

## **Indian Residential Schools – 40 some years later**

By Gilbert Oskaboose

Well, our class action lawsuit against the federal Department of Indian Affairs, the Jesuits et al has just taken one helluva kick in the crotch. Don't know if the whole group will survive this collectively and in one piece. Those opposition lawyers are tricky.

A group of Ojibway ex-students of Garnier Residential School for Indians in northern Ontario are suing the Department of Indian Affairs and the Jesuits (Blackrobes), the former for a breach of their own fiduciary responsibilities and the latter for their unsavoury contributions to a childhood filled with sexual and physical abuse, pain, loss of childhood, loss of language and culture...etc etc ....The lawsuit is in it's fourth year.

Now the opposition is intent on breaking us up further into "compensable" and non-compensable categories – Group A and Group B. Smells like the old divide and conquer routine. Group A will be made up of only those who have suffered extreme sexual and physical abuse. Group B will be made up of those who ONLY did a hard time in a residential school, ONLY lost their parents, ONLY lost their language and cultures and everything else it means to be Ojibway.

Jeez, it is exactly this kind of crap from Group B that has put Indian Country in the sorry state of affairs that exists today – and no one wants to recognize it? We in Group A have learned to live with the memories but the Group B stuff just keeps going on and on... There are children in Indian Country not even born yet that will feel the dark shadow of those Residential Schools.

Conventional wisdom among white lawyers these days says that no white judge has ever ruled on such things as loss of childhood, loss of language, loss of culture, loss of native spirituality etc., therefore the category does not exist – and is considered non-compensable. Incredible, eh?

As well they have summarily removed survivor's children from the lawsuit. They do not recognize the pain and suffering the kids put up with inheriting the bullshit we brought back from those schools to screw up their lives.

Whatever happened to the long and eloquent apologies, expressions of regret and deep assurances by government and various sundry church groups a while back about doing everything in their power to make things right with residential school survivors? Was that more promises broken even before the ink was dry? Was there nothing more to it than more flatulent oratory?

Is there no goddamn end to these people?

First we get used and abused by white professionals – a perverted clergy. Then we have to spend years in therapy with other white professionals – high priced shrinks and therapists. Then we have to have our lives and pain validated by yet more white professionals – old ex-judges hired to determine if we are lying or not. Then we have to leave ourselves in the hands of white lawyers who can only work with legal precedents that have been set by white judges already.

Wake up and smell the coffee. Our very lives since the residential school have been a precedent in themselves!

## **Response to Residential Schools 40 years later by Annis Aleck**

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I think Gilbert wrote this in the 1990's and many Indians who attended the Residential Schools were still too ashamed to say what happened to them and didn't want to talk about it because it brought back too many painful memories they didn't want to think about then wasted much of their life with excessive drinking. People need an outlet for their pain and anger otherwise it could fester inside them then come out on their body as diabetes, strokes or heart attack. I saw seemingly healthy Indians get strokes or die of heart attacks in their 40's or early 50's and wondered why, then realised it could have been the pain and anger coming out on their body. I was probably luckier than many Indians whose parents were Residential School survivors because my dad excelled in a job that he just loved even though it was dangerous but was still an outlet for his anger. He made sure the family was well provided for and that we all finished high school but still lashed his anger out on me even though I was the best behaved out of 4 boys.

One fellow who attended the Residential School in Williams Lake said one girl there had a couple kids from one of the priests then the priest went on to become a Bishop. I wondered if that was the same Bishop Indians tried to charge with sexual abuse but the case was dismissed on a very slight technicality. When I heard about that I wondered if the case would have been thrown out if these were White people charging a Bishop under the exact same circumstances, with the exact same lawyers and judge? In 2000 I met an Indian girl my age who said the priests and nuns held back her food because she was trying to do something for herself but wouldn't tell me her name, I think she went to the school in Williams Lake.

I was born in 1955 and even Indians younger than me said the sexual abuse was reported but nothing was done about it but I don't ask because it's too painful for the victims. Charging the perpetrator brings relief to many victims but it can also drive some of them to suicide. One of my friends who was about 2 years younger than me committed suicide when the case was brought to court. In the movie The Boys of St Vincent where a staff member was molesting the boys in the orphanage, charging the perpetrator brought relief to many of the victims but drove at least one and possibly more to suicide.

A minister at the Residential School in Lytton, BC was molesting the children which drove many of the victims to alcoholism and some to suicide was only sentenced to 2 years when he got charged. The Indians were only in the Residential School because the Govt forced them to go there, not because they committed a crime and got charged. At a juvenile detention centre where juveniles were there because they actually committed a crime a staff member was charged with molesting the children and was given an 11 year sentence. Canada got off without even a slap on the wrist for all the pain and suffering the Indians went through and not being able to get an educated, professional job for how we were treated in the Residential Schools. Donald Marshal, a Micmac Indian who served 11 years in jail for a murder he didn't commit yet the person who actually did the killing only served a little over a year in jail and the Police constable who lied to put Donald Marshal in jail, nothing was mentioned in the movie about anything happening to him for what he did.

Life in the Residential Schools gradually improved over the years but it was still difficult for the Indian children. In Lytton a friend 2 years younger than me said the school was like a prison and in 2005 he was the only one left of his class that was still alive. In 2003, on "Circle of Justice" on Aboriginal People's Television Network an Indian girl who appeared much younger than me said, "Jail is Heaven compared to the Residential School!" Then the sound went off so I don't what else she had to say. In 1995 the statistics of the incomes of Aboriginal elders compared to White people, the income for Aboriginal elders was about half of that compared to White elders on average and that couldn't have been because they didn't even apply for work. In 2010 Aboriginal People's Television Network said 4% of Canada's population is Aboriginal yet 60% of the children in the Child Welfare system are Aboriginal so we're still feeling the effects of the Residential Schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Ironically the Class Action Law suit Canada had against them over Residential Schools was called the Baxter Class Action Law suit, my nick name is Baxter and I've been fighting injustice all my life. Eventually I started researching issues, putting it in Information Packages and sending it out to influential people but Canadians don't like to see the truth exposed. In 2005 I sent an Information Package to Amnesty International and the clerk in the Post Office wouldn't register it, she said it's a parcel and can't be registered. I've registered other information packages the same size so it could have been registered. Then in 2006 I sent another Information Package to the Residential School Settlement but was served by a male clerk. After the male clerk was paid the postage and filled out the paperwork he saw who it was sent to but the female clerk thought she wouldn't have registered it. People don't only register mail to guarantee delivery, they register it so the recipient can't say they didn't get the mail. Postal clerks have no right to refuse to register mail just because they don't want the truth exposed! Even if I reported this to her supervisor it's quite possible nothing would have been done about it!

## Residential Schools – 30 years later

by Gilbert Oskaboose

Does the silence from Indian Country mean that it will be left to the social scientists and writers of the future to determine the impact of those infamous residential schools on our nations? Are we playing dead again? Can we at least make the connection between that dark chapter in our history and the dysfunctionality in our communities today?

Think about it. Think about the generations of children removed from their homes, their extended families, communities – with all that means – and plunked down into an alien, hostile environment. Consider yourself or your children placed in that situation, What would you do? What would they do?

Punished for speaking their own language, stripped of customs and traditional ways, often cold and hungry, frightened, lonely, turning on themselves and each other. . .

Conventional wisdom says that the will to survive is one of the strongest human feelings and that is exactly what those generations tried to do – survive. The strong survived with their fists. They became the schoolyard bullies who took the lion's share at mealtimes, took the best clothing, stole what they couldn't have. The weak survived by becoming the silent majority – unseen, unheard – or by becoming what the stronger ones called "kiss-asses," sucking up to the Christian priests and brothers, becoming altar boys, never doing anything to "rock the boat," never objecting, never complaining, always being "good boys," always doing exactly what they were told.

The silent majority is still here today, a lot older and none the wiser, still waiting for someone to do something for – or to them. The ones who survived through violence brought it home to their communities. Many became abusers. Many turned their violence back onto themselves – and died young, drunk, violently . . .

Both groups – and the "rugged individuals" in between – survived, or did they? . Some of them escaped into the army, some ran away, others were sent home as "unteachable." A very few were educated and made it into the "Canadian mainstream," as a tiny handful of doctors, nurses, teachers . . . Eventually the schools closed and they all went home, but to what?

One boy got home and was greeted – in Ojibway – by one of the "elders."

"Sorry, sir, he responded politely, I can't speak Indian"

"What!, The elder roared, what the hell kind of little brown Whiteman are you, you can't speak Eendian?" The boy took that kind of bullshit until he was big enough that he could tell those elders – most of whom had spent their own lives drunk – to go to hell.

Recently those old-timers have sobered up, and with the new "born-again Indianism" infesting Indian Country, have become "wise and sacred elders," dispensing good, bad and irrelevant advice to younger generations who didn't know them back in the old days.

How intolerant they've become, how judgemental, and how soon they forget that it was their generation who stood by, blissfully intoxicated, hat in hat, while their children were taken away by priests and Indian agents. "Take good care my kids, eh Fadder!"

What kind of parents do you think those generations of residential school "kids" made, when the time came for them to raise their own families, bearing in mind that the girls were

raised by childless nuns and boys by white men wearing "black dresses?" What do you think they knew about discipline when theirs had come in the form of a hard strap cut from a conveyor belt? What would they know about love when they were raised on abuse – sexual, physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural . . . How could they pass on dignity, pride and self-esteem, to paraphrase Sioux author Vine Deloria Jr., when they had been brainwashed, through alien textbooks, into believing their own ancestors were little more than a "lice-infested, canoe-toting, whiskey-drinking, horse-stealing, bead-coveting, root-gathering band of brigands, wandering around the deep woods, annoying decent god-fearing whites busy carving a new civilization out of a savage wilderness?"

The "residential school syndrome" didn't begin and end a long time ago. The bulk of the schools opened in the 1800's and remained open until the mid-nineteen Fifties and Sixties. The legacy of those institutions and what they did to the First Nations will be here for a long time to come. There are children not even born yet who will feel the effects of those schools – in the dysfunctionality and attitudes of survivors and survivors' children who will raise them. That kind of brutal societal disruption and change can't be turned off like a light bulb.

It's not good enough to dismiss this as ancient history or as "water under the bridge," as one aging Blackrobe tried to do recently. We are human beings, not water flowing serenely under a bridge. It's what we were and what we've become.

How can we know where we're going if we don't have the vaguest understanding of where we've been?

### **Response to Residential Schools 30 Years later by Annis Aleck**

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The Residential Schools didn't prepare the Indian children to get a career and be responsible working adults and many horror stories can be told about them. Some admit they didn't know how to parent after attending the Residential Schools and children learn what they live. They were beaten, molested and oppressed so in turn many beat and molested their own children. Unfortunately oppressed people tend to be oppressors because that's all they know so the Indians tended to lash out at people who tried to help them and were often their own worst enemies, perhaps that was the Govt's objective. Many Indian Reserves were known for excessive drinking but some are also rumoured to be bad for incest.

One lady who went to school with my father but was a few years younger, Kathy, said she licked salt to curb her hunger pangs and when the nuns found out they made her swallow a whole bottle of salt. I was surprised she didn't only survive, she went on to become a nurse. However, the schools probably had an adverse affect on her family life. She has a son whose often getting punched out and even wound up in the hospital after a beating. Some Indians didn't seem to know the importance of education and even when I was in grade school many didn't study, played hooky or dropped out of school before graduating. I told Kathy many Indians I went to high school with died or committed suicide before they turned 25 and she said, "Because they were molested."

The Indians couldn't get very good jobs because of the education they got and if that wasn't bad enough when we tried to do something for ourselves we were held back by Department of Indian Affairs, DIA. This didn't only happen to those who tried for post

secondary education, even those who applied to take a trade were often put in a course different than what they wanted and applied for. Happy Work= Happy Home, people are usually happiest and most productive when they're working with their natural talents. If people aren't happy at work it can affect their productivity, their home life and eventually their health. That could have been the object when DIA treated the Indians like that, keep the Indian families dysfunctional. Then when we were lucky enough to be hired we weren't given equal treatment or promotions, even I was mistreated to the point where I stopped giving recommendations except for safety.

Most dysfunctional families usually have a scapegoat and my brother's wife said it's usually the strongest one. Some Christian hypocrites will say, "You must have done something wrong that's why you were the scapegoat." Although there's healing programs life is also hard on the second generation after the Residential schools and they also appear to have a high rate of suicide and addiction. Although the Residential Schools have been closed down for some time now we're still going to feel the effects of them for some time to come, but fortunately more Indians are getting educated, leading more productive lives and becoming role models.

I went to Langara College in Vancouver, BC with Gilbert Oskaboose in the 1970's. He was quite a bit older than me so he probably wrote this in the 1980's because he also wrote **Indian Residential Schools – 40 some years later**, which was probably written in the 1990's and I found both of these articles on the computer in 2000. Gilbert said those students who did well in school, the clergy staff tried to convert them into priests and nuns. Indians who were adults in the 1960's could easily be called a "Lost generation" because they wasted much of their life with excessive drinking because of the pain and anger caused by the Residential Schools. Academic subjects weren't taught in the Residential schools so this also prevented them from trying to get an educated, professional job and grade schools still tell the students, "Everyone gets Equal Treatment in Canada!"