continue to be removed from their homes, whether it was part of the Sixties Scoop or, as Charles Angus details, in 2011, Census Canada determined that, of the nearly 30,000 children in foster care in Canada, half are Indigenous, a number that exceeds even the grimmest estimates. This means there are more children in the hands of the state now than at the height of the residential school system."

BEVERLEY JACOBS / GOWEHGYUSEH:

"Recovery, uncovering of our babies, of our children, is just a reminder that they'll never do it, they'll never get away with it. We're never gonna go away. And then having to deal with the colonial settler attitudes and racism and stereotypes, systemic discrimination, all that stuff we're still dealing with as well on a daily basis. We're still dealing with the impacts on a daily basis. I see it every day. I think for sure they knew and they thought it would just go away. You know, but I'm sure they've had records and if they didn't, then there was a reason for that as well."

CYNTHIA WESLEY-ESQUIMAUX:

"Part of the thing that most disturbed or disappointed people, Indigenous or otherwise across Canada was the fact that it had remained hidden for so long, not that Indigenous people had not been speaking about it amongst themselves and in various forums. It wasn't that it was unknown. It was just that nobody believed it. And now it has become, you know, what research would term evidence-based. So, before that, people kind of looked at it like, well, those are just stories, or those are just, you know, thoughts that people, you know, that it might have happened, but now there's ample evidence, proof, I suppose you would call it, that, that those deaths actually happened."

BEVERLEY JACOBS / GOWEHGYUSEH:

"You know, Canadians who have land and have resources have benefited from the genocide of our people. And the erasure of our people, and people need to really come to terms with that, and what that actually means, what the realities are."

CYNTHIA WESLEY-ESQUIMAUX:

"That these things happened, just like they happened in Australia. And they happened in New Zealand, and they happened in other places where Indigenous populations were either eliminated completely, or otherwise marginalized. And these are the conversations that we're going to have with you and it is going to make Canada very uncomfortable. And that's fine with me, they should be uncomfortable. And we should talk about and until we can talk about it in a way that actually creates resolution. We're not getting to reconciliation in this country, until we actually name the reality."

BEVERLEY JACOBS / GOWEHGYUSEH:

"You know, for those who are, you know, just learning about this, I think it's really important to keep your, you know, their minds and hearts open. This can't be considered a mistake anymore, or something that can't be believed. And that it is really harsh, really difficult to think that it actually existed. And I think that's what's difficult for people to come to the reality of, like, "Canada did this? The churches did this?" There has to be an acknowledgement of that truth."

EPISODE 8:

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE HONOURABLE MURRAY SINCLAIR

In the series finale, Grace Heavy Runner conducts an interview with The Honourable Murray Sinclair, who served as chairman of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission from 2009 to 2015.

MURRAY SINCLAIR:

"What you need to be aware of is the fact that the Government of Canada still continues to do to Indigenous children what they did during the residential school era. And they're doing it by utilizing the child welfare system and the criminal justice system. We have more kids in the care of government in our jails and in our foster system than we ever had in residential schools in any given period of time. So we're still losing our kids to cultural genocide. And we need to confront that, we need to do something about that.

We need to change the way that we educate children to believe that, as Indigenous people, we were not only here first, but we were valid as a people. We had a civilization, we had a culture, we had a right to this territory, and that it was not right for white settlers to come here and to falsely lead us into believing and signing documents where we gave up our rights according to their law, and then to impose that law on us, when in fact, that was never the commitment. And, at the same time, overcome us through military exercise, when we were not ready to take up that kind of resistance. And, so, we have to change the way that we're educating our children so that future generations don't behave like this."

RESOURCES

CANADA

Kids Help Phone (for ages 5-20)

-24 hr confidential phone support:

1-800-668-6868

-24 hr texting service: text CONNECT to 686868

Crisis Services Canada

-24 hr phone line (will find the nearest crisis centre):

-1-833-456-4566

-text 45645 (4pm-12am ET)

Empower Me (UCalgary graduate students)

-24 hr phone support

-connects you to ongoing counselling supports via video, phone, or in person
1-833-628-5589

2-1-1: Provides referrals for community, government, and social services within your location

Wellness Together Canada:

<https://ca.portal.gs/>

CALGARY & ALBERTA

Calgary Distress Centre

-24 hr phone & online chat:
distresscentre.com

403-266-4357 (HELP)

Wood's Home Eastside Family Centre

-Call 1-800-563-6106

-Text 587-315-5000 (9am-10pm MST)

-Live-chat/schedule a remote appointment at
woodshomes.ca

Mental Health Helpline

-24 hr phone line:
1-877-303-2642

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