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Opinion

Residential School Reaction

Residential schools are tarred with same brush

Editor's note: A piece on Indian Residential Schools that was carried by the Sun on Nov. 12 prompted several people to give another view of this issue. As a point of clarification, the editor of this page inadvertently left off the source of this opinion, which was part of the What Canada Thinks service provided by The Canadian Press. The author of the piece was Harriet Nahanee, a Squamish Indian elder, who made the comments at Simor Fraser University's First Nations Awareness Day.

It was with much concern we noted that a reputable newspaper such as the Brandon Sun would print an unsigned libelous letter. The title was "Residential Schools hurt Aboriginal Communities," Friday, Nov. 12 under your heading "What Canada Thinks."

In the fine print at the end you noted that all letters must be signed and that you reserved the right to edit them for length, etc. and for taste. This was obviously not done.

Why are we concerned?

We weren't responsible for the system under which those schools were run, nor are we speaking for all schools. But we do know there were some fine schools and many dedicated staff members, and we feel we must speak out on their behalf as well as our own.

We were on the staff at the Indian Residential School at Norway House between the years of 1937 and 1941 and during that time there was no abuse in any way. There were many fine students in that school who received an excellent grounding in academic subjects as well as learning valuable lifeskills. Over the 50 odd years since we were there many of those students have kept in touch with us, interested in the welfare of other staff members as well.

Does this sound as if they were abused? I think not.

Why do we hear nothing but negative information about those schools?

We make no apology for the years we spent as staff members at a residential school, because we know those young people received a worthwhile training.

**ISABEL AND
 JIM GILMOUR
 Brandon**

I was shocked and hurt when I read the letter to the Editor in the Friday, Nov. 12 Brandon Sun under the heading, "What Canada Thinks."

If the account given of treatment of Indian pupils in the residential schools was true in some schools, it certainly was not at the Brandon Indian School where I was on staff from 1936 to 1938. The Brandon Indian School came under the jurisdiction of the United Church of Canada and it chose



Canadian Press file

REACTION — The local Indian residential school served students well, letter writers say.

and hired staff of high calibre under Principal Rev. John Doyle.

I vividly recall being one of the staff to go to the homes on the reserves in Saskatchewan to bring in the students for the fall term. The driver was a male staff member and he drove the big school truck, fitted with seats — the same truck took students regularly to First United Church in Brandon on Sundays and also later to the collegiate for classes. The families had been notified when the students would be picked up and we found them expecting us. They had their suitcases or boxes packed and were ready to leave for the school. So that blows the statement in the article "What Canada Thinks" "(dragged off to residential schools by the RCMP)."

For the most part, parents kept in touch with their children at the school and at times would come to visit them and bring goodies from home.

My husband was also on the staff at the Brandon Indian School. He also worked at the Elkhorn School (under the Anglican Church) and the United Church School at Muncey, ON where we made our first home.

When the Muncey School was closed as a residential school and the children were integrated into the local day school system, The Home Mission Board of the United Church moved us to Brandon and my husband was again on staff there for the next three years. His work was with the farming aspect of the school, also with poultry and gardening.

To class the treatment of

students as stated in the article "What Canada Thinks" as the norm for all residential schools is very unfair and unjust.

**LAURA R. LONG
 Brandon**

Re: The Brandon Sun, Nov. 12, 1993 unsigned letter: "Residential Schools Hurt Aboriginal Communities."

How unfortunate that the title above this headline was: "What Canada Thinks."

I hope not.

Presumably what followed was a letter, though unsigned. If that's one person's experience — I am sorry. In no way can this be taken to be the norm.

As a member of the staff at Norway House Indian Residential School (1939-1941) and at Portage la Prairie Indian Residential School (1941-1942), administered by the United Church of Canada, I particularly resent the statement: "The residential schools attracted all the worst perverts who pretended to teach, but were there to prey upon children."

That is a downright lie — a slanderous untruth. The classroom teachers were fully qualified, experienced teachers, capable and extremely patient. The staff members I have worked with or known since, were and are fine citizens, dedicated and caring, with their top priority the students' growth and welfare.

They had time for extras like flooding a rink for skating, hockey and ice carnivals; sleigh rides, picnics, Halloween parties, special events at Christmas and such.

Students and staff did many things together. If there are any dysfunctional families among the graduates, the cause should not be blamed on the Indian Residential School lifestyle as we knew it. I am sorry I did not make the time to learn to make a beaded head band when the senior girls wanted to teach me.

My closest friends are from our Indian Residential School Days.

**I. MARGUERITE
 MILLER
 Brandon**

"Residential Schools hurt Aboriginal Communities"

This angry letter MAY be true for one person, but cannot be taken as true for all students at Indian Residential Schools. I write to correct that statement . . . "dragged off to residential school by the RCMP."

As a member of the staff at the Brandon Indian Residential School in 1940, I went with our principal, Mr. R. T. Chapin to pick up students for the new school term in September. We went to Carlyle and Broadview, Sask. and to Selkirk.

They were ready to come with us, waved on by their parents, who often came later to visit at the school. The parents wanted their children to learn English and to receive an education.

Two of our Brandon IRS students later graduated as registered nurses from the Brandon General Hospital. Good work has been done by dedicated staff in these schools.

**WILBUR COCHRANE
 Brandon**

Residential schools hurt aboriginal communities

I'm going to tell you why the people of my generation did not go to university. We were five years old, sleeping only in our blankets, when we were dragged off to residential school by the RCMP.

We were forced to stop speaking our own language. We were taught English with the strap.

The residential schools attracted all the worst perverts, who pretended to teach but who were there to prey upon children. Word spread that this was where you could get at kids. This is where the family dysfunctions spring from. This is why you see our people down on skid row: because they can't stand the pain.

Don't give up.
Learn to look past the

racism, to ignore the hate.

I encourage all of you to ignore the racism, hold your head up high and do it for all of us who never had the chance.

Every inch of North America is our aboriginal homeland. The money that comes from the taxpayers for welfare, that money all comes out of our land.

We should be getting more than the little that welfare pays to us.

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The Sun welcomes letters to the editor. Please mail them to the Sun at 501 Rosser Ave., Brandon, Man. R7A 0K4 or send us a fax at 727-0385. Please keep them brief (about one typed page at most), sign them and include your name, address and telephone number. We reserve the right to edit them for length, spelling, grammar and taste.