

**Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada  
Media Clips**



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

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## February 27, 2007

### Lost Spirits: Official records non-existent?

#### Grassroots News

#### (Part two in a four-part special investigative report)

by Len Kruzenga

There are some estimates floating around Indian Country which suggest that anywhere from 5,000 to 10 graves continue to be situated on the sites of Canada's over 130 former Indian Residential Schools and that many of them remain unmarked, unrecorded—nationally—at INAC and unprotected.

Although the Aboriginal Healing Foundation has doled out over \$300 million dollars in grants and funding to a staggering array of survivor driven programs and services intended to assist Residential School Survivors and their families, officials there admit not a dime has gone towards commemorating the graves of the dead or in chronicling the locations of the actual cemeteries, the names of those buried there or creating a national register of the dead.

Aboriginal Healing Fund Communications Director Wayne Spear says that of the thousands of projects the AHF has approved thus far, none have dealt with the issue of cemeteries or graves on the former Residential Schools sites.

"Quite frankly I'm not sure that this would fall under our mandate at the AHF. The projects we approve have to specifically address healing issues for the survivors and their families or the community at large," he said.

But among some survivors is the very real and growing sense that any community and nation-wide healing or eventual truth and reconciliation process as suggested by leaders such as AFN National Chief Phil Fontaine and others must include an accounting of the thousands of young children who died at the schools, either through sickness, misadventure or as some Native people have suggested, of broken hearts.

"Our burial rites are ancient and sacred. We still know where our ancestors are buried on our traditional lands thousands of years ago and yet at the schools we do not know how many or the names of those children who were placed in the ground," said James Scott. "But we as survivors and Aboriginal Peoples have no recorded collective history of the children who never left, who cried for their families while they were sick and dying.

Others, like Nathan Harper, say some of the blame for the lack of memorializing the children at the schools rests with the community.

“So much focus has been placed on healing and acknowledging the intergenerational effects of the residential school experience like loss of family, culture, language, parenting, community but as a people we have forgotten the great damage done when the little ones who died and were buried at the schools because their families and communities could not reclaim them or weren’t even notified for years when their children died.

“We have to force the churches, the government and our own people to say farewell to the little ones and their spirits who never had their people to mourn them properly so they could pass on to the spirit world in peace.

What Scott, Harper and others agree upon is the formal need for commemoration and accounting.

“It’s been a sleeping issue but it’s going to become huge as we go down the path of healing and restorative justice,” says National Residential Schools Survivor Society spokesperson John Gagnon. “We’ve seen here in Ontario how the school properties were developed without proper archaeological surveying regarding cemeteries at former Residential School at Shingwaup and Brampton.

“The federal government and others responsible for the school did not show proper respect to the graves of our people and simply began developing them.”

Gagnon says recent gatherings of survivors groups have increasingly raised the question of the Lost Spirits buried at the schools.

“The stories have always been there of our people generations ago not returning and as the survivors really start to begin dealing with their experiences and sharing stories together the individual memories spark a larger collective memory.”

Gagnon, Scott and Harper agree that the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has been shamefully negligent in maintaining information on the cemeteries and deaths at the school and that the churches will have to make the death registers and cemetery record available to national residential school groups as soon as possible to avoid a showdown on the issue.

“The churches fought us on settlement and that dragged things on for a lot longer in the courts while the feds were fighting them and we were kinda forced on the sidelines to wait,” said Scott. “It hurt getting settlement agreed on and you can see we’re still waiting so I hope the churches and the government realize they shouldn’t do this again when it comes to this issue.”

As for any organized attempt by either native, church or government groups to begin the process of compiling records on deaths, burials and cemetery locations at Canada’s former Indian Residential Schools its’ completely absent admit sources within the Anglican, Roman Catholic and United Churches.

“I think there’s some justifiable fear that a search of church and government records are going to confirm the worst fears of many that the records were inadequate even by historical standards and that the aboriginal people will discover to their great pain and sorrow that the process of wiping out their Indian identity at the schools was carried out even to death so that the lives of those children were deemed so unimportant that their graves were never marked in many cases or commemorated,” said one Presbyterian Church source, who spoke on condition of anonymity. “The churches actively pursued converting children to Christianity, forcing them to be baptized and practice the doctrines of the churches but in death it appears that the churches did not provide these members with the same dignity as their non-aboriginal brothers and sisters who were laid to rest in cemeteries that are not neglected and unmarked.

The source who says he has visited the site of the Birtle Manitoba Residential School (run by the Presbyterian Church) says the fate of any graves at the former school is the same as in Brandon.

“If it did exist it’s not there anymore or not marked like the regular church graves and cemeteries in small town and cities across Canada.

“It’s a question that has to be answered and reflected on by the government and Canada. Where are the final resting places of these thousands of children? Why were their graves allowed to be grown over, to be built upon? Why are their names erased or hidden from public record? I don’t think there can ever be any pretense of reconciliation, of truth or of forgiveness until we clear this great cloud of uncertainty.”

Thus far the experience of those who never returned consists of less than 300 words on the Legacy of Hope Foundation (an AHF funded project) website page entitled: *Where are the children*. There is no mention of the estimated number of children who died while at the schools or any information on the cemeteries or gravesites where they are buried.

There are fears, among some that any final accounting of the number and names of children who died at the schools might be too much for the aboriginal community—particularly its surviving elders—to bear.

“When you read stuff like that report by Bryce in the early 1900s where 35-60 percent of all kids who attended residential schools during a 20 some year period simply died because of neglect, improper housing and sanitation at the schools and preventable disease I get scared of how many bodies are buried at these schools, “ admits Scott. “I think that’s why so many of our people get frightened when they go to the sites of the schools there’s this great darkness and heaviness everywhere that’s never going to be solved by money or programs unless the whole ugly thing is exposed.

Attempts to contact official spokespersons at the Anglican, United, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian Churches by press time were unsuccessful.

## Letters: Rez School story needs to be told

### Grassroots News

As a descendant of one of the students of the Brandon School, who never returned, the story of a great great uncle who died there in the 1920s has been in our family for many years.

Your story uncovers another dirty secret of the government in abusing our people and literally burying the evidence and our past without paying proper respect to the dead, our own people, most of them children who died heartbroken, sick and removed from the embrace of their mothers and fathers to lie buried and forgotten.

Non-aboriginal children who died during these times have graves and markers so that their names and lives are known but not these, as you name them, Forgotten Spirits.

I am angry at the governments that tore down the schools without leaving any signs to people of what they did at these places and without any honour of those who never left and are buried there.

It is time for this secret to come out and for our own people to demand that the government and our own organizations take action to remember our dead.

Healing cannot really happen unless we remember EVERYTHING that happened at these schools.

I pray your articles will get our people and leaders organized and inspired to honour our dead at the schools and give them at least some dignity in death a dignity they were robbed of when they were forced into the schools and a dignity they have so far not been given by either the government, the churches that ran the schools and our own healing foundations and programs.

*Ross Sinclair*

Winnipeg.

## Reaching out to others through art

### Saskatchewan News Network Courtney Wagner

REGINA -- Lorne Cardinal is known as an actor, director, son, brother and husband, but he is also an avid observer, and that has helped him achieve the success he enjoys today.

Cardinal has learned his craft through the teachings of others and by observing the talent around him. To this day, even as an established actor/director, he will absorb as much information as he can from his surroundings, to better himself and his work.

Cardinal currently plays quirky police officer Davis Quinton on the off-beat CTV hit *Corner Gas*, which is set in the fictional Saskatchewan town of Dog River, but his talent is not limited to acting.

Born in High Prairie, Alta., Cardinal spent most of his formative years in Edmonton and on the Sucker Creek First Nation in Alberta. He has appeared in television shows such as *North of 60* and *renegadepress.com*, as well as stage productions, and in recent years has added directing to his resume. His credits include an episode of *Moccasin Flats* and four episodes of *renegadepress.com*. Directing is a whole new ball game and a challenge that he wholly accepts.

"It's incredible, it's stressful, it's incredibly creative; you are surrounded by creative people all the time and the buck stops with you," he says. "You have to make every single decision."

This is the first time in his career that Cardinal can't say: "I don't know." An actor saying he isn't sure is valid. But a director has to know.

The experience has been a huge learning curve for Cardinal and with the work comes mistakes, which he welcomes. The support of the crew behind him, going above and beyond to do its best work, is also a blessing that has made the learning process that much easier.

Tried many things

For some actors, the path is clear at a young age. For Cardinal it wasn't so cut and dried. In his early 20s he spent time working at a newspaper as a photographer, then freelanced for a year and a half before deciding to go tree planting in B.C. After the season was over he decided to return to school. He attended Caribou College, now called Thompson Rivers University, and signed up for basic courses that piqued his interest. He saw an introduction-to-acting class and figured it looked like an easy way to pick up credits, so he enrolled.

The class was "fantastic," and it was due to the instruction of Dr. David Edwards, that Cardinal was turned on to the theatre.

"I did my first one-act play and it was the first time, when I stepped onstage, it felt right. It felt like this is what I should be doing," Cardinal says.

Edwards encouraged Cardinal to seek more training if he wanted to pursue a career in acting and said it was important to be a trained actor as well as a talented one. Those words stuck with Cardinal and have sparked his drive to absorb as much of the business as he can.

### Completed his degree

Proof of Cardinal's drive to become the best he could possibly be came while he was attending the University of Alberta in Edmonton, where he enrolled in the bachelor of fine arts acting program. In the first year of his studies he received a call from his agent about a show called North of 60. He was asked to read for one of the lead characters, but when he found out the show was starting production later that year, he turned it down.

"I've turned a lot of work down, actually, when I was in university, because for me the most important thing was getting my training. I didn't want to short-change myself. And you know how tempting that is just to jump at the work because it's there -- but I chose not to. I chose to actually finish my training and get my degree."

Cardinal chose to stay in school because he wanted to improve his technique as an actor and felt he needed that more than he needed a job.

Through his training he has learned from others that it was not only important to learn his craft inside and out, but also to have an awareness for the work being done around him. To this day Cardinal puts that advice to work. He will watch directors work between his own scenes, or observes the rest of the crew doing their jobs, and he believes it has made him a better actor.

"It's just something I've always done. I've always just paid attention to what's around me. The only way to learn is by paying attention. It's having that attitude of taking the whole picture of theatre, from the first day of rehearsal to the closing, and all the steps in between. It's very much like a team sport," he says. "I played a lot of rugby growing up and that's what taught me about teamwork. I take that experience and put it right into the theatre and it's a perfect fit. It's about team play; it's about supporting the story. And if you have a small part you do that small part the best as you can to support the story. It's part of the links, sort of the stronger that you are the stronger the story becomes."

### Making a difference



Cardinal has experienced first hand how the strength of a story can touch more than just the actors playing the parts. Earlier in his career, soon after he finished university, he was doing a play with Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto. The production was called *60 Below*, a play written by Leonard Linklater and Patti Flather. Cardinal played a town hero named Johnny, who had died and returned as a ghost to visit his friend Henry. The townspeople thought that Henry had something to do with Johnny's death. Only Henry knew that Johnny had actually taken his own life, but he keeps the secret to himself, even after being sent to jail. In the end, Henry tells his girlfriend and Johnny's wife the truth about what happened and lets go of the painful secret he had been carrying around.

Following a performance of the play, the actors were backstage changing out of costume and a young man popped his head in and thanked the crew for the show. The crew said thanks and went back to what they were doing. But the young man interjected again and told them they didn't understand. His best friend had killed himself a few weeks earlier and the man had been thinking of doing the same thing, but the play had changed his mind. He realized he would be hurting more people in the long run by taking his own life.

"That's the point," Cardinal says. "That's when, to me, everything -- reviews, awards -- that doesn't mean as much as affecting somebody like that.

"And that's what I hope my work does, affect people. Let them know they're not alone; let them know there are other options, other ways to look at things and that there are people who've been through it and who have survived through it and can help."

Cardinal himself knows something about survival -- he learned it from his parents and other relatives who struggled with haunting memories of residential schools and grew up to struggle with other demons, such as alcoholism.

"Both my father and my mother are residential school survivors, as are most of my aunts and uncles," he says. "And growing up under the effects of that has been brutal."

Even through his pain, however, Cardinal's father Don Cardinal made sure to pass on words of wisdom to Cardinal and his brother Lewis Cardinal.

"Even when he was down and at his lowest point, he always managed to sneak a lesson in there," Cardinal says.

He recalls a time when his father took him and his brother out to every bar on the "skids" in Edmonton. They would have a beer at each place. His father would tell them to take a look around. "This is what will happen to you if you let this," he'd say, pointing to the beer, "grab a hold of you."

This memory has always stuck with Cardinal, and because of that he made sure he followed a different path than his relatives who struggled through painful times. The life lessons he took from his father were tough, but they worked.

"It's a shame, because you see so many beautiful glimpses of beautiful people, but then they're in so much pain and turmoil that it's just heartbreaking, to see that waste of talent and gifts that were given to each and every one of us, and to see them not fulfilled is very heartbreaking."