



Residential school deaths

Alberni Valley Times

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For the sake of the survivors of Alberni Indian Residential School, we need to find out the truth.

Kevin Annett, the former Alberni United Church minister turned residential school activist, has laid his cards on the table. Annett claims to have physical evidence at 28 former residential school sites across Canada showing children were killed and buried. That includes what he describes as a series of sinkholes, consistent with old graves, on the former Alberni site.

Are there children buried out there somewhere?

The residential school system proved to be an abomination. Given the basic flaw in the system -- rip aboriginal children from their families and debase their culture, all in the name of making them better people -- that's a given.

Even at that, had those children been allowed to become citizens firmly grounded in both First Nations and "white" culture, what a difference it could have made for successive generations. You'd see former graduates holding reunions on milestone years.

Instead, the reunions are in courtrooms. They're not grads, they're survivors, people with broken lives, testifying to the horrors inflicted on them. One can only imagine what an emotionally harrowing experience it is, to break through years of silence.

That's why loading allegations of mass murder onto these same schools only serves to re-traumatize the victims. Imagine finally coming to grips with the physical, emotional and (in many cases) sexual abuse that was going on around you. You're already suffering survivor's guilt. Now imagine being told that, along with all these other horrors, some of your schoolmates were being murdered.

Tsashaht chief councillor Les Sam has invited a proper investigation of the local site in question, to determine if there is any substance to the claim or if the holes are empty.

For local survivors, getting to the truth may help ease some of the lingering memories.

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