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## I choose to forgive

**The federal government wanted to take the Indian out of me. It did not succeed**

**Matthew Coon Come , The Ottawa Citizen**

Published: Wednesday, June 11, 2008

OTTAWA - I was taken away from my parents at a young age to attend La Tuque Indian Residential School, situated in central Quebec, approximately 300 hundred miles away from my home community of Mistissini, Quebec.

I was at the IRS for 10 of the most vulnerable years of my life.

The residential school I attended was officially opened by then minister of Indian affairs, the Honourable Jean Chrétien, and was operated by the Anglican Church.

The federal government wanted to take the Indian out of me. It did not succeed. I know that I know who I am. I am eeyou, a human being, son of a great hunter, and member of the Cree Nation.

The federal government wanted to assimilate me into the Canadian body politic. It did not succeed. I love my country, my land and my people.

The federal government wanted our peoples to disappear, because of our title to our lands and resources. It did not succeed. Our peoples are still here to assert our rights. We are still in the way. We are not going away.

Church officials slapped me for speaking my language and wanted me to lose my language and traditional ways. They did not succeed. I speak my mother tongue fluently and I and my family are Cree.

They told me that my culture, and my people's ways of life would never sustain me. They lied. I am a son of a hunter, fisherman, and a trapper. My father taught me how to walk the land, and to love and respect the animals and all of creation. I have not lost my culture. Our way of life is thriving.

They tried to force their religion on me. I hate religion. I hate the traditions. Religion kills. But I have found peace, love, and faith in a personal relationship with Christ.

The staff at the residential school physically and sexually abused me. At this they succeeded for I was only a child. I am still on a healing journey.

An apology was read today by the prime minister on behalf of the government and on behalf of the people of Canada. His sincerity and that of the Canadians he represents will be determined by others.

As a former residential school survivor, I have waited a long time for this day. And I accept the apology. Each survivor must make his or her own decision. I decided a long time ago that I would move forward. I want broad change, but that change must start with me.

I choose to forgive those who took me away from my parents, my grandparents, my community and our traditional lands and resources.

I choose to forgive Mr. Chrétien for opening and allowing the residential schools to operate.



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**Matthew Coon Come is an Indian residential schools survivor. He is former national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, and former grand chief of the Grand Council of the Crees of Quebec.**

Juda Ngwenya, Reuters

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I choose to forgive the church officials who tried to kill my language and my culture, and who wanted me to be ashamed of who and what I am.

I choose to forgive those who physically and sexually abused me.

It is time for me to move on. And to continue being Cree, in defiance of everything the federal government intended for me and my people. And to continue asserting our peoples' human rights to self-determination, to our cultures and to our resources and lands.

*Matthew Coon Come is an Indian residential schools survivor. He is former national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, and former grand chief of the Grand Council of the Crees of Quebec.*

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