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## Editorial

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### Apology not enough

Posted By RUTH FARQUHAR

Posted 1 hour ago

I have been debating with myself about commenting on the apology to native peoples from the government of Canada. After all, as a white woman of privilege how can I even begin to understand what happened in residential schools?

How can I begin to understand the pain of being wrenched from your family at a young age? How can I begin to understand what it was like to be beaten when you spoke your native language? How can I begin to understand what it was like for families who never knew what happened to their children after they were taken?

But what I can understand is that as a white woman I need to bear witness to the truth about these horrors. As a Canadian I admit we destroyed families and tried to wipe out as Prime Minister Stephen Harper said, "The Indian in the child."

It doesn't matter that I wasn't actually there at the time because all of our forebears were and they sat back and agreed with the government of the day that this was the right thing to do. As if taking their lands and traditions wasn't enough. It doesn't matter if we didn't realize that the children in these schools were tortured or sexually abused. Each one of us needs to acknowledge that we were responsible. I am so sorry for the horrors, for the criminal acts that were perpetrated against the First Peoples of this country.

Like many, I watched the apology given by Harper on behalf of the Canada and I will admit that I found it very moving. Here are some facts laid out by Harper:

Formore than a century the residential schools separated 150,000 native children from their families and communities;

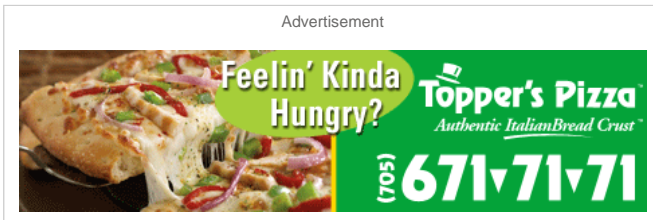
Most schools were operated as joint ventures with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United Churches;

Very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities; Aboriginal languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools; Some children died while attending residential schools and others never returned home;

While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools these stories are far overshadowed by tragic

accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities; The government now recognizes the consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that it had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language;

The legacy of Indian residential schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities.



It astounds me how many people believe participation in these schools was voluntary, that native people somehow brought it on themselves. And that's what I mean by bearing witness, it's not easy to hear what we did to native children, but we need to acknowledge that it was a horrible part of our history.

But Nepean Carleton- Conservative MP Pierre Poilievre blew it. He was interviewed on local radio on the same day as the apology and he said, "Now along with this apology comes another \$4 billion in compensation for those who partook in the residential school system."

Partook? Obviously, he didn't realize that native children and families didn't volunteer to go to these schools. Then he said, "Some of us are starting to ask, 'are we getting value for our money.'" What? This is compensation for the cultural genocide and he wants to know how they are spending that compensation? It is none of our business plain and simple.

Let's hope Poilievre is not indicative of the rest of the Conservative party, but I'm not holding my breath. This is the party that gives out a very moving apology to Native peoples, but refused to sign the United Nations Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, that got rid of the Kelowna Accord, that cut the Status of Women, which included major



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funding losses for the Sisters of Spirit Initiative who advocated for victims of violence at the Native Women's Association of Canada. See what I mean?

I hope the apology is the start of dialogue with Native peoples and the beginning of truly understanding what it means to be a survivor of this horrible system of residential schools.

But I fear the government may see it as, "OK, we have apologized, what more do you want?" Let's hope that isn't the case. If your child was forcibly taken from your home and then abused just for being who they are, would you forgive that easily? I know I wouldn't.

Ruth Farquhar is a Manitoulin Island-based freelance writer.

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