

Residential school film eye-opening experience

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by: Rick Garrick - Wawatay News

George Cheechoo was surprised to hear his father mentioned in the recently screened award-winning docudrama, *Sleeping Children Awake*.

December 11, 2008: Volume 35 #25

"I heard them talking about my dad, my aunt and my grandparents," said the Constance Lake First Nation band member. "It was a real eye opener."

Screened Nov. 26 at Lakehead University, producer Rhonda Kara Hanah's 1992 docudrama outlines the history of the residential school system and how it personally affected generations of First Nations people. The film featured a series of recollections and experiences of residential school survivors and their families along with dramatic excerpts from Shirley Cheechoo's autobiographical play, *Path With No Moccasins*.

"My dad went to residential school," Cheechoo said, explaining that he only recently found out his father went to residential school after he spoke about his experience. "I can see how it affects my life even though I didn't go to residential school."

Cheechoo said residential school has cost him his language and knowledge of the traditional way of living on the land as well as affecting his personal life.

"I have to approach my dad — I have a lot of questions now," Cheechoo said. "This film was made in 1992 and this is the first time I heard about it. My family is not as close as they are supposed to be."

About 100 people attended the screening, including many residential school survivors and children of survivors.

"Sometimes I feel we are all healing," said Audrey DeRoy, the daughter of a survivor. "The pain is still on the surface. At times you feel so helpless."

Gerry Martin, a Mattagami survivor of Shingwauk residential school, said it is very important for survivors to share their stories.

"It was probably the most terrible and pervasive thing they have done to our people," Martin said of the residential school system.

Kitty Everson, a Lac Seul survivor of both Shingwauk and Pelican Falls residential schools, said First Nations people had to be very strong to survive all the abuses inflicted upon them in the residential school system.

"We are very strong people because we are still alive today," Everson said. "We have a lot behind us that kept us alive that we are not using — our medicines are still here. In order for us to get well, we have to go back and use what is there. Our medicines, our prayers, everything."

Published in Wawatay Online, December 11, 2008, Volume 35, No. 25

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This project was made possible with support from the Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund and the Department of Canadian Heritage through Canadian Culture Online.



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