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Reactions of 5 survivors

Canwest News Service

Published: Wednesday, June 11, 2008

Roy Johnson

Age: 56

Schooling: A residential school in Whitehorse for nine years, starting in 1955 at age 4.



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Roy Johnson attended a residential school in Whitehorse for nine years, starting in 1955 at age four.

Ashley Fraser/Canwest News Service

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Lasting memory: Though he was punished himself, the memory of watching others being hurt and humiliated stands out the most. He recalls a group of children caught trying to run away were forced to strip and were whipped. "While these children were being whipped naked, we were standing there, also naked, as witness," he says quietly.

Mike Cachagee

Age: 68

Schooling: Three residential schools in Chapleau Ont., Moose Factory, Ont., and Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., over a period of 12 years.

Lasting memory: Cachagee says the residential schools were a "cultural genocide" that left many children emotionally and spiritually dead from abuse. "I was fondled by a staff member there," he remembers. When he asked her to stop, "she put me in tubs of hot, hot water."

Lillian Pooyak

Age: 64

Schooling: St. Michael's Residential School in Duck Lake, Sask., from 1954-1960, and a residential high school in Lebret, Sask. from 1960-65.

Lasting memory: Pooyak, who said she was severely sexually and physically abused during her 10 years in residential school, said she remembers the day she was taken away from her parents. "The only thing I remember was my parents crying, because they went to residential school themselves," she said. "I started crying also."

Gordon Williams

Age: 67

Schooling: Birtle Indian Residential School in western Manitoba from 1957-1961.

Lasting memory: The students at Birtle School ran a farm, but Williams says it often felt like a prison. He says he'll never forget the feeling of confinement he had when living at the school, since students were not allowed to leave the school ground. "It was almost like staying within a minimum (security) institution."

Ted Quewezance

Age: 55

Schooling: Gordon Indian Residential School in southern Saskatchewan.

Lasting memory: Quewezance said he suffered from physical, emotional and sexual abuse during his time in residential school. He said he has some good memories of his time there, but the persistent reminder of abuse, which can be triggered by daily activities such as taking a shower, "buries the positive of the residential schools, and that's the sad part about it."

Reaction to apology: It has left him feeling optimistic, but he stresses that there is still work to be done. "The words are nice, but the next step is we've got to add action to those words."

Compiled by Arielle Godbout

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