

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL APOLOGY: Is sorry enough? Not for local man

Date: 2008-06-11
By Lauren Gilchrist

The scars run deep.

Thoughts of the large rubber strap.

The beating.

The loss of culture.

All of this embedded into the mind of Ron Howard Senior.

No amount of money and certainly no apology will bring those years back, says the 73-year-old Hiawatha First Nation resident.

In Ottawa today (Wednesday), those who were forced to residential schools will gather in the House of Commons to hear an apology from Prime Minister Stephen Harper on behalf of the government and the people of Canada.

This apology comes much too late for Mr. Howard.

“The chief (Laurie Carr) asked me the other day if I was going to go down and I told her, 'not very likely,’” he says.

“I’ve waited 68 years for this but all they are are a bunch of of bulls*****ers anyway.”

Mr. Howard attended St. John's Anglican Indian Residential School in Chapleau, Ontario, about an hour west of Timmins, when he was just five years old.

For eight years Mr. Howard says he endured countless beatings from church supervisors, poor living conditions, bed bugs, death and a loss of identity.

“The food was poor. It wasn't nutritious. People were dying of tuberculosis,” he says.

“I got beat so bad up there my ass was black and blue. We were starved and they worked us.

“There is no excuse for this whatsoever.”

Local MP Dean Del Mastro says he feels just as strongly. These acts have tainted Canada's history and he hopes the apology will provide some sort of solace for those who suffered and still live with the terrible memories.

“I think it is a big deal. I think it's historic. This is a historic wrong. We can't change the past but we can acknowledge it,” he told This Week.

“Money doesn't have any impact on the spiritual and emotional wrong. We're one people with one future.”

However, he adds he doesn't think apologizing will be enough.

“The apology has to be accepted. It's sincere. It's historic and it's heartfelt.”

For Hiawatha Chief Laurie Carr, she has to hear it first before she can really decide what meaning it has for those who endured the abuse.

“For the apology to have any meaning or any depth it has to be sincere.”

In the past, the government has turned to monetary compensation giving out \$1.3 billion of \$4 billion. While this was a step in the right direction, for Mr. Howard it isn't about money.

Stories like his will soon be told before the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission under Mr. Justice Harry Laforme. The commission, with a five-year mandate, began its work last month and is expected to soon announce a start for hearings.

But this news comes a little late for some like Valarie Waboose, whose mother died last year before she could hear an apology.

Ms Waboose is now writing her PhD at Trent University on residential schools. It was something that

impacted her mother and father, she says.

When asked how her mother would have reacted she says, "I think she probably would have been happy that another page has been turned in this whole issue. Whether it would have helped her, I don't know because she didn't get to hear it. Just being disconnected from the community had a big impact on her."

The same disconnect lingers for Mr. Howard. He says he had trouble growing up and raising a family because he wasn't brought up in a warm and caring environment. He didn't know how to show love.

An apology isn't going to heal those wounds.

"I lost my culture. I lost my language. I lost my childhood. I lost my parents. I lost my pride.

"I have got a hole in my heart. Nothing will heal."

With files from the Toronto Star



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