

**Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada
Media Clips**



**Résolution des questions des pensionnats indiens Canada
Actualité**

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Table of Contents/ Table des matières

<u>HEALING AND RECONCILIATION IS A COMMUNITY AFFAIR.....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>NATIVE STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT HOLOCAUST FROM JEWISH NEIGHBOUR.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>HEAD-TAX APOLOGY ON ITS WAY</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>THE BEST HEAD-TAX RESPONSE.....</u>	<u>8</u>

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Parry Sound North Star
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Healing and Reconciliation is a Community Affair

by Sarah Bissonette

WASAUKSING - A day of healing and reconciliation for former Indian residential school students and their descendants was hosted last Thursday by Pshe genda gok Miikaans, Sacred Pathway, a support group for former students. The day included a community walk and traditional drumming by the community's youth.

In his youth, Gerald King, 72, attended the Chappleau residential school, in Chappleau, Ontario. He said that he was glad that community members came out to support the former students. Three survivors took part in the walk.

Grade 7 student Lorne Pawis, 14, who was also the drum chief, was on the walk with five other students "to support the elders," he said.

Sacred Pathways was a support group for former Indian residential schools students on Wasauksing First Nation. The two-year program was funded through the federal Aboriginal Healing Fund. The group's last day was May 31.

Residential schools for First Nations' children between the ages of five and 16, were in operation in Canada before Confederation in 1867. From 1874 to 1969 the schools were funded by the federal government, but run by church organizations. After the federal government took over responsibility for the operation of the schools in 1969, many were closed, but the last one wasn't shut down until 1996.

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Canadian Jewish News

Native students learn about Holocaust from Jewish neighbour

By Janice Arnold
Staff Reporter

MONTREAL - High school students in the remote Cree community of Waskaganish in northern Quebec were introduced to the Holocaust by a survivor's son who lives in their midst.

Marvin Zylber, a Montrealer who has been the community's capital projects manager for almost two years and is the only non-native resident of the reserve, was invited by the Cree School Board to speak about the topic to Grade 10 and 11 students at Wiininibekuu High School.

"This is the first time that a northern Cree community explored the subject. The Holocaust was presented as part of the history curriculum. Most students had never heard anything about the Shoah. However, they had an appreciation," said Zylber, who considers it an honour to have been asked.

"It was a beautiful exchange between a Jew and a native Indian community. After the presentation, both the teacher and the principal thanked me for my effort."

Zylber, 46, is an engineer by profession, not a teacher. His late father Solomon was born in a Polish village that was the scene of a Nazi massacre. His father fled to Russia, where he spent the rest of the war, but other family members were sent to camps and some died. Coincidentally, Zylber addressed the class the day after his father's *yahrzeit*.

Zylber put together a broad overview of the Holocaust from the time Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933 through to liberation, and included graphic photos of starving inmates and piles of bodies, in a PowerPoint presentation.

First, he had to explain what anti-Semitism was to young people for whom the word "Jew" means little or nothing. Even a long ago war in Europe is a very remote concept.

He told them: "The Nazis believed that Jews owned everything, Jews were rich, Jews were too powerful, Jews controlled the media, Jews were racially inferior." He explained the Nazi belief in the superiority of the "Aryan" race. He also touched on Jewish resistance and the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.

His concluding segment, "How to prevent another Holocaust," warned the students to "speak up about racism, be proud of who you are, educate yourself and be accepting of different people."

The school is small, and the class Zylber addressed had only about 20 students. The presentation was also repeated in French by another teacher, France Cadieux.

Although the subject is distant, the students could relate as aboriginal people to the evils of prejudice and persecution, and to the desire to preserve cultural identity. "The Cree students are very sensitive towards discrimination, so they could identify with the Holocaust. The biggest challenge for most students was the magnitude – six million. They couldn't understand it."

Their people's bitter experience of residential schools enabled them to see some connection to the Nazis' denial of a whole people, Zylber said.

While the time that can be spent on the Holocaust is very limited, the students will be given a test on the topic, he said.

The young people are aware of Israel, however, he said, probably because it is in the news so much.

There is a word for Jewish in Cree – Chuuiiyuu – which translates as "the people who are Jews," said Zylber who has picked up quite a bit of the language.

Some of the adults are sensitive to the Jewish community because of the anti-Semitic remarks made by Saskatchewan Cree elder David Ahenakew in 2003, for which he was found guilty of promoting hate. The then-chief of the Assembly of First Nations, former Quebec Cree grand chief Matthew Coon Come, visited Montreal's Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue to try to heal the wounds.

Waskaganish, which has about 2,000 residents, is on the shores of the Rupert Inlet of James Bay, 800 kilometres northwest of Montreal, and accessible via Air Creebec through Val d'Or. Winter temperatures of minus 45 or 50 are not uncommon.

Fishing and trapping are the main livelihood. Zylber said more than half the population face financial hardships, but the community is not overly plagued by social problems.

Zylber said his job could be compared to that of a city manager. He's responsible for the Waskaganish's infrastructure and construction, and reports to the band council.

He has never hidden the fact that he is Jewish, a matter that came up when he returned to Montreal for the High Holy Days and Passover. "When I explained I needed to go because of family, they backed me up," he said.

Zylber, who is single, does return to Montreal for brief furloughs through the year, to visit his mother and stock up on items not available in the north.

He tries to keep kosher and is mainly vegetarian, which is not easy where he lives. He has had to explain to the Cree, who are extremely generous, why he cannot accept their gifts of geese and moose, nor eat at their homes. "They respect that I can't eat certain foods," he said.

There is a Jewish doctor from Montreal who visits Waskaganish for short periods on a rotational basis about every six or eight weeks. In addition, one band member claims to have a Russian Jewish great-grandfather who came to the region as a trader, and another man was raised as Jewish in Kingston, Ont., by the family that adopted him.

Zylber has worked at a number of wilderness projects over his career, including overseeing the construction of hydro-electric plants and pulp-and-paper mills, but he said his time in Waskaganish has been the most rewarding. The people have accepted him and he enjoys the beauty and clean air of the great outdoors, with the hiking and canoeing it offers.

He said he could be there anywhere from another two to 10 years, and he is looking forward to it. "I get up every morning feeling energetic and wanting to get to work," he said.

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Head-tax apology on its way

By John Pigeon

What is an apology worth?

If you ask Sid Tan, president of the Chinese Canadians for Equality and Solidarity Society, he says the June 22 apology to Chinese head-tax payers their spouses and descendants is about restoring justice and honour.

But he will also tell you that the apology is more than words being said, it's about righting the wrongs that led to Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology.

"This is a tax refund, this is not compensation," Tan said. "No organization and no individual in Canada should be able to profit from racism and keep the proceeds."

For 83-year-old head tax descendant Gim Wong, redress is important because it was the tax that was the harshest of racist Canadian policies which lasted until the 1940s.

"Out of 100 nationalities, ethnic groups and religious groups from the separate world, Chinese were the only ones that had to pay a head tax," Wong said. "Slaves were worth something you could sell a slave if you didn't want them, they [Chinese Canadians during the exclusion act] were not even a dime a dozen."

Gim Wong will ride the VIA train to Ottawa tomorrow to hear the prime minister apologize in the House of Commons.

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The best head-tax response

Prime Minister Stephen Harper is getting ready to apologize for a shameful period in Canadian history -- the 38-year stretch when our government collected a head tax from every arrival from China. About \$23 million was collected; there is no word whether families will get compensation.

But don't expect Harper's apology to end the eagerness to reconsider the sins of our past with the enlightenment that comes with the passage of time.

And don't expect silence from the Chinese community, which is divided on the issue. If no compensation is given, expect complaints that justice has not been done. If there is compensation, expect to hear that it is too little or going to the wrong people.

And that's just the start. What about all those other groups that can argue convincingly that Canada discriminated against them when they arrived? In the middle of the 20th century, Eastern Europeans faced tougher restrictions and higher costs than arrivals from the British Isles. That wasn't fair.

Canada allowed only 5,000 Jews into the country during the years the Nazis ran Germany. Other countries closed their doors as well. Indirectly at least, that meant Jews died.

And what about the way the federal government ended its Chinese head tax, simply decreeing that no Chinese would be allowed? Period. That ban lasted from 1923 to 1947. Which is worse? Telling people that they had to pay to come here, or telling them they couldn't come at all?

The head-tax issue should never be forgotten, but it is important to keep it in its proper context.

The immigration policies that Canada used a century ago would never be allowed to stand today, because at the core of those policies was the belief that the future of this country was white and English-speaking. And as appalling as that might sound today, Canada was no less welcoming than most other nations of the day.

The head tax is a highly visible reminder of our unconscionable behaviour past, but it is hardly the only one.

Rather than trying to issue dozens of apologies, we should strive to ensure that we don't let those kinds of things happen again. That would be the best way to remember

the Chinese, Ukrainians, Italians and others who suffered as we fumbled toward a better Canada.