

The Effects of Residential Schools

Robert

(Kamloops Residential School)

I look back on my own life and I can see how my experiences in the residential school affected me. The way I related to my children, I was distant. I couldn't express myself, I couldn't say "I love you" very well, couldn't hug them. Whenever they cried too much, I couldn't deal with that. Because I couldn't cry, I didn't know what crying was. I was brought up in the school, we were taught never to cry.

When I was there, there was no affection between the supervisors and the children. There's only rules. So it's not like a home situation, you don't have the adult in your life saying to you "I care about you, I love you."

Barbara

(St. Mary's Mission 1945-1954)

Although my dad didn't talk about his years at residential school, I think the things that he did or learned that affected my life was the feeling part, like saying I love you, or giving me that hug. I think if he hadn't gone there he would have those things but he didn't.

So like myself he wasn't able to reach out and say I love you and I appreciate you. That is what really bothers me is we weren't able to do that or know how to. Now that my grandchildren are around I am able to do that and it is a different story. I give them the love that I wasn't able to give to my children.

Bev

(Williams Lake Residential School)

Ridicule from the nuns encourage ridicule from other kids. We really had to be careful we didn't violate anyone's turf or offend someone by appearing better than anyone else, like what happened when someone would get new shoes.

If our shoes got too small for us, the nuns would usually give us hand-me-downs from older girls. Only when the hand-me-downs were so worn that no other girls could wear them would the nuns break out a new pair. This should have been a joyous occasion, but

no one wanted to get the new shoes. With new shoes came the burden of trying not to look at your new shoes. The kids saw this as "showing off." If word got around that we were too proud, we became the target of more kids.

The message of "don't try to be better than anyone else" had an effect on me for years. The more invisible I was, the better. The more mediocre I was the better. *Don't strive to be the best, strive to be the least!* And it was seen as okay to be the least.

Eileen

(St Mary's Mission 1961-1965)

I think that residential school had a lot of impact on my mom in the way that she raised her kids. When I was six, my parents separated, and we had to go live with my dad because my mom said that she was not able to raise her kids. She felt like residential school was a big part in not being able to raise us kids.

I think for a while what I learned at residential school has impacted my kids too. The older kids got the most impact, but I went through my own native spirituality. Like when I was 18 years old or in high school, it

was almost like I was embarrassed of the native spirituality, or the superstitions of the old people was embarrassing, and I think that it came from residential schools.

We were taught that the native beliefs were just like superstitions or something, and when I first came out of St Mary's I really believed that. I didn't feel good about being a native, and I think that came from being here at St. Mary's. It wasn't until I started growing in the spirituality, in the native way, that I started being proud of myself.