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## Local News

Home News Local News Plucked from his family in Curve Lake, artist Freddy Taylor endured life in a residential school



### Plucked from his family in Curve Lake, artist Freddy Taylor endured life in a residential school

Posted By GALEN EAGLE

Posted 3 hours ago

Freddy Taylor barely looks up from painting when asked about the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a forthcoming apology from Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

"The government, I wouldn't accept their apology," the 63-year-old Curve Lake native and former residential school student says. "The damage is done."

That damage is apparent in the titles of his artwork, hanging prominently in the entrance of the Whetung Ojibwa Art Gallery in Curve Lake.

My Shattered Dreams, Rage and Culture Shock are some themes setting the stage of Taylor's work.

Like the scars on his face, his paintings reflect a hardship. They show a man at conflict with his culture, a man grappling with the theft of his identity.

They are beautiful, colourful pieces, depicting a horrible, dark past.

Taking responsibility for Taylor's past and the thousands of others who experienced abuse within the native residential school system, the federal government will issue an apology on June 11, Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl announced last week.

The formal apology will coincide with the beginning of the \$60 million truth and reconciliation hearings on native residential schools.

There are about 80,000 survivors of the original 150,000 children who attended the residential schools.

Taylor is one.

He was born in Curve Lake in 1945 and lived with his mother, father, three sisters and a brother.

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When he was six, an Indian agent offered to take him to lunch, Taylor recalls as he puts down his paintbrush.

"He said he was going to take me for a bite to eat," Taylor said.

He didn't.

Instead, Taylor was plucked from his family (it would be 10 years until he would see them again) and placed in the Mohawk Institute residential school in Brantford, Ont.

"The first day I went there, a couple of the older boys took my food and they beat me," Taylor said. "As years went on, I took from the little ones as I learned to survive."

Within the walls of the school he no longer had a name.

"I was a number, No. 39 for the years I was there. I even forgot my parents' names," he said.

He said when he couldn't recite the Lord's Prayer, he was beaten; when he couldn't spell an English word, he was beaten; when he spoke in his native tongue of Ojibwa, he was beaten.

"They beat the Indian out of me," Taylor said. "They would just go to town on my body."

Food was scarce and students had to be resourceful to stay fed, Taylor said.

"If it was raining out, me and a few others would run to the cow barn and eat cow food," Taylor said, adding the Brantford city dump was another reliable source of food.

  
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again the Kawartha Artists' Gallery is bringing in "The Best of High School Art" by our local students. This annual show opens MAY 4th 1-4 [...]

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Twenty-four teachers from the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board were issued lay-off notices today, effective September 1, 2008. The decline in [...]

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**Learning in Leisure geared up for a new series of speakers**  
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"I had to learn to fight, steal and take what wasn't mine without conscience."

The legacy of Canada's native residential school system pre-dates Confederation, but it wasn't until 1920 when an amendment to the Indian Act made attendance mandatory for all native children seven to 15.

Family priests, Indian agents and police officers were allowed to forcibly take children from their homes.

Throughout the school system's history, about 132 residential schools operated in every province but Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, according to the department of Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada.

Most residential schools ceased to operate by the mid-1970s; the last federally run residential school in Canada closed in 1996, the department says.

The goal was to assimilate native children into Canadian society. The reality for Taylor and thousands of survivors was years of sexual, physical and emotional abuse.

In many ways, Taylor said, the government was successful in his case.

After 10 years at the Mohawk Institute, he said, he no longer considered himself native.

"The government won. They did what they intended to do," Taylor said. "I'll never be native again. I want to be, but I have given up searching because it's too painful."

When he was 16, Taylor was brought back to Curve Lake.

"They just plopped me back. 'Here, we brought you back. Bye bye,'" Taylor said.

He found his parents were alcoholics who had five new children. The survival tricks he learned in the institution coupled with his newfound love of alcohol brought him into immediate conflict with the law, he said.

"I hated cops and authority. My life was full of crime," he said.

No longer able to identify with his own culture on the reserve, Taylor said he has always felt more comfortable in jail than anywhere else.

"I did a lot of crimes just to get put in jail," he said. "To me, going to prison doesn't bother me. I'm comfortable in prison. It's not an easy thing to say, but that's how it is."

That's where Taylor is spending his weekdays right now - in jail.

On May 6, he was sentenced to 75 days in jail for his seventh conviction for driving while suspended. He is serving an intermittent sentence that allows him to be released on the weekends to continue his work at the gallery.

Taylor said he finds himself incarcerated about once a year.

About six years ago, he turned to art, something that has helped keep him away from the bottle.

"The good Lord, the great spirit, whatever you call the man up there, he told me to lash out on canvas what I felt ... the anger, the shame, the beatings," Taylor said. "This is the only therapy I can get."

In the years since, he has become one of the gallery's top sellers, gallery owner Mike Whetung said.

His art is still inspired by his troubled past, but Whetung said more recent titles such as Healing Within and Visions of Hope mark an interesting evolution in Taylor's work and outlook.

The federal government has paid out \$1.3 billion so far to residential school survivors, with more to come for those who were physically and sexually abused.

Taylor has received compensation but said nothing - the money, the truth and reconciliation or the apology - can reverse what happened to him.

"I've been in about every prison in Ontario. I haven't come across one that was as bad as the Mohawk Institute," he said.

That's not to say the commission and an official apology won't help heal the wounds of other survivors, Taylor said - they are just too little too late for him.

"I'm now white inside, red outside," he said. "I just can't seem to get back what they took."

[geagle@peterboroughexaminer.com](mailto:geagle@peterboroughexaminer.com)

Galen Eagle, Examiner

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