

From pain to understanding

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The Sault Star

The first time Lori Rainville attended a gathering of Shingwauk Hall Residential School survivors as a teenager, she didn't quite get what it was all about.

Ten years later, in 1991, she began to understand the place where her mother spent most of her childhood.

"That was my first real understanding of why the school was there, and of the children that were taken and placed in the school," said Rainville, 50.

The next year, her mother, a Shingwauk survivor who was taken from her Missanabie Cree parents at the age of four, died. Alice Fletcher was 54.

Rainville said she still finds it difficult to speak about her mother's death.

"I think my mom would still be here if she had been able to access more opportunities for healing, and just talking about it," said Rainville.



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■ SHINGWAUK HALL: Continued

Residential school has lasting effects

FROM A1

The Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association's eighth annual commemorative gathering begins Friday, and Rainville is scheduled to speak during its opening that afternoon.

Commissioner Marie Wilson, of the residential school Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, will name Shingwauk Hall, as well as the church and the cemetery at the site, a national memorial to the thousands of residential school students who didn't return to their families.

The three-day gathering also includes a conference, which organizers say is a way to allow the next generations — the children and the grandchildren of those who were forced into Canada's residential schools — to keep the discussion going.

Rainville said the effects of residential school were lasting on her mother. She said she could feel, growing up, the pain her mother felt at having spent her own childhood away from her family — her mother and father — who were back in Missanabie.

"That has an impact, especially when you have your own children and you think, how would I react if somebody took my children away," said Rainville. "When you have your own children you understand what her mother and her father went through."

It was not long after that 1991 gathering that Rainville, now band administrator for Missanabie Cree First Nation, enrolled in Algoma University, which stands on the former Shingwauk grounds.

Both her children go to Algoma U

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Lori Rainville on her mother having spent her childhood away from her parents

now. Her son, Nolan, is in his third year of a bachelor of arts in Anishinaabemowin. Dayna, her daughter, is in the fourth year of the fine arts program.

Rainville said it was returning to Shingwauk Hall, as an Algoma U student, that helped her to understand who she is.

She said she took part in activities with other First Nations, and her own. She said she remembers sitting at the school with her uncle James Fletcher, himself a Shingwauk survivor who died last year. Each year, Fletcher would tap the school's maple trees.

"He shared a lot of stories with us, sitting by the fire boiling down the sap to make syrup," said Rainville.

"I think that's the difference. My children grew up knowing who they were, who their grandmother was, who their grandfather was, who their great-grandparents were and where they came from," said Rainville. "They're more comfortable with their identity than I was when I was younger."