

**Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada
Media Clips**



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

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Native activist had little reason to trust white man's ideas of justice

[Alan Ferguson, The Province](#)

God knows, Harriet Nahanee had a darn good reason to hate white people.

She was five years old in 1942 when the Mounties snatched her from her parents' home on Vancouver Island's Pacheenaht **Indian Reserve** and stuck her in **residential school**.

By her 10th birthday, the beatings and rapes she witnessed had been seared into her memory.

One Christmas Eve, she claimed to have watched a drunken priest kick a little girl down the stairs, killing her.

Nanee herself told friends she was a victim of repeated sexual abuse over a four-year period.

It wasn't until her mid-40s that she began to comprehend the damage that had been done to her. And who would blame her for the conclusion she reached?

"The church and the government did this to us deliberately in order to take the land and resources," she reportedly told a psychiatrist in 1984. "It was all about keeping us dysfunctional, to keep us dependent."

From that point on, Nahanee spent much of her life fighting for the dignity and culture of her people.

She never forgot the children who were punished for speaking their native tongue or singing traditional songs.

She was uncompromising in her stand, refusing to recognize the authority of the white man's governments.

For her, all the rights she demanded were guaranteed in a 1763 Royal proclamation that she wielded like a magic talisman.

She insisted on reading it when she was arrested last May while taking part, aged 71, in a protest against Sea-to-Sky Highway construction at Eagleridge Bluffs.

And she defied a court injunction to return to the site in June, with another activist, 78-year-old Betty Krawczyk.

Nahanee was among a group of 16 protesters summoned before B.C. Supreme Court Justice Brenda Brown in January. Most were handed fines ranging from \$250 to \$5,000. But the weight of the law came down particularly hard on her.

Because of her high profile, the fact she showed no remorse, and didn't bother to attend court much, the judge jailed her for 14 days.

Nahanee spent nine days at the Surrey pre-trial centre where, according to her friend, lawyer Lyn Crompton, she was jostled and taunted.

A week later she was dead, having been admitted to St. Paul's Hospital suffering from pneumonia and previously undiagnosed lung cancer.

Now there are demands for an inquiry into her death. And perhaps that's the least we owe her.

In the context of the Eagleridge standoff, Nahanee got what she deserved. She wilfully and repeatedly broke the law, in full knowledge of the potential consequences. (Just as Krawczyk did -- and she was jailed yesterday for all of 10 months).

But, in the context of her life, she got a bad break.

She had endured unspeakable horrors as a child.

And she saw her own suffering mirrored in the humiliation of an entire people.

No wonder she was angry.