

## Storm Cardinal's Story

My family has lost a lot of Indigenous family values because of residential schools: knowledge about the way we see each other, the way we speak to each other, and our native languages. Not only the residential school Survivors, but their children were also weakened and affected by the residential schools.

The trauma was passed down to us by our families through body language, tone, and sometimes abuse.

I'd like to talk about that today, about what I've seen through my eyes as a child growing up and the similarity to what others went through at residential schools.

As a son of a residential school Survivor, I wasn't sure what the school was in my community, at the time, or what it meant to many of the people in my hometown. As I got older, I met with a teacher I knew back in my hometown who taught the children Cree. One day while I was in class, we brought up the residential schools and missionaries.

She gave me my first opinion from a community member of what that school experience was like for them, and she also shared a bit about her mom attending that school before her. As I got older, heard more stories, more opinions, it became more clear and more intense as I collected and stored these experiences from elders in my community. I've got to piece together what effects it has on the residential [school] Survivors and the youth today.

After a while of hearing stories and understanding what it was that went on, I realized I had to share my own experience to anyone, and I chose to tell my best friend. If I was to go back to when I was a child, I can recall many times I had gotten what us "rez" families called a "licken'."

I started to realize that what I went through had some similarities with what they experienced in residential schools—abuse with sticks or by hand. I got my experience as a kid having to go and get my own willow to get whipped with. You had to choose smart; bigger was blunter, and skinnier stung for longer. By hand was different because it was face-to-face and yelling at times.

It was traumatic for me as a kid, and I can recall times when I had panic attacks as a kid and would freeze in a corner while being yelled at and hit to the point where I couldn't cry anymore. I just stood there holding in my voice like my will to cry, listening to muffled growling because that's all I could hear.

It follows them and even us while we are being raised or raising our own kids. They learned what they were taught, and they taught the way they learned. Without even knowing [...] that it was something they experienced and their kids are experiencing now.

Many kids grew up without experiencing a nurturing family life, whether their parents were always out drinking, or out getting high on drugs, maybe they even left early on. That leaves a toll, abandonment issues with youth nowadays impact them a lot. Most of the time they have no one to help them cope or to socialize with them when they're younger. It's a lot harder to find themselves later on and end up mixed up in the worst things that get us stuck in that lifestyle.

Some youth, even young adults, never find their way out of it. We never got the full experience [of

residential schools], but we are experiencing the aftermath. Most end up passing on what they've learned and experienced from their parents and it's a cycle that we hope to one day end.

Another sad or rather devastating coping mechanism some of the residential Survivors used was what many used, including my father and I used; completely burying our memories and keeping only what we thought were "good" memories. Traumatic experiences of abuse and mistreatment, we would rather bury our memories and choose to forget and feel numb, rather than heal ourselves and be haunted everyday thinking or remembering the traumas of our past. This usually leads to not having people recognize or acknowledge your pain, your story, and never healing properly.

My father was one to never share heartbreaking moments or painful memories or anything emotional at all. He tries to remain a strong image for us, to not see his pain or even hear about what eats away at him from the inside. It makes me wonder if I'll ever get his story.

I also wish I could be up here to share even a little bit about my mother's story. Unfortunately, she passed away when I was 10, which is well over 13 ago years now. I never once got to hear anything about her younger life or residential school experience. Until just recently, one of my aunties mentioned she was a residential school Survivor and she had her own experience there that was never shared, like many others who never got to come back home.

It's not about who they feel comfortable opening up to, or in what environment they may be comfortable, it's just the fact that some, including my father, just simply can't remember what they buried deep down inside.

When I was around the age of six, I learned what cigarettes were and what the drug weed was. I remember times when I was acting wrong in my household or causing domestic violence to my younger sibling. I would run away from home to smoke cigarettes and smoke drugs with kids I attended school with who were all experiencing traumatic experiences from home. All of us experienced something that caused us to feel driven to abuse ourselves with drugs and alcohol and it eventually led to my first time drinking alcohol. I was about 12 when I stole a six-pack from my dad's fridge and walked around town with my so-called friends at the time.

I remember my dad being so drunk that night under the table that he didn't remember having that six-pack and I remember doing it multiple times and even stealing smokes, weed, and even his pop can pipe. I think now, to this day, I still use drugs and alcohol to cope with my own experiences as a child.

Drug use, games, work, music, alcohol, these were only a few ways I forgot about pain. I'd do all these things over and over again until I would just eventually forget. Yes, it helped me forget, but it's always there. I can dig it up and feel hurt, then drink and bury it again. I am still fighting this very same battle now.

These are only a few ways that I cope with my anger, depression, and anxiety and I know a lot of youth in my own community who do the same thing. We all use these methods of coping instead of releasing this pain in a very uncomfortable but safe setting.

I tend to wrap my head around things and over contemplate how I deal with any of my bad, sad, or mad situations and it leads to me finding alcohol in my life again.

I come from a loving household that wasn't all love and care from day one. We had struggles here and there where [my] siblings had to move out or stay with friends because of the pressure we received in our household from our parents and siblings.

When we were growing up, I remember a few times where my mother and father would have us all sleep in the living room together, mainly because all the kids were bad that day. It was easier to watch us all in one room. But the main thing I remember is that we had to be very quiet and go to sleep, or my mother would hit us with a wooden spoon.

At the time we didn't know what abuse was. My parents weren't very strict, but with parents who forced us physically to be better and to listen, it was hard to learn. My father and late mother were also residential school Survivors. I got to ask my dad a bit how it was back in those times in that school and he couldn't give me an accurate answer.

My father said, mainly it was very hard to be alone in there with no siblings or parents, just the other kids, the priests, and nuns. That was his family for around six years. He passed grade 7 and then they closed [the school] down, and it wasn't easy for anyone, not even for my dad. He thought it would be easiest to bury his memories. I honestly think that is the hardest thing to ever do because I know personally how and why I do that.

Even now, when I try to get him to open up about it, he says he honestly can't remember. I would have preferred him to tell his story and to be heard.

I tried to talk to my dad about everything, even my own past, but even I bury my past like my dad does till this day. I can't remember every traumatic memory in my past.

Some former students have positive memories of their time at residential schools, and certainly some might have been treated with kindness by the priests and nuns who ran the schools as best they could, given the circumstances. But even these "good" experiences occurred within a system aimed at destroying Indigenous culture and assimilating Indigenous students to bring them into conformity with their customs.

I hope all their voices are heard, and I encourage all the youth of all the residential school Survivors to speak up for yourselves and be honest and open to anyone around you: friends, siblings, cousins, anyone who's willing to digest what you have to get off your chest.

Thanks for listening to my voice, and I hope this helps inspire some youth to speak up about their experiences and encourages them to share their stories, just like me.