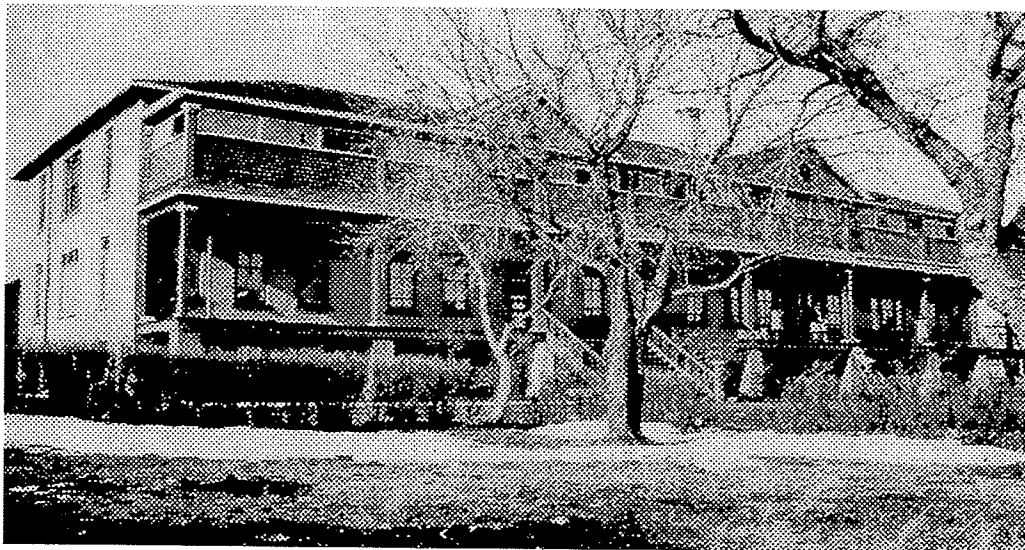


ON OUR WAY TO HEALING: STORIES FROM THE OLDEST  
LIVING GENERATION OF THE FILE HILLS INDIAN  
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL



File Hills Indian Residential School, circa 1940-1950. Photo reprinted with permission from Mr. Elwood Pinay, Peepeekisis First Nation.

By Ann B. Callahan (nee Thomas)

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of  
Manitoba

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Native Studies

University of Manitoba

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## Dedication

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents,  
John R. and Nora (nee Keewatin) Thomas  
who have passed on into the Spirit World and  
who have given me a great deal of  
love, affection and direction in my life.

This thesis is also dedicated to all the survivors  
who attended the File Hills Indian Residential School;  
to those who have crossed over to the Spirit World  
and those who are still in our midst.



## Acknowledgements

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My deepest gratitude is extended to the oldest most living survivors of the File Hills Indian Residential School (FHIRS) who so freely and openly gave me their stories of the experience at the FHIRS. Their stories of how they coped as students in this school were exemplary of how the First Nations People are able to draw on their inner strength, one of the many gifts given by the Creator.

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## **Abstract**

The story of Indian Residential schools is a sad one in Canada. The government's policy of assimilating the Aboriginal people into mainstream society began in the early years of the nineteenth century in western Canada. One of the strategies the government employed was through the founding of the Indian residential school. The churches were the "hand maidens" in bringing about this movement. There were many effects experienced by the residents of these establishments. For the most part, the survivors proclaim that this experience was a negative one while few say that the experience was a positive one. The abuses were of a sexual, physical, mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual nature. Most devastating of all was the deprivation of the Aboriginal culture, particularly, the Aboriginal Spirituality that was carried out among the southern Saskatchewan Cree and Saulteaux people for thousands of years. This thesis will examine the various approaches taken by these survivors to become centred in oneself once again as an Aboriginal person, which is to know one's own identity as a First Nations person. In addition, this paper will specifically examine the perspectives of the oldest generation of those survivors of the File Hills Indian Residential School (FHIRS), Balcarres, Saskatchewan of this experience and if returning to or renewing of Aboriginal Spirituality was a means of healing from the residential school trauma. They found it difficult to conceptualize the term, "healing"; instead they preferred to discuss their post- school years in the manner in which they carried on with their roles as caregivers of their families with a great deal of love and compassion. They have striven to provide a favourable life for themselves, their families and their community. Many of these people were very happy to participate in the traditional ceremonies openly and expressed the thought that the return

of these ceremonies was a good way to go. These survivors choose not to look back but to look to the future.

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## Chapter One - An Overview

The legacy of Indian Residential Schools (IRS) is one of tragedy. The Crown and the church sought to systematically assimilate the Aboriginal people into the mainstream of society in the early 19th century through the isolation, confinement and submission of their young .... “to learn the cunning of the white man” (Morris, p. 96). The assimilation process was destined to be through such means as the Bagot Commission (1842), the Act for the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes (1853), and the 1894 amendments to the Indian Act (1876). The oppression of traditional ceremonies - “Old Indian Way” was one of the tools of assimilation. As well, the establishment and operation of Indian residential schools was another movement to erase the “Indianness” from the Indian children.

The legacy of Indian residential schools had devastating effects on the survivors’ personhood, cultural identity and other referents that make an individual an “Indian.” The government had a deliberate policy to encroach on the First Nations social structures and economic bases. They moved to take or forcibly remove children from their parents’ grasp at a young age and place them in residential schools. There, the children were to shed anything that identified them culturally as Indigenous people, their traditional Indian beliefs, values and customs. They were not allowed to communicate in their own Native languages; speaking only in English was enforced in these residential schools.

In the Aboriginal communities, there were various moves to assimilate Aboriginal people to the mainstream society. One of these was the attempt to convert the First Nation people from that of hunter-gatherers to farmers in western Canada. In relation to religion, their “pagan” ways were to be replaced with Christianity. Traditional ceremonies were driven underground. Speaking Aboriginal languages was discouraged in the homes and almost lost in some communities. The attempt by both government and the church was to assimilate Aboriginal people by removing them from “want and neglect” (Bull, 1991), that is, from their family and community tribal life ways. Thus the introduction and founding of Indian residential schools became a reality.

The thesis will demonstrate that the oldest living generation of the File Hills Indian Residential School (FHIRS) who attended this school found that the experience was an unfavourable one. From the eleven people that I interviewed, only one person said, “The experience was all right; I have nothing against File Hills School.” As for myself as one of the contributors, the FHIRS experience was not a good time in my life. I call it “a lost childhood.” I explored with the survivors how they dealt with this experience in later years- how they coped in the post-school years. I also was exploring the directions they took in seeking closure from this experience, one of which was returning to the ceremonies of the “Old Ones”. Each of these survivors gave me their individual perspectives on what life was like in these years. Their stories will reflect their memoirs.

## **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this research was to learn about the nature of the survivors' experience at the FHIRS and the way they coped in the post-school years. Another purpose was to learn about the healing journeys from the oral histories given by the survivors. As well, in sharing this experience, I listened to how it affected some of them emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. I was looking at Aboriginal Spirituality as the focus of healing from their perceived traumas that they may have sought. The Seven Sacred Teachings of Aboriginal Spirituality are wisdom, love, courage, honesty, humility, truth and respect. These virtues can be heard in the voices of the survivors as they describe their philosophies that are reflected in their daily lives.

The objectives were as follows:

1. To document the experience of the oldest living generation of the FHIRS.
2. To document the approaches taken in order to heal the emotional, psychological and spiritual wounds from the FHIRS experience.
3. To facilitate a cathartic means to unleash residual emotional scars from the FHIRS days.

## **Justification, Parameters, Limitations, and Background**

The thesis is justifiable in that the emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of the former attendees at the FHIRS were unheeded. The oldest living survivors



express an urgency to have documentation on their perspectives of this experience and their views on how they dealt with these traumas in the ensuing years. They say it is important that future generations know about this experience as part of their history.

Individuals included in this research are limited to those who came to FHIRS from northern and southern First Nations communities in the late 30s and 40s, and who are still living, and are in reasonably good health. The story of the FHIRS survivors is not a comprehensive one as many have died and some are too ill to give their story.

The basic demographics for FHIRS, including the opening and closing dates, and student populations are difficult to determine; information collected from written and oral sources provide a brief background. Deiter (1999) states, “The File Hills Residential school was located on the Okanese reserve north of Balcarres, Saskatchewan. The school opened in 1889”(p.16). To arrive at an approximate date when the larger FHIRS was built, sometime between 1911 and 1921, I looked at two printed sources. Miller (1996) writes, “Given the fact that File Hills was getting a larger school . . .”(p.240) and the corresponding archival source in his “Notes” ( p.486) is dated June 14, 1911. In the Women’s Missionary Society’s (WMS) annual report of 1921 there is an entry under the heading “Canadian Indian” that reads across a ledger “File Hills...Residential School Principal...Rev.F. Rhodes...1921 (United Church of Canada Yearbooks - UCCY, p.189). After establishing an approximate

date for the opening of this larger school, circa 1921, I found in the WMS annual report, 1948 - 1949, a portion that announces the closure of this school that reads as follows: "Last June, [1949. my own entry} I visited the File Hills School and Colony at the time of closing...Isabel McL. Loveys."(UCCY, p.74). As to how many students were in the school, Principal Rhodes' entry in the WMS annual report, 1931 - 1932 states... "during the year we have had among our 89 pupils..."(UCCY, p.294).

One of the ex-students, Mrs. P. Creeley believes "There were not quite a hundred students, fifty-five girls and the rest, boys, in the school in the 40s" (February 1, 2002, telephone conversation). During a recent visit on January 27, 2002, John Asinawasis told me he remembers he and his cousin, Ivan Keewatin playing on the roof top of the FHRS in the years 1950 and 1951. By this time, he recalls, the school was empty; that is, there were no students housed there. These dates correlate with the archival sources of the school's closure. As well, he remembers seeing old documents in the office of the principal. He remembers reading about the late Harvey Keewatin, one of several notes entered in a log that he saw. He regrets now that he or someone else should have kept them and he does not know where these papers ended up. Since archival records failed to provide me with specific dates, particularly when the larger school was built, I turned to a contemporary historian.

On January 17, 2002, as a guest lecturer at the University of Manitoba and author of *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools*, Dr. J. R.

Miller spent a few moments with me. I pointed out to him that the FHIRS was not on the map (maps follow p. xii) that is titled *Schools in the Prairie Provinces and the Southern NWT* in his book, *Shingwauk's Vision : A History of Native Residential Schools*. He includes ample material on the old FHIRS, during Miss Katherine Gillespie's principalship (pp. 131 - 132; 237 - 40) but he has not included any more information about the larger FHIRS that was built later. He admitted it was an oversight on his part. I appreciated his listening to me regarding my thesis material and reading the interview that I conducted with Mr. Bigknife, one of oldest living survivors of the FHIRS, the one that was the larger of the two schools.

In the final analysis, it can be said that the history of the FHIRS covers an extensive time period, with records indicating it opened in 1889 and closed in 1949.

### **Definitions**

1. *File Hills Indian Reservations*: File Hills Indian Reservations refers to a collection of First Nations communities, namely, Peepeekisis, Okanese, Star Blanket and Little Black Bear, located an approximate distance of one hundred and twenty-six kilometres northeast of Regina, Saskatchewan. The File Hills residential school was situated on the Okanese First Nation community. The children who attended were mainly from the Cree First Nations and the remainder were Saulteaux, and Assiniboine First Nation communities.
2. *Residential school*: Residential school refers to a facility whereby all Treaty/Status children from age six to sixteen were ordered by the federal

government to attend. “Residential schools were formally constituted as industrial schools and emphasized industrial training for young Canadian Native children....the schools were founded for the purpose of boarding children in dormitories for ten months of the year” (Ing, 1991, p. 69).

3. *Oldest living generation:* The oldest living generation refers to the ex-students of the File Hills Residential school whose ages range from sixty-six to eighty-three years old.
4. *Aboriginal Spirituality:* Aboriginal Spirituality is explained by Elder John Stonechild and Elder Art Solomon:

Native spiritual life is founded on a belief in the fundamental interconnectedness of all natural things, all forms of life, with primary importance being attached to the land, Mother Earth .... There is no distinction between spiritual life and cultural life. For Canadian Natives, spirituality is a total way of life. (Correctional Services of Canada, np)

## **Chapter Two - Literature Review**

This section will briefly examine the roots of education for Aboriginal people as a colonized people and Aboriginal people’s vision for education. It will also include preschool reservation life and it will discuss the manner in which Aboriginal children were held in high regard by their parents. Another aspect of the literature review will note how the Aboriginal people persisted in performing their traditional

ceremonies and the resistance they met from government officials. The nature of boarding school experiences of the Aboriginal children is documented by several authors and anecdotes from these authors are included here. Finally, interventions toward healing, will include a brief statement from Grant's informant how Aboriginal people can move to Aboriginal spirituality as a way of healing and the establishment of healing funds by the churches and government in 1994 and 1998 respectively.

### **Looking Back**

Doubtless all the tribes will disappear.  
Some will endure only a few years longer,  
others like the Eskimo, may last several centuries.  
(Jenness, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1932)

Earlier in the nineteenth century, when the "Indian problem" was causing concerns for those who were eager to make way for settlers in the west, and to take the burden of dependence off the state, Prime Minister Sir John A. McDonald was swift to assert his vision of the assimilation of the Indians to Parliament in Canada's first century. Education was the social engineering by which the assimilation process was to be realized. In a memorandum to the prime minister, the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, L. Vankoughnet wrote:

Give me your children and you may have the parents... to act in working out the most difficult problem - the intellectual emancipation of the Indian,... his elevation to a status equal to that of his white

brother. This can be done through education . . . only by a persistent continuance in a thoroughly systematic course of educating . . . the children, will the final hoped and long striven for result be attained.

(Vankoughnet, 1887 in Milloy, 1999, p.7)

So the establishment of residential schools was to be realized in the life of the First Nations people. The era of this dark period extended: "...from the first forays in early seventeenth-century New France, through the colonial period, to the creation of the modern residential schools in the 1880s, and finally to the fading out of government sponsored schools in the 1960s (Miller, 1996, Preface, p. ix).

Miller (1996) notes the vision of a "teaching wigwam" by Chief Shingwauk who desired education for the children given in his address at Garden River in 1872 (p.4.) Over 130 years later, the individuals who shared their stories with me aired the sentiment that their parents (who were the first generation to have attended the FHRS) regarded education as important; however, they did not envision that their children would be mistreated. It is not too difficult to see why Aboriginal people wanted education for their children but in an environment into which their children were born and raised. Many children enjoyed a life of serenity and were raised by very loving and nurturing parents.

### **Pre-school Life**

Pre-school life for First Nations children was serene and peaceful. "The hills and valleys of Poundmaker Reserve, the flocks of sheep, his family and friends were

John's life in those days, tranquil and secure and he knew no other" (Sluman & Goodwill, 1982, p.93). Another picture of the surroundings of an Aboriginal setting is written by Brass (1987), "...the buds on the trees were bursting forth, the frogs were singing lustily, and the birds were joyously chirping... our home was cosy and comfortable...with lovely curtains at the windows and colourful patchwork quilts on the beds" (p.5). These environments described by these Aboriginal authors were typical of many of the children's lifestyles. Deiter (1999) writes:

Little Kitchi-mookho-man lived a traditional childhood. Childhood for all Indian children was a time of great indulgence and freedom. This First Nations attitude caused much concern for the European missionaries. One of the first to lament about this was the Jesuit priest Le Jeune. He argued that the children should be taken and placed in schools, "because these little barbarians can not bear to have their children punished, even scolded, not being able to refuse anything to a crying child". (p.19). She cites ethnologist David Mandelbaum "who supports this idea that Indian children were never corporally punished... They were never beaten and rarely reprimanded...even during the most sacred rites children notes accorded perfect liberty."(Deiter,1999, p.19). In her recollections of her great-grandfather, Kitchi-mookho-man (Cree translation- Long Knife or Long Knife man), and the traditional Plains tribal education, she concludes that portion of her

story with, “ These practices were based on love and respect. Plains Cree believe that children are only on loan and are a gift of the Creator” (Deiter, 1999, p.19).

The Elders were the transmitters of the teachings that would instill in the children the morals, attitudes and behaviours that would carry them from childhood to late adulthood. The ceremonies of the “Old Ones” were an important element of praying to the Creator. Children were blessed and given spiritual names which would protect them. They were highly regarded and nurtured in a very spiritual way which was not clearly understood by outsiders. For example, two noted scholars Jenness (1932) and Mendelbaum (1979) are among several others who have witnessed and recorded the Indian religion and ceremonies in their books. But their writings clearly reflect an ethnocentric quality in their description of ceremonies. The spirituality of the ceremonies is not felt in reading their accounts.

From an emic point of view, Aboriginal Spirituality is a lived, learned experience. First Nations Elders passed on the traditions orally to the younger generation. In addition, the young men and women learned by experiencing and participating in the Sweats, Pipe ceremony, Sun Dance and Rain Dance. The First Nations from the File Hills area are those living memoirs of a traditional life - a great part of that life was devoted to the spirituality of the people. Aboriginal Spirituality is integral to a way of life of these people as it has been for their ancestors, many, many generations ago. The Spirit of the “Old Ones” lives on and on, not to be broken



by any external force such as was prescribed by the Indian residential school system.

### **History of the dissuasion and persistence of traditional ceremonies**

Prohibiting of the traditional ceremonies, dancing and singing was part of the assimilation process:

In 1885, the Canadian government outlawed the ceremonial distribution of property through potlatches and other forms of religious expression practised by many Northwest Coast Aboriginal cultures in British Columbia by amending the Indian Act of Canada. Subsequent modifications to this legislation (in 1895) allowed the federal government, under the auspices of the Department of Indian Affairs, to undermine certain religious practices among other Aboriginal cultures. In particular, certain rituals associated with the Sun (Thirst) dances were prohibited, as were giveaway ceremonies involving the massive distribution of goods....Government officials and missionaries contended that certain indigenous religious practices were immoral and seriously undermined the assimilative objectives of Canadian Indian policy. (Pettipas, 1994, p.3)

Jacqueline J. Kennedy (Gresko) notes that the move to take First Nations of the 1870s to the 1920s was to take them away from the “teepee” life, to remove anything that was “Indian”, their language, dress, family connections, community tribal life ways and their traditional spiritual ceremonies. (*Qu'Appelle Industrial*

*School white 'rites' for the Indians of the Old North-West*, Masters thesis, Carleton University, 1970).

Father Hugonnard collaborated with Commissioner Graham in promoting an agricultural experiment at the File Hills Colony at the turn of the twentieth century (Kennedy, 1970 & Pettipas, 1994). The following excerpts from Kennedy's thesis will show the intent of the government in establishing Industrial schools and the Indian parents' view of such schools:

While the Public works Department built the Fort Qu'Appelle Industrial School in 1884 and 1885 (Mcgee, 1884), the Indian Affairs Department and the church organized the internal management of the school. They planned to remove children from teepees to Industrial schools where the staff would immerse them in Christian and civilized patterns of the English-speaking and then transform them through religious conversion and apprenticeship in civilized occupations; and finally incorporated them into new statuses and roles -those of self-reliant, Christian citizens (Kennedy, 1970, p.540). Recruiting inmates for the new institutions was not easy for their administrators. Even christianized Indians were indifferent to or opposed to sending their children to the Industrial schools, just as they had been to day or mission schools, Indians objected to having their children alienated in this life or in the next, shorn of their hair, or labouring for the

missionaries instead of their parents.(IAR 885, IAR 1886 in Kennedy, 1970, p.75)

At the same time, things were happening at “home” concerning the traditional ceremonies, like The Sun Dance which was in opposition to the objectives of the government officials. (Section 114, an amendment to the Indian Act, 1895). The Crees and Saulteaux people of the Plains continued to dance and drum which sparked the ire of Indian officials of the federal government.

After the war the people of Piapot wanted to hold a dance to give thanks for the safe return of their veterans....One of the returned soldiers went personally to confront commissioner Graham...Graham reacted,.... “ Look,” he said, “you have been forbidden to hold the Sun Dance. It’s part of the Indian religion and it’s no damn good.”....Graham grudgingly gave the desired permission but he warned the young man that they were not to invite people from other reserves to join them. That was like asking the leaves not to fall from the trees in autumn..... Crees began flocking into Piapot Reserve. Just as the ceremony began the police arrived, insisting that the visitors leave. The Piapot people had to go ahead with a short form of the dance. Ka-mi-yo-ki-si-kew (Fine Day) who had led the Indians during the battle for Cutknife Hill in the Rebellion, was now a very old, if vigorous man. He had vowed to the Creator to make the Sun Dance, but permission

was refused. No white person can begin to understand the sorrow and heart-break of those involved. Fine Day's wife was so stunned by the Department's prohibition that she went into a state of complete shock, "as though she had been shot". (Sluman & Goodwill, 1982, p.142)

The Sun Dance meant a great deal to the First Nations People as it was a reaffirmation for the First Nation who they truly were:

In the 1930s, anthropologist David Mandelbaum found the "older men" insisting "that they perform [Sun or Thirst Dance] ceremonies despite opposition to the agents and of every other non-Cree." One of the agents commented that the children were in school "all year round, but as soon as they [came] to the Sundance [they] were Indians again!" Mandelbaum says that during the dance, "participants not only felt themselves in touch with something more than normal...but they felt themselves essentially Plains Cree. They found their identity there. (Gresko, 1986. p.100)

Not only were Aboriginal people experiencing an intrusion of their traditional ceremonies and life ways communally by the government, but the instrument of the residential school system was enforced to further bring the goal of assimilation to fruition. The era of the boarding school was not a pleasant experience for many of the Aboriginal students who attended these institutions.

## **The Nature of the experience**

Much literature has surfaced by researchers seeking first hand information from students who experienced the residential school system. The treatment meted out by the church-operated staff to the students was cruel and created hardships for the children. For others, the quality of this treatment was tolerable. Gripping accounts of the punitive measures used by the staff of these schools are numerous, too numerous to infer that this abuse was conjured up by those who have come forward to make those experiences known. Sexual, physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual abuse were spoken about in angry and sometimes in muffled tones. There are still others who cannot bring themselves to talk about that abuse; for them, it is too painful a memory. Those who view the experience as a good one must be heard and respected.

Wrenching testimonies from former students of IRS about the sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual abuse by former students of IRS abound in printed sources, books and periodicals written by Brass,1987; Haig-Brown,1988; Johnson,1988; Ing,1991; Bull,1991; Jaine, 1993; Miller,1996; Grant,1996; Graham,1997; Deiter,1999 and Milloy,1999. From one of the many disturbing and repulsive abuses, an account is recorded by Grant (1996):

Winnipeg Free Press, Nov. 10, 1990

Pam Sickles can never forget what happened to a sick friend. She was sick and threw up in her plate and she was forced to eat it all. I can still

see the nun pressing the spoon against her lips and she was pushing so hard there was blood on her lips....{St.Mary's, Kenora}(p 131).

Sexual abuse was revealed by several of the authors from the interviews conducted by the researchers. One instance is cited by Grant (1999) when an informant was abused by an older student when he was six years old (p.228). "In 1995, a former supervisor at the Port Alberni school, which was operated by the United Church, was sentenced to eleven years in prison for sexually assaulting fifteen boys between 1948 -1968" (Grant, 1999. p.229). In an article entitled Abuse of trust in *McLeans* magazine, reports that in 1993 Starr, a school administrator at Gordon School pled guilty to charges of sexual assault on 10 students and was sentenced to 4 1/2 years in prison (p19). The article lists in a sidebar, The legacy of shame, other incidents of abuse. Most noteworthy is the public statement of Phil Fontaine, former Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), that he was sexually and physically abused at the residential school in Fort Alexander, Manitoba (p.18). There were other kinds of abuse such as depriving the children the use of their Native language in the schools.

Grant (1996) implores that:

Language had shaped the children's perception of the world and established their ways of thinking and acting. Vi Hilbert, an Upper Skagit Elder has pointed out that culture is embedded in the very structure of a language. A language is much more than just a series of

words. There are different associations with words in different languages and language embodies the spirituality of a cultural group.

(p.192)

Grant (1996) gives several incidents about students being punished for speaking their own Native language:

Justa Monk recalls the shock that he experienced when he learned that he was not allowed to speak his language at school. [My brother] was beside me, "Why are they taking my clothes away?" I asked him. Of course I spoke to him in our Carrier language. I knew no other. The priest slapped me so hard on the ear that I almost bounced off the wall.

"We don't use that language around here!" he said to me. (p. 196)

Closer to home, incidences of corporal punishment emerge from various sources. At an earlier time of the FHIRS existence, in the late 1800s, when my mother and her siblings were attending FHIRS, Cora Keewatin, oldest daughter of my uncle, Roy Keewatin, died from a severe beating. In 1990 Eleanor Brass told the *Globe and Mail* about her friend Cora Keewatin, "She killed her... I don't remember what Cora got it for...it wasn't much of anything. After that whipping, she just lay there for days until she died"(Brass,1990, in Grant,1999, p. 135). Another account of a student losing his life is provided by Brass (1987):

Poor little Archie Feather fell through the ice in the early fall of 1913 or 1914 and was drowned. Another man about seventeen years of age

hanged himself. They found his body hanging from a beam in the barn.

He was from the Carlyle Reserve. The poor youth was in some kind of trouble which wasn't so terrible but apparently it seemed that way to him. ( p.26)

At a later time during the 1940s, an ex-student of FHIRS surmises that a young boy may have died from a trauma or from a fatal illness. His name was Ronald S.; it is speculated he could have met his demise from a beating while others say he died from meningitis. It happened while I was a student there so I remember this incident.

### **Toward Healing**

The traumas endured by Aboriginal people as residents in the boarding schools operated by religious denominations under the auspices of the federal government surfaced in the last few decades and this revelation posed the enormous dilemma of what and how should the healing process be developed and implemented.

In reviewing the literature on how the "survivors" managed to retain their cultural roots, their belief systems, world views, and languages are contained in much of the literature, I did not find any written material as to the retention and reclamation of Aboriginal Spirituality as a way of healing from the IRS experience. However, Grant (1996) discusses the perspectives on reconciliation and closure regarding the IRS system as proposed by one person with whom she collaborated:

Marie Baptiste believes that there is no technical proof, no guide book which will help psychologists and teachers heal the oppression of the



past. Only time will heal the hurt as Residential school survivors tell their stories and grieve for their lost childhoods.... With the restoration of languages, Native Spirituality will grow and flourish.( p. 280)

The churches came forward with their apologies. In particular, spoken by the Moderator, the Right Reverend Robert Smith at the 31<sup>st</sup> General Council, United Church of Canada, August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1986:

Long before my people journeyed to this land your people were here, and you received from your elders an understanding of creation, and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich and to be treasured. We did not hear you when you shared your vision. In our zeal to tell you the good news of Jesus Christ we were closed to the value of your spirituality. We confused western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ. We imposed our civilization as a condition of accepting the Gospel. We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed. We tried to make you like us and in doing so we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were. As a result, you, and we, are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred and we are not what we are meant by God to be. We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed.

The United Church followed up the apology with the establishment of “The Healing Fund” as a means of reconciliation:

The Healing Fund was originally established by General Council in 1994 as a five-year fund-raising and educational campaign (1995-1999) to address the impacts of residential schools on Aboriginal people. It now continues as one facet of the United Church's ongoing reconciliation work with Aboriginal people (<http://www.uccan.org/healing.htm>).

This was followed by the federal government's creation of their "Healing Fund":

On January 7, 1998, the federal government announced the creation of a \$350 million Healing Fund designed to support communities in redressing the tragic effects of the residential school system on generations of First Nations peoples. (AFN Health Directorate, 1998, p.1)

In the federal government's *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* in response to *The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* recommendations, the healing process is summarized as follows:

In dealing with the legacies of the Residential School system, the Government of Canada proposes to work with First Nations, Inuit and Metis people, the Churches and other interested parties to resolve the longstanding issues that must be addressed. We need to work together on a healing strategy to assist individuals and communities in dealing with the consequences of this sad era of our history.

Reconciliation is an ongoing process. In renewing our partnership, we must ensure that the mistakes which marked our past relationship are not repeated. The Government of Canada recognizes that policies that sought to assimilate Aboriginal people, women and men, were not the

way to build a strong country. We must instead continue to find ways in which Aboriginal people can participate fully in the economic, political, cultural and social life of Canada in a manner which preserves and enhances the collective identities of Aboriginal communities, and allows them to evolve and flourish in the future. Working together to achieve our shared goals will benefit all Canadians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. (Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan, 1997, np)

### **Chapter Three - Methodology and Methods**

#### **Methodology**

I was very curious about how the students at the FHIRS fared during their time at that school as I too was a survivor of FHIRS so began my mission. In order to begin my research, it was important for me to determine my plan of discovery. Two of these items consisted of the methodology and the methods to be employed.

First of all, I was faced with the problematic distinction between what was meant by the terms oral tradition and oral history. So I turned to contemporary Aboriginal authors for clarification. In an article entitled *Oral History Methods in Native Studies: Saskatchewan Aboriginal World War Two Veterans*, Rob Innes (1999-2000) writes:

There has emerged a debate about the conceptualization of the terms oral tradition and oral history which not only has repercussions for Native Studies, it also represents the divergence of Native Studies and other disciplines, especially history. Some scholars maintain a rigid distinction between oral tradition and oral history, while others have been receptive to the notion that two are in a fluid relationship....Jan

Vansina distinguishes oral tradition as “oral messages based on previous oral messages, at least one generation old” and oral history as “reminiscences, hearsay, or eyewitness accounts about events and situations which are contemporary, that is, which occurred during the lifetime of the informants.” (p.64, 65)

In determining the definitions of the terms oral tradition and oral history, I found out that there is an interplay between oral history and oral narration as I was fortunate to hear an oral story from Mr. Bigknife. The story which is included in the interview section of this thesis was a ‘gift’ given to me. He told me about the survival of his old granddad, an incident that took place in Montana in the 1800s. From listening to the oral narrative, I was to interpret its meaning. Dyck (1992) as cited in McLeod (1999) provides an analysis of this paradigm of learning through the oral narrative, “My grandfather never said what the point of his stories were; he forced the listeners to discover this for themselves” (p 42). McLeod (1999) elaborates further:

They have the freedom to decide meaning for themselves. Thus the paradigm of this process is inherently slanted towards people making up their own minds about what they think about something: they have to decide what they believe to be true about something. The listener is given the chance to internalize the stories.” (p 42). “The emergence of Cree narrative memory within universities opens up new possibilities for interpreting the “lived” experience of Canada, layers which have all too often been forgotten. ( p.45)

## Revisiting

Secondly, my overall methodology I used for my study is based on ‘revisiting’ with my community through oral history. One researcher who has employed the “Voice of Experience” in collecting the memoirs of former students is Elizabeth Graham (1997) in her book, *The Mush Hole: Life at Two Indian Residential Schools*. She interviewed 33 students who were from two Indian Residential schools: The Mohawk Institute (Brantford, Ont.) and Mount Elgin (Muncney, Ont.). Graham is a product of a residential school as well. Calvin Redman (2000) interviewed twenty-five former residential school attendees who were from Aboriginal communities surrounding Regina, Saskatchewan. Redman is a member of one of these communities. His study was focussed on the impact the Indian residential school had on the parenting of the participants.

From my own perspective, the methodology of reconnecting with my community came by way of what I call “walking with them” through the experience, as I, too, am a survivor of the FHRS. This type of methodology is of a qualitative nature. Young (1997) describes some features about qualitative research, “...in qualitative research the language used in the report may be made in the first person and personal. The researcher also admits the value- laden nature of the study and it is context-bound (Creswell, 1994, p. 4 in Young, p.14). She also used the self-narrative enquiry effectively in relating a journey in her life that traces her experiences in order to achieve her academic goals. Reed-Donahue (1997), states that “ the self-narrative enquiry is also known as auto-ethnography” as cited by Jonathan Ellerby (2000). The self-narrative enquiry seems most suited to help me in relating my own reflections of that experience of the FHRS and the paths I took to coming to terms with the psycho-social traumas I endured.

I followed traditional Aboriginal ways of “sharing”. Sharing is an omnipotent quality; not only does it embrace the sharing of food and other amenities but also it means sharing of knowledge. As survivors of the FHIRS, through the sharing of our experiences and various events, people and times emerged. Individual perspectives of these experiences at the school produced a colourful composite of what it was like as an “incarcerate” of the FHIRS. The study is comprised of their stories and my story.

The overall methodology is a philosophy or belief system that underlines my research and can be called the “Old Indian Way” which is difficult to define in English but which is rooted in ancient Cree spirituality and traditional knowledge. This methodology influences all aspects of my research including my methods.

### **Methods**

I selected people I knew who are the survivors of the File Hills Indian Residential School (FHIRS). The experience was, for me, a revisiting, a reconnecting, and a reestablishing of my relationship with my people. In these incidents, I was to establish yet a new relationship, that of a researcher, which implied that I was not only to be a listener but I was there to record their accounts of their experience at the FHIRS.

Inherent in the latter role, I, as a researcher, was not to shed my prior roles as previously perceived by them. One capacity by which they still viewed me was that of an advisor whom they could approach for information regarding an ailment, its nature, prognosis and pharmaceutical regime since I have a nursing background. In other instances, I was summoned to be a mentor for a younger family member. The adolescent girl wanted information about bodily functions to understand what she was experiencing at a physiological and psychological level. I call these “teachable

moments”. I helped an eighty-three-year-old lady gain access to health care. While fulfilling these expectations of the people, I was able to elicit their willingness to accommodate my access to facilities in the community and most of all, to spread the word, via the “mocassin telegraph” that I, as home comer was on a special mission which was to visit and hear the stories of what took place at the FHIRS.

### **The Ceremonies**

In addition to being a “helper”, I participated in the traditional ceremonies with the people. I was a keen participant as well as an observer as I humbly admitted to the Elders that I needed direction in my own personal life and in my academic life. Intuitiveness as to when to step in and help in ceremonies is a quality I learned as a young woman. What I do when I go to ceremonies is always to be guided in the way I should conduct myself by my older sister, Peggy Stonechild, who is a very traditional woman. At these ceremonies, in addition to the kisses, hugs and handshakes, there is this unspeakable welcome extended to me, “It’s an honour to have you celebrate with us.” My parents and grandparents taught us to always look after the visitors. As a visitor to my community, I felt that same spirit in the people. The thoughts of, “I’m home again” gave me warm feelings and I was happy. “My battery was being recharged” is what I call moments, hours . . . of “peak experiences”.

Some of the ceremonies in which I participated included the Rain Dance, a feast at the Okanese First Nation. There were other feasts to which I was invited, One of these feasts to which I was invited was held by Mrs.Elaine Pinay Dawson and her family at the Treaty Four celebrations, held at Fort Qu’Appelle, Saskatchewan in September, 2001. This was a very touching moment for me as we had the feast in her grandparents, the late Mr.and Mrs Squatapew’s teepee which is over one hundred

years old.

The Treaty Four Tribal Council hosted this celebration. There were many activities one could attend like the rodeo and pow-wow. There were some interesting visitors in attendance at the pow-wow. One woman came all the way from New Zealand and another visitor was from Hawaii. There was a host of dancers from the eldest to the tiny tot. Fifteen drummers and singers were a great part of the event. The Grand Entry was spectacular with distinguished Elders bringing in the Eagle staffs, followed by a number of people of honour like dignitaries from other First Nations, nationally and regionally, the Aboriginal veterans and the dancers. The arbor was filled to capacity. These were the good times but there were sad times as well.

I was advised by the Elders to cut short my visits with the people in four communities due to a very unfortunate happening whereby five people lost their lives. I was asked by three women Elders to accompany them to a community gathering at the peak of this crisis as the community was in shock and dismay. As a researcher, I learned that I had to be prepared to expect the unexpected in my work. I also became aware that as a researcher I must go with the throb of the heart of the community. Making myself visible and helping out in occurrences in these communities paves the way for not only research but facilitates a renewal of collectivity the glue of which can be termed maintaining our relationship to one another. I, too, felt the hurt and the pain of the relatives of those young people who lost their lives. After this unfortunate happening, I had to re-plan my research as to what direction I could take. Later on, in the early winter of 2001, one of the Elders advised me to return to finish my work.

During these cold winter months and as it was before that past summer when



I began my research, all the Aboriginal people with whom I had contact were most helpful in such daily activities like providing transportation, meals and a place to lay my head when night fell.

Socializing is a great part of doing research. My niece, Susan Creeley took me to a Christmas dinner where her partner was attending a training for employment called, The Indian Business Management Program, at Fort Qu'Appelle. Then my sister-in-law, Mrs. Ramona Stonechild and two other women and I went to a fund raising bingo to raise money for the Christmas Tree presents for the children at the Okanese Recreation Center. Lady Luck was not with me that night but I enjoyed meeting many relatives and friends..

Socializing is fun but I had to get refocused on my project so contacting people was next on following my agenda. When they learned that their stories were to be recorded and documented, the older members in the First Nations communities welcomed me wholeheartedly. We visited and talked about the old days at the FHIRS over tea and hot bannock. So began the story telling of the FHIRS by oral history.

### **Oral History**

I contacted the people in the generation before me with whom I had prior relationship through my roots in the First Nations communities. By fully informing the subjects of the purpose of the research project, I enlisted their consent to voluntarily become a participant in relating their stories (See Appendices 1 & 2). As a researcher, I informed them that I was particularly interested in how they coped while in residence and if returning to Aboriginal Spirituality ceremonies was a way of healing. Through the informal interview process, I was to listen to their experiences not just from this specific time in their life at FHIRS but I was to gain an understanding of the connections the survivors made between the FHIRS era and the

paths they took in their life after they left the school. Threaded into the tapestry of their life ways, was the Aboriginal philosophy of 'being'. Briggs (1987) states:

...the goal of oral history is to elicit information about past events... oral history interviews produce a *dialogue* between the past and present. Interviewees interpret the meaning of both the past and the present, including the interview itself. Each query presents them with the task of searching through their memories to see which recollections bear on the question and then fitting this information into a form that will be seen as answering the question. Oral history interviews are thus related to the present as systematically as to the past (p.14).

The specific method I used in collecting the accounts of the FHIRS experience from the oldest - most survivors of the FHIRS were to audio-tape their recollections. My prompting questions included statements like - as I am also a survivor of the FHIRS, I am truly interested about *your* life while *you* were there as a student. What was it like for *you*? What are *your* feelings about that experience? Before *you* went to FHIRS, did your parents and grandparents take you to the ceremonies of the "Old Indian Ways"? Have *you* healed from this experience?. This method allowed me as the researcher to listen to the stories of that experience in their own words. It can be referred to as using their "magic" to bring out the nature of that experience.

In speaking about what the experience was like, the theme of the traumas that they endured ran throughout their stories. The traumas they described ranged from physical punishments like the principal or another staff member using the strap to lay heavy blows to hands, arms and buttocks to being made to stand alone in a dark corner in the basement all night. The feelings of lack of self-identity, self-worth, self-esteem and despair were expressed in various accounts. One story is told by a

seventy-five-year-old woman, Mrs. Elsie Ross in this manner: “I was called down from grade one to grade eight, left me with no self-esteem, no self-esteem.” A tone of despair can be felt in her words earlier on in her talk when she announces, “. . . I cried my tears . . . bunch of sad little kids trying to soften the blow by looking after one another . . . holding hands, trying to see some joy in life. Meanwhile our hearts are breaking because we were separated from our parents.”

As well, in my survey of the survivors’ experience of the FHIRS, the informal interview took the direction to the aspect of Aboriginal Spirituality. Specifically I was interested in whether the Old Indian Ways were part of an individual’s life prior to entering the FHIRS and if those followings were suppressed by the Indian residential school system. Then, I was curious to know if the survivors reclaimed these “Ways” in later years to make the ceremonies part of their life on the road to healing or a way of seeking closure from the experience. To facilitate the process of the discussion of Aboriginal Spirituality with the Elders, I shared with them statements like, “In my experience, my mother and dad respected The Old Indian Way (this term was frequently used among by my older relatives which is parallel to the contemporary usage of Aboriginal Spirituality). I was raised following these ways. Those ways were stripped away from me or an attempt was made to replace it with Christianity. My mother practised both the Old Indian Ways (out of sight of the Indian agent) and Christianity in her daily life.” Again, I then asked the survivor, “What was it like for *you*?”

After listening to the past recollection of their young years and their connection to Aboriginal Spirituality, I introduced the issue of healing from the FHIRS experience. The responses reaffirmed for me that “healing” has a different meaning in the context of Aboriginal thought. Many of the older survivors I sensed

found their “healing” from the revival of the ceremonies that are integral to Aboriginal Spirituality and the freedom to participate in these ceremonies without reprisal from the Indian agent. They talked respectfully of the “Old Ones” and the ceremonies passed down from the generations before them, their parents and grandparents.

Others chose to relate what achievements they made in the ensuing years. These older people talked about the benefits derived from the experience at the FHIRS. For example, in conversation with an eighty-three year old Aboriginal woman, Mrs. Koochicum, talked with pride in the domestic skills she learned at the FHIRS in order to maintain her homemaking duties in an admirable and enjoyable way. This for her was deriving something good out of the experience even though those days in the FHIRS were tough times for her.

However, when I posed the issue of “healing” from the FHIRS experience to another survivor, Mrs. McNabb, she adamantly said, “Certainly not!” She talked about an injury to her arm that impeded her in the delivery of her children, that is, she did not have the strength in “forcing” which is required in the birth process. As her story unfolds, she recalls how later in her life, there were other areas that were affected by this physical trauma. White (1998) exemplifies the act of speaking out as, “moving from silence into speech is a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible” (p.179).

It has been my own observation that many of these families have revived, reclaimed and restored the Old Indian Ways or Aboriginal Spirituality through the ceremonies I have attended in the last three decades of my life. I refer to it as a “Renaissance of Aboriginal Spirituality”. Before I embarked on this thesis, I had the idea that the assimilative process by the federal government and the churches was

very much entrenched in some of the Indian families before these children entered the boarding school. This was confirmed by one interviewee, Mr. Pinay, who succinctly stated, "I never had a culture before I went to FHRS." He came to find and participate in the ceremonies after he left school. It is my premise that the Indian residential school was the "hand maiden" to the federal government in the assimilative strategy for the Indian people of that period in time.

The next chapter will include some background as to the positioning of the interviews in this thesis, the "ways of learning" when an Elder tells a story as a reason I choose not to thoroughly analyze the stories. I include what I learned while I attended the Rain Dance which was another way that I came to understand myself and gain a perspective of my own life. Finally, the relationship of the United Church missionaries and the File Hills people was important for some of the interviewee to remember happier times so as to set the scene for the interviews to continue.

#### **Chapter 4 - Background to the Stories**

I have elected to position the testimonies in the center of this thesis as I wished to honour their voices. Very little analysis takes place regarding the content of these interviews. The reason for this is that I wished to follow the traditional way of learning. The "Old Indian Way" was as follows: When an Elder tells a story, the interpretation of the story is left up to the listener to ponder the meaning of that story and to arrive at an understanding. I do not want to analyze the story because I do not want to tell the reader what to understand. Elders will share a teaching; it is up to us to understand and integrate that teaching. The listener may not be ready for that teaching at that particular time but at some later date, an understanding will come. It is also is a way for expanding our learning, to look at options which could come from each individual perspective. I experienced this when I sat beside my mother in

the Rain Dance Lodge. When I asked for the reason why certain things were being done in the ceremony, I was told to sit, observe, listen and pray thereby I was to determine for myself the meanings of the prayers, the songs, the rituals like looking at the centre of the Tree of Life in the Rain Dance while dancing. All these ways were very sacred, I sensed that and respected that. I did arrive at my own interpretation and understanding later on in life in different situations. I truly felt a sense of self-esteem, self-worth and self-identity as an Aboriginal person in the Raindance lodge as a dancer. I felt proud to be a First Nations person and these feelings emanated from the powers I felt from the other dancers, drummers and the Sacred Tree of Life at the center of the lodge. In my own quiet way, I witnessed the other people and I felt that they too were experiencing those same feelings. These kinds of feelings are unspoken but they are certainly seen in the facial expressions, body language, dancing and speeches of the people taking part in the ceremony.

It is only fair to relate the Christianity played an important part in the lives of the File Hills people as did the Aboriginal ceremonies. Church services, Sunday schools, picnics and summer camps were enjoyed by many of the people. The missionaries, the late Miss Ila Brown and the late Miss Ida Drake were especially sensitive to the needs of the Aboriginal people. They often acted as advocates for the people with the Indian Affairs people like arranging for us to go to high school at the Birtle Indian residential school where I spent four years. She often donated clothes to the people that came from bales from different non-Aboriginal churches. Some of these clothes, although appreciated, often smelled of mothballs but we were happy to wear them after a good airing. Miss Drake was a counsellor for families in distress, delivered babies and held services even if the weather was harsh. She drove a horse in her sleigh to get to the west of the File Hills areas to hold services during the winter. The Womens Missionary Society was an important organization for the

women to make up parcels for the men overseas during war times and the women were busy at quilting bees and many more purposeful activities. We had a mission band where we send money to other poor nations. These missionaries conducted many marriages and funerals for the people. Christian life in the community was much more pleasant when we were home in the summer than when we were in the residential school. These remembrances were shared about the missionaries along with the boarding school during many of our 'getting re-acquainted' pre-interview sessions of the survivors. There were many pleasant memories that we shared about the old days and this is part of the healing process. As much as I enjoyed these visits, I soon had to get focussed on the questions relating to my project of the FHIRS so the interview process began eventually.

### **Introduction to the Stories**

What I hope the people, the survivors, who read this thesis, particularly, the interviews, is that they will have an enjoyable time remembering their school mates and the humorous occurrences. My intention of writing this thesis was not make anyone sad about the bad times. I acknowledge and honour their strength and fortitude in surviving the hardships they experienced. Their stories are valid because their reminiscences come directly from their hearts and minds. These are their voices which needed to be heard for a long time. For over some 50 or more years many have been silent, not by their own choice. We are grateful for the authors like the late Elder Dan Kennedy, the late Eleanor Brass, and lately Bernelda Wheeler, Winona Wheeler, Calvin Redman and Connie Deiter who took up their pens to write about our people in the southern First Nations.

In relation to experience of the FHIRS, the survivors of the IRS can say, "We survived and survival is an achievement in itself." We honour those that did not come

through this experience as well, like the late Cora Keewatin, Archie Feather, and Ronnie Saulteaux; these are the ones who lost their lives at this school. We all also honour those former students of the FHIRS who succumbed to the social ills like alcohol, spousal abuse, suicide, homicide and mental illness. Many of the former students are now afflicted with chronic illnesses like diabetes and arthritis. Many of these ills are not solely attributable to the IRS experience but these ills certainly have their roots in the earlier negative experiences and poor conditions at the school.

Others who may read this study like people from the academic world and others from mainstream society hopefully will gain an understanding of what the survivors experienced and will understand some of our attitudes, feelings and behaviours as we interact with them. For example for myself, there still resides in my personality this dreaded fear of rejection or reprimand from authority. It is an ingrained behaviour of which I have to be constantly vigilant and then I must muster up all the courage to convince myself that I too have rights and am worthy of consideration. Last of all, for our children and grandchildren, we ask for their forgiveness for any way we may have harmed them by lashing out at them, being impatient or being non-communicative when they needed someone to listen to their personal problems. The staff members at the FHIRS were not good models of what parenting should have been. We, as survivors, cherish our children and grandchildren; They are our gifts from the Creator and we love them. It makes us feel happy that once again, we, as Aboriginal people have the responsibility in raising our own children, grandchildren and grandchildren. We are now in control and enjoy the challenges these young people give us. We are family again!

We pray for these young people and their families in the Sweat lodges and as they too have many different influences that could make life difficult for them. Many



of these young people are Skabe'wis (Ojibwa - helpers) to the Elders in the ceremonies. Elder Ben Stonechild was pleased his son was one of his helpers and that this son has turned his life around to a better life. When the young people read these interviews, there will be an awareness of what their parents went through at the FHIRS and these young people will gain a perspective of the outlook on life these survivors have. They will see that the parents, grandparents and grandparents are returning to the traditional ceremonial ways and that they will be the next generation to carry on with the ceremonies under the guidance of the "Old Ones." After considering how these interviews may impact on the readers of the study, I now turn to the methods in the way I conducted the "talks".

I visited eleven Aboriginal people, four males and seven females, who are following either the traditional belief system or traditional and Christian belief systems in combination. All of these individuals are residential school ex-students of the File Hills Indian Residential School (FHIRS) Balcarres, Saskatchewan. They are approximately a generation older than me. I learned from their perspective what the experience as a student was like, how they came through it and how they are coping now. In addition they sought to offer their philosophies on life.

At the outset, I made a friendly visit either on the pow-wow grounds, at a feast or at the camp during the Raindance and in the homes to tell the First Nations people of my mission. Then I set up a date and time that was convenient for them. I always felt welcome, maybe because I was known as "Auntie Nora's girl" or just an old school chum; I like to think it's just because of my quiet, gentle unimposing approach to people. These latter graces were given to me by the "Old People". One caution for future researchers is the method of interviewing First Nations people that I experienced as a short fall of the structured interview.

I found the structured interview is not a productive method. I asked each question methodically but the respondent did not feel comfortable. One person said it reminded her of the way she used to be interrogated at the FHIRS by a staff member. The process was too stiff and unnatural. So I choose to say in plain English (with a little broken Cree thrown in now and again) what my goal of my thesis was and the word “sharing” meant a great deal to the interviewees when I approached them about my aims. After the interviewee read the questions I had laid out, I allowed them to talk freely without interruption. At times, I did have to keep focussed on my thesis so in a very diplomatic manner, I returned the respondent to the questions.

Implication for doing future research is that young Aboriginal people could visit the Elders to capture the richness of their stories that are so relevant to understand the life ways of our people. It would be interesting to talk to these survivors again in 10 years, perhaps, to review how they see Aboriginal Spirituality has affected them in their healing from the FHIRS and if by then the memories of the FHIRS have faded.

In relation to finding former staff members of the FHIRS to interview about what their perspectives were about the school, I was only able to find one person. Her name is Mrs. Dorothy Morrison and lives in Vancouver. She is 93 years old now and she was able to tell me in a telephone conversation on March 10, 2002 about how sorry she felt for the way the children were treated. She felt the attitude of the staff was not a good one. She and her late husband, Mr, Stanley Morrison taught at the FHIRS during the years 1944 to 1945.

A reader may wonder why I did not thoroughly analyze each respondent’s content, although I do admit that I did a little of this analysis myself. The reason I left

the interviews in a verbatim fashion is that I wished to maintain the purity of the people's voices and to share each individual's unique perspective, by presenting their stories in this chapter exactly as they were shared with me. Another reason I did not interpret the content of each story of the Aboriginal people I interviewed is this; the issue of leaving the stories as I heard them was important for me as I took a holistic view that for an Aboriginal person all things in one's life are inter-related and I choose not to break up the stories into microscopic pieces. At the end of the stories of the 11 survivors of the FHRS, I will be relating my own experience as an ex-student of that institution.

The Aboriginal people who chronicled their experience are notably from the File Hills First Nations communities. There are many more people from this First Nation community who I did not reach and who have their own stories to tell. Due to time constraints and minimal resources like funding, I was not able to interview these people. There are other older Aboriginal people from neighbouring First Nations like Pasqua's, Muscowpetung, Carry the Kettle, Key and Keeseekoose as well as those from remote areas in Northern Saskatchewan who spent a good part of their young life at the FHRS and who have their own stories to tell. One participant in the study, Mrs. Elsie Ross, said in a telephone conversation that one young girl, Betty Shuswap, came from The Pas. It can be said the ex-students came from the four corners of the prairies and up into Manitoba. This thesis provides a mere glimpse into the life of a student at the FHRS. Much more research needs to be done to preserve this part of Aboriginal history from other First Nations people of the File Hills School. I heartedly encourage this direction, especially those of the younger generation. It is a fulfilling experience and personally it was a an opportunity that I would not miss again to reconnect with my people.

## **Charlie Bigknife**

*Ann (A): Today is December 7, 2001. It is a beautiful, beautiful sunny day down here in the Qu'Appelle valley. We are sitting in the home of Milli Stonechild. I feel very, very honoured, 'mitt-to-nay' (Cree-truly) to talk to one of our Elders. He has been a respected Elder in Saskatchewan for many, many years. His name is Mr. Charlie Bigknife. He is accompanied by his wife, Mrs. Florence Bigknife. He stands 6 feet tall and is straight as a willow. He manages a ranch and carries out all his own work that is required to run a large ranch which entails a great deal of physical work. I will be asking him questions regarding the File Hills Indian Residential School(FHIRS) or the "boarding school" and about the Old Indian Ways. My first question to you, MR .Bigknife, Charlie, if I could call you that, is,"How old are you?"*

**Charlie(C):** I will be 83 on February 10, 2002.

*A: You are in fine fettle for 83 years old. You walk upright, just like a young man. How is your health?*

**C:** My health is pretty good, no sugar, nothing.

*A: You have certainly been blessed with good health. How old were you when you entered the FHIRS? How old were you when you left there? What was that experience like for you?*

**C:** My granddad didn't want to let me go to school while he was alive. He was the first counsellor on the Starblanket reserve. He didn't allow the Indian agent to pick me up and take me to school. When he passed away in 1926 with a heart attack and that following fall, I was compelled to go to school. Then when I got to the school, I was wondering why my parents let me stay there. I had a lot of little questions in my young mind at that time. First thing I knew, I was ushered into a room, which

they called the playroom, I didn't know at the time. The farm instructor whose name was Mr. Redgrave and who was an old sergeant from the First World War came in with a sheep's shear and cut my 4 braids off and threw them on the floor. After a while along came a young boy rolling a horse clippers into the room and that horse clippers bounced over my head and gave me a bald head. After he got through, he said, "Now you are no longer an Indian" and he gave me a slap on the head. I don't know how to explain it but it really hurt my feelings. I got many a slap and my ears pulled because I couldn't talk English; I never knew a word of English. On account of speaking my own native language which was Cree, I got a beating over it a lot of times. By being slapped around the head so many times, in a year or two after, it kind of gave me a problem with nose bleeds. I was ushered into an infirmary to stay because they couldn't stop the nose bleeds. I lost a lot of blood. A nurse, sort of a nurse was there. One of the boys from Prince Albert was there, by the name of Sam Bear who could talk Cree and he used to interpret for me. From that day to this day, I still have those nose bleeds. That's the result of that school. That's about that part of it, I think because I used to hear little children cry at nights; boys like who couldn't talk English and I'd cry along with them when I heard them cry. It was quite hard for me for quite a length of time. Then I began to catch on; the problems seemed to stop and over the years after that, I still had those nose bleeds.

*A: Mr. Bigknife, that is a very sad experience that you went through. My next question to you is this, how old were you when you left the boarding school?*

C: I was sixteen, somewheres around 1934.

*A: Before you went to the boarding school, did you experience the ceremonies of the Old Indian Ways? Did your parents and grandparents, your Mooshum and your Kookum take you to these ceremonies? Can you name those Old Indian Ways for me,*

*Mr. Bigknife? If you do not want to say what those ways were, I will respect that.*

C: When I left school, I can remember way back then, I must have been about 2 years old when my Dad let me go and stay with my grandparents. I went everywhere with them at that time to feasts or rituals or what ever you call them. But I remember one thing, one thing that happened. They knew the true God at that time. As I turn a few pages of history back, I saw a lot of supernatural powers being performed by different ones in these ceremonies. I used to wonder how it could be when I grew up. I used to think about people being sick and being doctored by Medicine Men and these sick people would get better. I thought that was the way I was to go as an Indian person but I also found out, I heard about it and saw with my own eyes that a lot of people got hurt at those times. Some of them didn't have that. There was good in every tribe and that goes for all nations all over the world. There is the good and the bad and we can learn by mistakes by doing this and doing that, thinking it was the right thing to do and I grew up like that. I respected all these things but something happened after a while when I began to grow a little older because I saw the plight and conditions on our reserves. A lot of them were very poor. I remember when I was a little guy going to town one day here. My granddad had a bunch of muskrat furs to go and trade and as I entered this big building, I didn't know what it was. It was something strange, something new for me to see. As I walked in there and as I looked at all the shelves, filled with nice food and the clothes that hung there, oh, a lot of nice clothes. As I looked at myself at a tender age, I had nothing that was bought, everything was home made. I lived a very, you might as well say, a poor life in those days. My granddad was a pretty good hunter and as he went to set traps; mostly he made wooden traps, not the kind that are used nowadays. I got interested in following him around. I was never cold. The clothes that I had on were mostly lined with some kind of fur. I always tried to get ahead of him, nearing a trap. Sometimes there were weasels and

mink caught in the traps. I learned how to survive.

When I got a little bit older, that's when I left home and went to boarding school. I learned to work after I left boarding school because in that school we went to school three hours a day so we didn't have much schooling. I believe a lot of us today went to those boarding schools across Canada, we could've been doctors, nurses or whatever. We could've made something of ourselves but we were denied these privileges. Today as I look back a little bit, I see myself studying about the ways of life and I begin to see is the only way is to try and work and get something for ourselves. I believe by saying that my granddad and my dad had cattle . I made a lot of hay one fall and that spring, I traded a lot of that hay for heifers and that's the way I got started. From that day, when I was pulling hay from the hay stack and feeding little calves. To this day, I'm still doing that at my age, coming 83 now. But this time it's easier, I do it by machine. I worked in different places, I studied a lot about the ways of life. I started to because I made a little money, I started to drink heavy. I always blamed the white man for bringing the fire water to us, giving it to us for which we were not allowed to have at that time. We still snuck to town and got it anyway. Not only that, I became involved in a lot of these what you might call, these shaking tents and all that. I had a granddad who used to do that. I handled all these things. By that, I might as well say, the good Lord was putting me through school, letting me see all these things happen that I might choose the right way. I believe everyone of us is born into this world has been given some kind of work to do. At that time, I began to drink so heavy that I landed in hospital and from there through the prayers of my wife now, I begin to... something happened anyway. I began to see a different change in my life. I have no more craving for alcohol, no more craving for anything else, like smoke. They were both taken away. At that time, I believe my health began to improve where I was sickly before. Now, you

might as well say, I have perfect health yet. I still do a lot of work that people my age cannot do and even some people younger than I am have problems in their life and cannot seem to do much for themselves.

*A: Yes, You are a very strong man. Yesterday you were very busy. What kept you busy yesterday, Mr. Bigknife?*

C: Yesterday, some of the horses got out of my pasture and I had to go some place. When I got home that night I went to the barns and I tracked a lot of horses around there. There was three of them that I bought lately and they were hanging around the stacks. Then after that I had a good night's rest. Then I had to take my wife to Melville. When I returned, I had to round up the horses, I found out where they were and I chased them all back in the pasture. I checked the fences; all the gates were shut and I couldn't find out where they got out from.

*A: That's a good day's work, chasing horses. My next question for you is about the FHIRS experience again. You talked about the unpleasant things that happened to you. What was good about it? Perhaps I can help with this. You probably developed long lasting friendships with the boys you went to school with. Can you talk about that?*

C: I had a friend from Kamsack, a fella by the name of Mike Byrant. We got to be real close together. A funny thing that happened just before we left school. There was going to be a Christmas concert. We were to have a dance. We were to have partners who were slow and clumsy in dancing and we didn't want to be the laughing stock at the concert. So we decided to run away. We took off to Kamsack, Saskatchewan and that was quite a long ways to walk. We landed up in Lorlie, Saskatchewan that evening. Before arriving in Lorlie, we stopped at Roy Keewatin's place. He was just getting home from Lorlie and he had some groceries there. He had



a rabbit frying in a frying pan. He told us to stay for supper and we had a good taste of rabbit. After that, he gave us an apple each. Then we took off, we arrived in the town of Lorie, bought some bread and butter and little something else to eat along the way. We walked all the way to Melville, Saskatchewan that night. The distance is about 40 miles. We fell asleep at the train station. We talked to the station master and he asked us where we were coming from. We told him a kind of a lie. We said we were coming home from working far away in Alberta. "Well", he said, "if you boys need help, there's a way freight coming along not too long from now and I know the guy that is the boss of that and I'll let him know that you're going to get on." So we went. We got to Kamsack and Mike went to his dad's place and I went to my aunt's place who was married to John Cadotte at the time. I stayed there a week and finally my uncle said, "I have to send you back now, your parents might be worrying about you." So he gave me some money, enough money to catch the train. I changed trains in Canora, Yorkton and then to Hubbard. It was late when I got there in Hubbard, too late to go anywhere. There was no roads and already there was deep snow. The storekeeper said, "You have a long ways to walk Why don't you sleep in the store I'll make a bed for you beside the heater." The next morning, I walked all the way to the reserve. They, my parents, were so glad to see me, alive. They kept me home for a day. So they took me back to school. When I got there, I got nothing but punishment just like a welcome home. A week later, Mike came along, with the RCMP beside him. They didn't punish us right away but a week later the principal called us into his office but already, we had it planned we were going to gang up on him. This he knew, we got him scared as we were pretty big boys already.

*A: Charlie, you got out of that one good. Do you remember any of the other children who ran away,?Do you remember what happened to them?*

C: There was a few that ran away but were soon caught either on the way to their home or their parents brought them back depends on how far they lived from the school. They were punished. The principal had three sizes of straps hanging by the principal's desk. One was a wide webbed strap; then there was a rubberized one, the next size to that...the real one that used to hurt was a thick rubberized belting. And that hurt! It was just like cutting through ...like fire went through you when you got hit.

*A: What happened to the hair of these runaways?*

C: Most of the younger boys, say around 12 or 13 years, they still had baldheads. The older ones still had their hair. They let them grow. The girls got boys' hair cuts. They didn't like that.

*A: When I ran away that's what happened to me. When they caught us, Doris Star and I, they shaved our heads bald. Then we got a good strapping, right from our wrists up to our elbows. Not only that, we were made to wear signs on our backs that read, "I will not run away." That was very humiliating to walk around like that in front of your friends and the other kids. My next question... I was wanting to go back to the Old Indian Ways. In your opinion, what do you see today about those ceremonies? Are they coming back and if they are, are they coming back strong or are they coming back slowly? Can you talk to me about that, please?*

C: I can remember like I said earlier there, that I took part in all of these ceremonies that I saw because I had to go with my granddad. Like I said, there were supernatural things that happened but there was one there that I can really remember just like it was happening today. They had a blue cloth with a yellow cross on it It was spread down there and a bunch of eagle feathers around . I didn't know at that time, it was a prayer song, prayer singing. People prayed; they really honestly prayed. They asked

for forgiveness. They asked for love .They asked to love other people. They asked for health for the people.

By symbolizing by wearing that eagle feather, the people were reminded that the eagle when he has young ones along the cliffs or highest trees, when they got into trouble, the father eagle would be away up there where the naked eye cannot see, and the least little cry from these young ones, the father eagle would come down so swiftly and bring 'em up again and put them back on up on the... The same thing happens when we cry for help, when we ask God to help us, he hears us and comes down and helps us and lifts us back up again to the right place where we should be.

But in those days, I truly thank the good lord that he has brought me to see all these things happen but today you asked me a question about what I did at that time (boarding school) in praying, in certain areas it did a lot of good and in some areas it didn't. So I believe it's up to everyone of us that have been given a mind by the great spirit to realize that we have an enemy in our souls and the good Lord that gives us everything that is good. He doesn't want us to destroy ourselves and this is where that life begins to change. But today I see that what's coming back now is sort of.. what should I call it... something like what was before was the right way and today is not now. That's the way I see it. Today I believe there is a lot of misunderstanding amongst our young people. They are trying to do something they don't understand, they can't understand their own native tongue and by doing these things sometimes, they use a tape recorder for these songs and, mind you, these songs were given to certain ones to be their own. Now they are beginning to share them with these tape recorders. Today I can see where there is lawlessness, there is no respect anymore amongst our Indian people, especially the younger generation nowadays. There is so

much heartache in our reserves, it's because they're doing things that are not pleasing to the Almighty God. This is where all the problems rests and rises from the hatred, the jealousy, you name it, everything that happens is nothing that helps to promote the welfare and good will of our Indian people.

*A: Those are very strong words, a very strong message indeed, Mr. Bigknife. We talk about our young people, the difficulties they are going through, some of them are not using the old ways the right way. As an elder, what rule do you have in directing them the right way?*

C: To make a long story short, it happened in the 1800s, when my granddad had gone to retrieve the horses that had been stolen from someone across the line. I believe it was someplace around Montana. And his both legs were almost shot off, he had lost a lot of blood. His friend dropped him off in the gully where he stayed for many days and he had made poultice out of herbs that he found on the hillside and not to get blood poisoning. He stayed there for many days and without food, and I believe the good Lord saw him there and He made a way for him to use a coyote to bring chicken or whatever he could bring, what he could catch out there and set it in front of him. The coyote would run out a little ways and that was his daily companion for many days until the Northwest Mounted Police scouts spotted him and they brought a wagon and took him to, I believe, it was Fort Walsh. They nursed him back to health, after that he was beginning to heal, get his strength back and he dug his way under the logs - there was no cement foundation at that time - he dug under the logs and made his way to freedom again. They didn't bother with him at all, they knew he was well and strong to move and wherever direction he wanted to go. Anyways, this is the man they called for me one day when I was two years old. This man raised me, he was the first councillor on the reserve like I said along with my uncle who is lifetime chief,

Reddog. These two gave me a real good direction in life. They even prophesied what was going to happen to our reserves. They saw a way ahead of time like the old prophets of old and I see them today, I see those things right before my very eyes happening today amongst our people, not only our own Indian people but all people of all races.

We are living at a time that we call the “end time”, where lawlessness prevails it seems to be that way right now. I believe that when we believe in a Lord that created the universe that He will see us through, through all these problems. He will even supply our needs, we won't have to go hungry. Someday there is going to be famine here, even in Canada. We have a land of plenty now but we have so many people unthankful for what they have, they are not satisfied. Greediness, greed is getting the best of our people across these lands whether they are white or whatever. Anyway, from this I can see the only way out is to believe the finished work that the good Lord has done for us. That we look to Him for guidance, divine guidance from day to day.

And I might add a little bit more to this, I learned a lot during the past years, I became involved in a lot of this police work. I worked with the Attorney General at that time, Roy Romanow, policing, crime prevention and stuff and all like that. In 1970, I got into the position of J.P. on the reserve and coroner and ever since that time I've been going on the free will, offering... might as well say to help our people get the best out of what they call the justice system. In 1990, I joined in with Bob Inkster's force of advisory group in which I was lucky enough, privileged enough to be one chosen from Saskatchewan. To be on that team, one of nine people across Canada and we always started out in our native way of praying to the Creator, that everything will go right, that we will get divine guidance. In 1994, my dream was

fulfilled in Regina after the workshop with the RCMP, to see all our Indian people and the Indian ancestry dressed in scarlet in that ballroom. I said this was the end for me, that's it the end. I fulfilled my duty but when I was given the microphone to speak, I couldn't speak nothing else but gratitude for what I saw there, with tears swelling my eyes. I thank the good Lord for bringing an answer to my prayer but I believe that wasn't the end of it though. When I got back to the reserve here, I found my name on a list to be on a police management board and that is where I am today. I sort of wear a lot of different hats, do a lot of ministerial work amongst our Indians.

*A: Do you still take part in the Raindance and other ceremonies, like that Mr. Bigknife?*

C: We took part in them in my earlier years before I got married and even after I got married we still went to Raindances. You know, sometimes I don't like to talk about things like this here. I found out that all these dances and rituals were being abused. They weren't being performed the right way because after the performances people still had that anger within their hearts and there is unforgiveness yet. There was no change and I gradually dropped away from these things and I just pray to the one true God, 'cause he said in his words, "All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth." He told us not to worship anything, "I created everything, I'm a jealous God." So that's the one I pray to everyday for...irregardless of who it is, I pray a lot for white people even because they are human beings as well as we are. We are all God's creation. We are here in Canada to share the this land for different nationalities of people therefore we must get along as best we know how.

*A: Mr. Bigknife, it sounds as if you have gone through healing in a very very spiritual way and by talking with you I feel very strong, very very strong. Through your words, I will listen to your words when well whenever I want, sometimes we need*

*some strength if we have some difficulties, your words of wisdom will certainly help me through the difficult times and the good times too. This paper that you have contributed to will be available not only to you as a respected elder but to the children, the grandchildren and great-grandchildren. It is a part of Canada's history. There were good times and not so good times but I feel myself before I leave hopefully if I have been a good Aboriginal woman, good mother, good grandmother, I will go to the Spirit world that I will leave behind this piece of legacy for future generations to look at and to understand what we went through and to understand why we behaved the way we did. To forgive those who have harmed us, that is a great part of healing. I would like just a few last words from you Mr. Bigknife and I wish to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your very valuable and true words.*

C: Yes, it is truly a privilege for me to share a few words. I have a long story to tell right from beginning to the ending. There is always a reason for everyone of us, again I say, everyone of us has been born. I've been born for a purpose here on earth. I used to hear my granddad saying, in Cree it says "Kîspin ê-nohtê kiskêyihtaman pah-pikwacihowin piko ka-nito-kî(sic)-itôtaman êwako anima isi-pimâtisiwin" The translation in Cree is this:

"If you want to know spiritual things, you will have to be born again to that experience by our Heavenly Father." To those who will listen to this, I hope somehow, it will touch your lives and cause you to turn away from a lot of bad stuff that's going around; that you will turn your eyes upwards and see the manifestation of God come down upon you and change your life. God bless you.

*A: Mr. Bigknife, you've raised a big family.*

C: I have a pretty big family and I thank the Lord for everyone of them that's alive today. We only missed two of them, one little boy and one twenty year old girl. Out of that family of two boys that I had, and one little Sioux boy we raised, and four

girls. Out of those seven, we have thirty-six grandchildren, most of them are married now. Out of respect for persons, we have about five or six white girls and then we got one white boy. Out of those grandchildren, most of them are married now, we got forty-seven the last count great grandchildren. That's how big of a family I got.

*A: The Kit-chi-mo-Ko-maan (Bigknife) name will go on forever and ever. What was your grandfather's name, you talked about him so reverently?*

C: His name was Ohoo, I believe he was one of the great warriors from the 1800s. He saw a lot of life, a lot of rugged life, I suppose. After the experience my granddad had with those broken legs they called him Kii-sta-ti-a-gaan (legs shot apart). My grandmother came from Ochapowace because we used to go there quite a bit, in fact they had his name Ohoo as one of their band members. I believe he moved to Starblanket Reserve. That's where we all ended up.

*A: I want to thank you once again Mr. Bigknife. Ah how!*

### **Ivy Koochicum**

*Today is July 4, 2001. I am visiting with Mrs. Ivy Koochicum who is 83 years old. She is the oldest member of the Peepeekisis First Nation. Mrs. Koochicum is a survivor of the File Hills Indian Residential School (FHIRS). I feel very honoured to visit her as she is a great story teller and has a fascinating memory. May I call you Ivy?*

*Mrs. Ivy Koochicum (I): Yes, you may.*

*Ann(A): First of all, how old are you, Ivy?*

I: I was born January 3, 1918. Old Mrs. Flagg delivered me on the Indian reservation where I was raised. I was given a Cree name by her. We all had Cree names.

*A: Ivy, how old were you when you entered FHIRS?*

I: I was five years old.



*A: How old were you when you left FHIRS?*

I: I was 18 years old. I was in that school for 13 years.

*A: Before you went to the FHIRS, did you experience the ceremonies of the Old Indian Ways? Did your parents take you to these ceremonies? Can you talk about what those ceremonies were?*

I: Yes, they were pow-wows, Sweats and Rain Dances. The Indian agent tried to stop these events. The Indian people didn't give up. As a child, I don't recall going to these things; it wasn't until I was 18 that I clearly remember my old grandfather having a Sweat. My grandfather's name was Keewisk. He was well known for his doctoring as he was a Medicine Man. Many people came from faraway for healing for some kind of sickness. Even some white people came for doctoring.

*A: Did your mother and father speak a Native language?*

I: My mother spoke Saulteaux and Cree. My Dad spoke Cree.

*A: Did they speak Saulteaux and Cree to you?*

I: Yes, they did. My grandmother was deaf so I made sign language to her. She always understood me when I made sign language to her. My grandfather was blind

*A: Are you able to talk Saulteaux or Cree now?*

I: Not Saulteaux; I can talk a little Cree and understand Cree when someone speaks to me.

*A: Do your children speak any of these languages? If not what do you think was the reason for that?*

I: My children are unable to speak our language fluently. The principal in FHIRS forbade us to speak Cree. I can understand the Elders when they pray.

*A: When you were in FHIRS, were you allowed to burn Sweetgrass?*

I: That was totally forbidden.

*A: Can you tell me about your experience at the FHIRS?*

I: I went to boarding school when I was five years old. There was not quite 100 students going there. I went there for 13 years. I was five years old when I entered and I was 18 years old when I left. We had very strict staff and if we didn't obey the rules, we were punished. *A: In what way were you punished?*

I: If we got caught running out of bed after bedtime, we would have to stand in the hallway all night in our nightgowns or scrub ceilings at night or we got the strap.

*A: What part of your experience would you like to forget?*

I: You know sometimes I wake up because I dreamt I was back in that school. It is a nightmare. The part I would like to forget about is how cruelly we were treated. We were treated cruelly not only by the staff but by the pupils. There was name calling and fighting. There was one family that was very mean. There was nothing we could do. We just took it. In the long run, they paid for it; it doesn't pay to be that way.

*A: What was the food like?*

I: The staff got the best of everything. We just got plain ordinary foods. They got the cream and we got skim milk. We never got butter like they did. Many of the children were hungry particularly the little boys. We always saved hard bread crusts. These crusts were used to make bread pudding. We'd give these crusts to these hungry little boys. We'd give them the big porridge pot to scrape out so they could satisfy their hunger.

*A: I was wondering what a typical school day was like at FHIRS?*

I: I went to school for half a day and the rest of the day was spent working. It was the same for all the students. In the morning, if we worked in the kitchen, we were up

early. Chores included setting the tables for breakfast and get everything ready. We worked either in the sewing room, dairy or the bakeshop.

*A: Can you talk about one particular area you worked in?*

I: The one place that is vivid in my mind is the bakeshop. We set our dough in great big tubs, mixed our yeast, covered it up and left the dough to rise overnight. In the morning, we'd pan this dough and let it rise. We had a great big brick oven. We had to put logs under the oven to keep the fire going to cook these loaves of bread. We had to weigh each loaf of bread on a scale. We panned and baked a 100 loaves of bread a day.

*A: When you worked in the dairy, what were the chores like there?*

I: We had one of those separators. Early in the morning, the boys brought in the milk in great big cream cans. We separated the milk. The staff got the cream and we students got the skim milk.

*A: What was their education like?*

I: We went up to grade eight. We went half a day; the other half, we worked in the kitchen, dairy, bakery or the sewing room.

*A: Did you suffer any injuries at the FHIRS?*

I: I broke my finger; it caught in the swinging doors in the classroom.

*A: What were your clothes like?*

I: We wore slips and bras made out of flour sacks. We had loose dresses; they used to make them; they were just plain with a belt. Then we wore black stockings with boots. The boots were ill-fitting in that they were very tight. We had to very well wear them. I have quite a bit of trouble with my feet now. I have these bothersome bunions. I have gout which my doctor said came from wearing tight footwear. We had fleece lined underwear.

*A: What kind of hairstyle did you have?*

I: We wore our hair in a straight manner. We always got it cut short to the middle of our ears. The staff treated our hair with kerosene; this was to get rid of koo-cheese (head lice). The staff put some thing in our eyes, a purple substance; this was to treat students who had trichoma.

*A: What did you do after you left FHIRS?*

I: I stayed home for awhile; got into mischief. I got married to Mr. Frank Koochicum on November 17, 1943. He worked on the railroad as a section man for 18 years and he became a foreman after that. He retired in 1973. We lived in small towns wherever they transferred us. I used to get lonesome at first but I became used to it. I made many friends with the ladies in the towns. My children went to school with the other children in the town. They all went to high school.

*A: I really appreciate your taking time with me to give me your story. Many of the people on the Peepeekisis reserve often remark what a neat housekeeper you are as well as being a good cook; you are particularly known for your pies.*

I: I enjoy making all kinds of pies, saskatoon, pumpkin and apple pies.

*A: Are you able to eat wild meat these days?*

I: Oh yes, I love deer meat and ducks which my relatives and friends bring me.

*A: Both you and I attended the Rain Dance at Okanese First Nation recently. Please tell me about that ceremony and what you felt.*

I: I thought of my late husband because he knew all those Rain Dance songs. I enjoyed visiting the people I haven't seen for a long time. We feasted and that was very enjoyable. They called my name to go into the lodge and I was given a beautiful blanket. I was very touched. This event reminded me of the old people and what used

to happen long ago. I'm sure they would be very glad that we are going back to the Old Indian Ways. They would want it that way.

*A: This visit with you as you are one of our Elders is a great honour. To be in your presence gives me strength emotionally, mentally and spiritually. To be in touch with one another keeps our relationships, our families strong.*

I: It keeps us together. I feel honoured myself to have you visit. I get very lonely. I'm having a visit from my daughter who lives in Montana.

*A: I understand what that loneliness is like. You're looking forward to moving to a senior citizens independent living unit in the fall. I want to express to you that I find you in good health for your 83 years. You can see good and have a very intelligent, clear mind. You are able to walk independently. You have raised a fine family. They are all working and caring for their families. I'll keep on praying for you. Thank you very much.*

### **Margaret Stonechild**

*Today is July 31, 2001. My name is Mrs. Ann Callahan. I am very honoured to be interviewing Ms. Margaret Stonechild. She is affectionately known as "Peggy." She is from the Peepeekisis First Nation. She is a survivor of the File Hills Indian Residential School (FHRS). As an Elder, she is called upon to help at the ceremonies in the surrounding Aboriginal communities. There are several questions I will be asking you. The first one is, how old were you when you entered the FHRS?*

Peggy (P): I was 3 years old.

*Ann (A): How old were you when you left the school?*

P: I was 16 years old.

*A: So you spent 13 years in the FHRS.*

*A: Did your parents take you to the ceremonies of the Old Indian Ways when you were a little child?*

P: I was too small. It was not until I was older that I became to participate in the ceremonies. About ten years, I danced the first of the four Rain Dances I vowed to carry through. We fast, that is, we do not take food or water for these four days. We keep our eyes fixed on the Sacred Tree in the centre of the Lodge and we pray to the Creator for good health for our families, all the people in the communities, as a matter of fact, we pray for all the peoples in the world. Then, too, we are praying for our selves. If you asked the dancers this question, they may tell you that they are dancing for a relative who may be ill. Every one has his or her own individual reasons for entering the Rain Dance. There is so much I could tell you about this ceremony and other ceremonies but now is not the time. I went into several Sweats since then. I burn Sage and Sweetgrass and pray and pray. I know that my prayers will go up with the smoke. It is just like going to church for me.

*A: Tomorrow, we'll be going to Okanese First Nation, what is that event about?*

P: That is a memorial feast to honour a loved one who has 'gone ahead.' Relatives make this feast every year. The head man at the feast blesses the food and prays for the people in the communities of the First Nations. These old men hold a pipe ceremony early in the morning before the feast. Like other ceremonies, this is very sacred.

*A: Peggy, do you speak a Native language?*

P: I am not able to speak Cree; that was taken away when we went to boarding school.

*A: Can you share your knowledge about the old people who were able to doctor people and any other things about them?*

P: There was Old Keewisk who was very powerful in that he was able to help people get well. Then, there was my grandmother, Old Mrs. Turtle ( Misquattisoo); she also was called upon for healing. These old people spoke Cree all time and they carried on the traditional ways.

*A: I'm going to ask you about the File Hills Indian Residential School. What was the experience like for you?*

P: I learned many good things like how to sew on the sewing machine, how to darn, and how to mend and how to make bread.

*A: What grade did you complete at the FHIRS?*

P: I completed grade 8. We went to school for half a day. We took reading, spelling and arithmetic.

*A: How did you get along with the other children while at the school?:*

P: We had to learn to get along with one another although there were a few 'bossy' girls there. We weren't to fight or say mean things to each other.

*A: What was the staff like? Who was the principal and what was he like?*

P: The staff were all older people and they got along pretty good with the children. Mr. Rhodes was our principal; he was very stern as he was a retired sergeant major in the army so we had to learn to stand at attention and how to march. He was quite a regimental person.

*A: What was the best experience about boarding school?*

P: The best things about it is that I taught my children how to do things that I learned in school like cleaning their homes thoroughly, to sew, and to care for themselves, like keeping clean.

*A: What, to you, was not so good about FHIRS?*

P: We got a strapping when it was coming to us.

*A: What about your being away from the family and the community?*

P: We felt it very bad but we knew we had to be there and that we had to stay in the school.

*A: After you left FHIRS, where did you go or what did you do?*

P: I joined the army. I was a private in the CWAC for several years.

*A: So now you are a veteran?*

P: I'm a veteran. The Indian veterans are called upon to participate in events like being in the Grand Entry at pow-wows and Aboriginal Days. We also give the honour guard and the last post rites to our fellow comrades who have passed on. As veterans, the Aboriginal communities have a high regard for their veterans.

*A: Please tell me about your family that you raised.*

P: I had ten children but I lost six of them. I have two boys and two girls living.

*A: What was it like living on the reserve?*

P: In those days, my man and I raised all our children on the reservation. I don't think we had it as hard as they do now because we were kept busy every season. We always had a garden and my man hunted for wild meat.

*A: Did you have running water?*

P: No, we didn't. We hauled our water in barrels from the spring that the whole community used.

*A: What about fuel?*

P: We burned fuel oil in a great big furnace. Before this we burned firewood which we cut down in the 'big bush' and hauled the logs to the farmyard to be cut up.

*A: Would you please share your teachings or words of wisdom as to how we as parents and grandparents can direct or guide the young ones.*



P: I have had my sobriety now for many years, over 30 years now. This is what I would like to see amongst our people. Get rid of the alcohol and drugs. I would like to see our young people going on their own to seek help for their alcohol and drug problem. The help is out there like treatment centres to help them to deal with that problem. I do much talking; I am not able to make them go to treatment centres; these young people have to want to go for treatment.

*A: I see your daughter, son-in-law and their family are into the traditional way, like participating in the ceremonies.*

P: They get help with their problems that one meets on a daily basis.

*A: Would help come from going back to the Old Indian Ways?*

P: The values were there long ago. We didn't lock our doors. People walked in someone's home as the doors were left open; they would help themselves to a cup of tea and something like a tea biscuit if they were hungry and left. We had respect for each other. We have to teach these values to our young people. Another thing among many teachings, we were told not to torture small animals. In the olden days, we were brought up with the value of love. I'm raising my four grandchildren now as their mother passed away. I never hit them; they are a blessing to us. I tell them don't do things or say cruel words that will make your grandmother cry like getting into mischief.

*A: You are one of the last living of the generation that went to FHIRS. We went to a Raindance together. Could you relate your experience you had while in attendance there?*

P: It was very honouring for me to go in the lodge to pray, pray and pray. That's all we need is prayer. This is the way we look at life; we are so thankful for life. That is another reason we have a give-away. We sat with our relatives and feasted, We were so thankful to be with our relatives and friends outside on the ground. Our 83

year old cousin was there with us and she truly enjoyed herself. She was so happy that she cried.

*A; We're sitting under a big Elm tree and having a good time talking about the old people and their teaching. I want to say to you how much I enjoyed this time with you as you have taught me a great deal. I also want to say to you that I feel you are a great woman, and your man is also good to care for your grandchildren. That is one of the values we must hang onto. Your grandchildren have much respect for their grandmother and their grandfather, Victor Daniels.*

### **Elsie Ross**

*Today is August 8, 2001. I am interviewing a 75 year old woman who is originally from the Okanese First Nation. The Creator has given us a beautiful day; it is cool, lots of fluffy white clouds. I feel very honoured today to be talking to this woman who I have known for many, many years. I am going to ask her to share her story in her own words. She is a 'survivor' of the File Hills Indian Residential School (FHRS). Her name is Mrs Elsie Ross. Her maiden name was Elsie Anderson. Today, Mrs. Ross volunteers at the Carmichael Outreach where she helps needy Aboriginal people. She says by helping other people is her way of giving back to the Creator all the good things with which she has been blessed.*

Elsie(E): First of all, I feel very honoured to be asked to say a few words and to give a little bit of input into this interview with Ann. We go back a long way. She and her family were very, very dear friends, relatives and neighbours, all in one. I was about five or six years of age when I went to residential school. Being very young.... really didn't matter how old I was when I went to school. I went to kindergarten. Did I experience the ceremonies of the Old Indian Ways? I vaguely remember. I must have been about five years old. I saw this Sweat Lodge and these men were standing there, heating these stones and they were also picking them up. In my mind's eye, I can see it, as clearly as I see the nose on my face. They were picking these red hot stones up

and taking them into the Sweat Lodge. I knew they were going to sweat in that little Sweat Lodge. I didn't understand what was going on. I must have asked my Mama. That's all I remember. The people were inside already by the time we got there. I didn't see anyone going in. I also knew an old gentleman by the name of Buffalo Bow was a medicine man. They had a village at the west end of Okanese reserve near the File Hills school, and near the agency. It was a village where Buffalo Bow, Squatapew and old Day Walker, Jack Walker ( who was his son), old Feather and Moostatuck. Mrs. Moostatuck wore these nice beads. She was dressed up for some special occasion, I would imagine. I admired those beads she was wearing. They were so nice. I'd never seen ornaments on folks before in my tender years.

We used to go home on New Years Day. Our parents would come and pick us up. They used to stop at Mr. and Mrs. Squatapew's home. They had this huge table in the shape of a "T" , white tablecloth, all set with all beautiful kinds of food setting on there. But I especially remember red and yellow jelly. I'll never forget those big bowls of Jell-O on Mr. and Mrs. Squatapew's New Years table. There were cakes and just every thing good. We'd have a meal there and then we'd proceed on home for our own little get-together at my home. Then we returned in the evening. We had to be back at the school by 8 o'clock so we could see a cowboy show. We'd have to read the dialogue and if it was funny, we'd all start laughing. Nice memories!

We were never allowed the burning of Sweetgrass. I don't know what would have happened if we did. It just wasn't done. By the time I got to school, it wasn't even mentioned.

The experience when I first went to File Hills school was a feeling of loneliness, loneliness, terrible loneliness. Yet, there were children there who were from Prince Albert, Norway House, Pasqua's, Muskopetung, Kamsack, Carry the Kettle, Piapots, Keekeesikoose, and Keys reserves. Just think how lonely they were. At least our folks were right beside the school, just a few miles away. We could see

them now and again. Some of these poor kids never saw their folks for years. How lonely they were and how selfish I was to think that I was hard done by being lonesome. But I was lonesome; I cried my tears like the rest of the kids; bunch of sad little kids trying to soften the blow by looking after one another and care for one another. We would go for little walks around the playground, around, around and around, holding hands, trying to see some joy in life. Meanwhile our hearts are breaking, because we were separated from our parents. They too, I'm sure missed their children.

The worst thing I can remember for ever being referred to as "you stupid little idiot, you silly little idiot" especially by the cook, Mrs. Alexander. I was terrified of her. Instead of being told to do something, she would command you to do it. I just shook in my boots, every time that I had to work near her. It just seemed my turn came more than any else. I'm sure others felt the same way. Speaking of Mrs Alexander, hate is a very strong word. I think I absolutely hated her because I was so terrified of her; and anything she said to us, and to us kids who worked for her in the kitchen. She was our cook. We just shook in our boots. Hate is such a strong word for a young kid. I absolutely hated her but that's how I felt about her. She used to tell us, I'm going to "shake the mitts out of you if we didn't do what I command of you." Can you imagine that! That's my worst, being under Mrs. Alexander's supervision. Then there was another supervisor by the name of Miss Pugh. We joke about her now with my little friends that I see now and again and who I talk with on the phone. Miss Pugh was always going to "straighten the humps on our backs." I have to laugh though because we call each other "Miss Pugh" and she was always going to straighten the humps on our backs. That's how we greet one another. It's good for a laugh.

We didn't have a chance to learn about Christianity at home because we were just four and five years olds. We went to church with our parents. So we really

didn't know that much. We did very good ground work in religion and Christian belief. Mr. Rhodes was our instructor and principal. He was very good at teaching us religion. I am eternally grateful for that because I have a firm standing in Christian beliefs to this day. That was good. I think a lot of my little buddies did too.

After I left FHIRS, I took grade eight there. I had to go to Brandon Indian Residential School. That is just the thing we did for high school. I took grade nine and ten. I have no negative comments to make about Brandon.

About being in FHIRS, we had visits from our parents occasionally. We were better off than the other kids whose parents lived miles away like the ones from Prince Albert. So we were a bit more lucky like that so that was a plus. We went home for eight weeks in the summer, all of eight weeks. Can you imagine in eight weeks, we tried to crowd in, activities like visiting, picking berries, helping your Kokum smash chokecherries, eating bannock with her, going on picnics, going to vacation bible school at the church, going to town and shopping with your Mom and Dad. That was all crowded into eight weeks. We were certainly happy when we were home. Then, back to school again, downhearted.! So that was FHIRS. Brandon, I haven't much to say about it. That was high school. That is where I took grade nine and ten. I tried to go to school in Scott Collegiate; I went to school 'til Christmas time and I got an infection on my big toe. I had to go the Fort Qu'Appelle Hospital. I had the end of my toe, up to the first joint, taken off. I spent two months in that hospital so I lost my grade ten. It was too late to return to Scott Collegiate. So I went back to Scott Collegiate for grade ten so that was another year. I took my grade 11 in Brandon in that collegiate. They drove us every morning to town which was three miles away as the Brandon Indian Residential School was out in the country. That was hard because I didn't have a guidance counsellor to guide me as to what subjects I should take. I wanted nursing. Who did I see? Nobody. I was called down from

grade one to eight, left me no self-esteem, no self-esteem. I didn't dare approach anybody for guidance as to which subjects I should pursue for a nursing career.

I finished grade 11 but by this time I was tired of regimentation, "line up here, line up there." "Oh, here comes the cows," we heard people saying and laughing because we were all in a line, marching into church in Brandon. About 35 or 40 of us went to town in a big truck to Brandon. By then, I'd had quite enough of all that 'put down' so I came home and stayed home.

For some sweet memories and to get away from the sadness of my earlier years, I'm going to talk about my maternal grandmother. Her name was Mrs. Yellow Bird. She lived in a small hut behind our main house on the reserve. She was a kind, little old lady. I used to have fun with her. She didn't speak English; she spoke Saulteaux and Cree. I'd get her to say, "Balcarres." So she'd very slowly try to pronounce it this way, "Bel - carr - ess." And we both had a good laugh. She always reached for something. She lived in a little tent behind our house during the summer when we were home which I remember so distinctly. She'd make a little fire there in front of her tent. She'd make bannock, cook the bannock in that big frying pan, take a stick when it was half done, take a stick, turn it over, cook the other side. Then she'd make you a cup of tea. The old people like my grandmother always gave you something. They shared with you of what little they had. That was wonderful. To this day, I notice that among our people, very sharing, very sharing. I admire that immensely. I have deduced that my mother and my Kokum spoke both Cree and Saulteaux. How do I know? I know some Cree words and some Saulteaux words and because they didn't speak those languages at the school. It was forbidden. I have had to have learned from my Kokum and my mom, chatting back and forth. Even, today, I can say "Keespquay"(Cree - at least).

I remember, I was visiting with my Kokum, sitting on the ground, in front of her tent when my mother came to announce we were going to town. My mother

asked my Kokum what she needed from town. My grandmother reached in a wooden box, took out this handkerchief. She had a five dollar bill, all neatly folded in the corner of it. She handed it to my mother. I asked my mother, "What does she want?" My mother said, "She wants, "pears". That was the season for pears and she wanted to buy these for her grandchildren who were returning to the residential school.

I neglected to mention that during the course of my life time, both at the FHIRS and the Brandon IRS, we never, ever learned our cultural ways and how to pray to our Creator. I have learned a great deal from my own children who have been out many times in the community, eager to learn about our cultural ways. So I am learning from them. Just awhile ago, Ann taught me something else. I'm an eager learner; I'm starved for our culture. So she handed me tobacco; something in return for my little chit - chat. "Tobacco goes first". I have learned little gems like that which I appreciate. Good-bye.

*Ann : Thank you, Elsie, for a wonderful enjoyable visit. You have given me many gifts by the sharing of your stories.*

### **Melvina McNabb**

*Ann(A) (researcher): Today is August 8, 2001. I am interviewing Mrs Melvina McNabb who is from the Peepekisis First Nation, Balcarres, Saskatchewan. Her maiden was Melvina Stonechild. I feel very honoured to talk to her. We have known each other all of our lives. She is a survivor of the File Hills Indian Residential School. So I'll start out by first asking you, how old are you, Melvina?*

Melvina (M): I am 74 years old.

*A: That is quite an age. I want to congratulate you on living a long life. My next question to you is this, how old were you when you entered the FHIRS?*

M: I was seven years old.

*A: How old were you when you left the boarding school?*

M: I was 16 years old.

*A: Before you went to the FHRS, What can you remember about what we call the Old Indian Ways?*

*Did your parents take part in these ceremonies?*

M: Yes, they did. My dad's father and mother were still living . They were very traditional. They always had Sweats. We travelled to pow-wows and feasts, all the Indian ways of life.

*A: While you were in the FHRS, were allowed to take part in any of these ceremonies?*

M: Certainly not!

*A: Did your mother and father, Kokum and Mooshum speak their own language, and what language was that?*

M: Yes, they spoke Cree. My old grandfather spoke Saulteaux.

*A: What was his name, Melvina?*

M: Mind you, I don't know his Christian name but they called him old Keewisk.

*A: Yes, Keewisk is remembered by many of the people in the File Hills area. Can you tell me a little bit about this great man and what he was known for.*

M :He was known for doctoring people with Indian herbs.

*A: Was he allowed to doctor people in the open?*

M: No, he was discouraged by the Indian agent to carry out his healing ways. Very much so. They didn't allow them to have Rain Dances. The Indian people had to go way in the forest, the 'big bush', we called it. That's where they would go and hide and have their raindances.

*A: In the old days, do you recall whether it was the old men only that went into the sweats or did the women go in also.*



M: The women also took part. The ladies had their own sweat. But they were always all together. People used to camp there and they would go into these sweats every day.

*A: This morning, before I came, I burned Sweetgrass, because we are going to talk about the old people and I wished to honour them in this way. And because I will be talking to you as a respected Elder. Now my next topic involves your experience at the FHRS. You can tell me in your own words what this experience was like. I would like you to talk about the good things and the not so good things about this time spent at the school. There will be personal things that I would like you to share with me like if you were punished, what was the food like, and what kind of work were you told to do.*

M: I went to school when I was seven years old and I couldn't talk a word of English. I talked Cree and I was abused for that, hit, and made to try to talk English. I would listen to the other little girls and that's how I picked up English. It was very hard for me because I didn't know why these staff were hitting me. I didn't understand nothing. I used to cry a lot because I was getting hit all the time.

*A: In what way were you hit?*

M: Anywhere, hit on the head, hit just wherever they could catch me, talking my own language. Oh, I grow up and I worked hard in school. I worked in almost every place there was to work in, like the bakery, the dairy, the kitchen and the laundry. They would strap us with a thick strap, a long strap, strap us on the hands till our wrists would bleed. Some of them got the strap on their bodies, the runaways, and those who tried to run away.

*A: How were these runaways treated when they caught them?*

M: They were put to bed, stripped naked, with a sheet over them and then they got a good strapping. Their bodies were all bruised up. They were left to stay in bed for the day. Sometimes some of them would be so severely strapped, they couldn't walk right.

*A: Melvina, did you suffer any injuries yourself?*

M: Yes, I was working in the laundry room with no supervision. This was my first time working there. The girls were all scrubbing. No one was watching me. I stepped on this lever, this extractor that dries clothes. It was going quite slow but still it caught my arm.

*A: That's a big scar you have on your upper arm; that's about 10 inches long right across your upper arm.*

M: I still suffer with that; it aches when it's going to storm, right in the bone. I have arthritis in my elbow and my wrist.

*A: Were you taken to the hospital ?*

M: Yes, but not till the next day, I lay and I suffered. They had to look after me, changing the bandages as I lost a lot of blood. I stayed in the hospital for one whole year because they didn't have any casts in those days.

*A: Okay, we'll have a rest now, have some refreshment. We'll pick up where we left off. It's such a beautiful day out there. The wind is blowing the leaves in a gentle way. There are a few clouds and a nice blue sky. The Creator has given us a break as it was such a hot day yesterday. Melvina, my next topic is to ask you about how .... do you see the people today going back to the Old Indian Ways? Can you can talk about how the Indian agent who represented the federal government and the churches tried to, what was their purpose for the boarding schools and the other means of trying to make us different than what we are.*

M: First of all, I would like to say I never forgot how I was treated at the boarding schools because reminders would come back to me. For example, when I was having a baby, my arm would get too weak to help me to force when I was having a baby. I would think of them all on account of them. I had difficulty like carrying firewood into the house on my arm. Little things like that. I don't think the healing process

they are talking about will ever heal this mind of that life. I tried to join the army when I was 17 years old. I couldn't do what was required of me on account of my arm so I was discharged. This injury at school has put me back lots of times in different ways in my life. I used to have to scrub on the washboard and my arm would play out and I mostly I used just the one hand and my arm, one side. We were so sadly abused, it is unbelievable what they were trying to do to us, make us be like white people. But you know in the long run, it never worked.... it never worked. We went back to our own traditional ways of life which was a very strong thing for me. That's the way I liked to live with my husband; he was a good provider. Even though we were poor, we made a good living with our horses.

I don't know about this school. I don't know what other people think but to me I will never forget that abuse I suffered; I guess because I suffer with my arm. When I started having my children, I promised myself I would never hit my children; pound them in any way. That's what the old people told us not to do. You use your mouth to teach your children You don't hit them, you'll injure them somehow, the old people used to say to us.

*A: Melvina? How many children did you have?*

M: Ten of my children are living. I had seven miscarriages. I was married 48 years to Fred McNabb. I knew about the poor part of our lives ; how we had a hard time and yet we had no alcohol in them years. We lived the real Indian way. It was the real Indian way. I enjoyed that.

*A: How many grandchildren and great grandchildren do you have?*

M: I have 43 grandchildren and 22 great grandchildren. I'm so proud of them. I'm so tired now at my age. I just have to sit there and watch them. I can't be loving them, holding them.

*A: What church were you baptized in?*

M: I was baptized in the United Church. Me and my family used to go to church. You know, the nicest part about going to boarding school, was that we were taught the bible. We were taught every Sunday. We were taught to be clean. When we were cleaning something, we had to do it thoroughly and it all came in handy when I got married. I was able to keep clean, scrub, scrub.

I'm glad I learned a lot from my parents and grandparents. Soon after I got married, my grandmother died, my dad's mother. I'll never forget old Keewisk because I used to wait on him. I was able to do things for him like go and get water or wood. He taught me a lot, a lot of things. I was able to use those teachings as I went along in life. I went by what I was taught by him.

*A: Those are very good words you have spoken, Melvina. There is one question before we close. It is probably one we can't avoid. How did you get along with the other students? For the most part, did you get along or were there some students that an upper hand on you. Some people call this 'bullying'. How did you deal with that?*

M: We had a group of our own people from File Hills. They were these ladies who were mean to us. We had to do what they asked of us or we would get punished. For instance, there was this one lady who was the same age as I who set the fire or water hose on us in our beds. We were all soaking wet. We couldn't tell on her because we would get pounded by her bigger sisters. That was abuse in itself! As we got older, we made a plan all of us, fifteen year olds. All right now, who's going to do the fighting? As usual, I was chosen to be the fighter. We made a big circle and we put this lady in the middle of the circle. Boy! Did we ever lambaste her! She's not going to boss us anymore. That's how that part stopped. She quit.

*A: Those are things that go on in institutions of different kinds. For myself, at this boarding school, we smaller ones used to get bullied. We had a saying so we wouldn't get hit, "I'll give you something when my mudder (mother) comes!" So we'd give up an apple, orange or candy to these bullies when our 'mudders' came. When we see our former school mates,*

*we'll run across the street. We'll greet each other and hug one another. We went through the very same thing but we're good friends now. Would you comment on that, Melvina?*

M: When we'd meet a school chum, we knew how to love one another - hold hands. A lot of times, we have to pity each other, be kind to one another. For instance when we all got wet at the time of the fire hose incident, we were all lined up, our night gowns were all soaking wet. This one staff member, an older teacher, from the sewing room, was strapping us. I told Pauline (our cousin), "Oh! I hope she gets tired before she gets to me." We got punished for everything we did wrong. These white people, these staff seemed to have had some kind of, what? - ungodly energy!

Before I got married, I was courting with Fred and he'd come to visit me at my Mom's. Hubbubs (interviewer's nickname) and Auntie Nora would get there. Fred gave them and my younger brother, Johnnie Bear oranges to go outside, paying them. When we had our fortieth anniversary, in comes Ann with her bag of oranges. She handed these oranges to Fred, and said, "Here, I'm paying you back." Oh, was he ever proud. He was holding these oranges up. We have a picture of him.

*A: Melvina, through the humour and Aboriginal Spirituality or the 'Indian Ways', we seek healing from those bad experiences in Indian residential school. Do you agree?*

M: Oh yes, yes. I'm very happy that my oldest son is very, very traditional. I have a few daughters that don't pay attention. But still they follow me wherever I go, like pow-wows. They are not into that. I'd like to throw them into a Sweat and teach them a lesson.

*A: We'll end this interview, Melvina. This has been such a pleasant time for me. I'm going to take her a piece of moosemeat. I wish I had some wild berries. I haven't been able to find any saskatoons yet. They'll show up somewhere. I want to thank Cindy and her husband for allowing me into their home. I understand they are very good to you. Thank you.*

M: I always thank them because they are very kind. When I have no other place to go, I come and stay with them. I moved from Regina to Maple Creek. I'm very thankful for that because it's a nice quiet town. Very traditional Indians live there. Harold, my oldest son, when he comes to visit in Maple Creek, is always asked to help with their ceremonies, like feasts.

*A: Thank you very much, Melvina and thank you, Cindy and Lyle. Goodbye.*

**Bernard Pinay**

*Today is September 25, 2001. I'm sitting in the beautiful Qu'Appelle Valley. The sun is out, wisps of clouds are swirling about. It is my honour to be interviewing Mr. Bernard Pinay. who is a survivor of the File Hills Indian residential School(FHIRS).*

*Ann(A): I will ask you to ad lib regarding your experience as a student at the FHIRS as well I would appreciate your talking about Aboriginal Spirituality; whether those ceremonial ways were permitted in the FHIRS. As well, Could you share your recent participation in Aboriginal spiritual ceremonies. Thank you.*

Bernard(B): I was six years old when I went to FHIRS. No, we never went to any ceremonies when we were little because my folks, my dad was always working out so our mother raised us. We never really participated in any thing like feasts or Sweats. I never thought of it until after I left school. Some of those ceremonies were, I guess, just Sun Dances, feasts and Pipe ceremonies but I never really went to any of those until after I came home and when I got old.. When I was away, I left home right after I left school because my mom and my grandmother told me there was nothing there for me. They asked me what was I going to do now that I left school so I was forced to go out to work. I'm thankful I did or thankful they gave me that advice. I never did really live on the reservation, mostly I stayed off the reserve. My

kids didn't like it on the reserve. After we started to raise kids, they didn't like it so I was forced to move out again.

No, when we were in boarding school we never tried to do any of the Old Indian Ways because the staff and the school were really dead against it. There was nothing we could do about it; some tried but they always got hell. So I can't really name what the ceremonies were because we really never had any. The only ceremonies we went to was when we went to church, It didn't do me a bit of good - a real Widigo. Like burning Sweetgrass, we never even heard of it until we left school; we never had any in school because I don't think they would let us; probably get pounded if they found out.

The experience was alright; I have nothing against File Hills School. The only thing is I didn't get much schooling because I spent a lot of time working on the farm. I still think the FHRS owes me about five or six years of wages, working on the farm there. Our supervisor, he was the one that was supposed to do that but he didn't, I did. All us boys would take turns. I spent most of my time there because I liked horses, looking after horses is what I done most. Then too, I milked cows. Other than that, it wasn't too bad. They learned us everything; it kind of helped in a way. It didn't make me lazy. I preferred that than going to school.

There was nothing really bad about school; it was just the way you accepted it, the way you conducted yourself. A lot of guys got along real good but there were others who didn't like it. I think it was all in their heads. I've talked to students who went to Lebret Residential School and we talked about the food we used to eat. There was nothing wrong with our food compared to what they used to tell us. It was terrible. We used to get lot of fruit, meat and potatoes; we were never short of that. The boys planted and looked after the potatoes. I got no complaint about going to school. The only complaint I have is that I had to work all the time as I grew older. After I left school, my grandma and my mother told me that there was no place for

me on the reserve so I just up and left. Yes, I worked most of my life and raised a family.

I really didn't follow the 'old Ways' until after I come home; just recently I started to get into it. I go to a lot of pipe ceremonies, pow-wows and Sun Dances. I'm getting relaxed with it and believe in it. Before I never had a chance like when I went to school and I never knew anything about pow-wow and all that. You see, I never had a culture before I went to school. I didn't have any for them to take away. After I left school, I was forced to leave home, not really forced but I was told I couldn't be 'a reserve fella'. I'm glad that all them things happened because I'm living fairly good. I don't have to depend on anybody. In a lot of ways, school did me a lot of good.

The Old Indian Ways are starting to come back. I talk to many Elders who are very helpful. They come and visit our family. I try to bring up my great grandson with the teachings of the Old Indian Ways because he does not learn those things in school. It's up to me and his grandma to teach him. He's a good listener and he's interested. He asks me, "Why are you an Indian, Grandpa?" He asks me those kind of questions and they all pan out. He wants to know these things. I have a hard time to answer his questions so I have to tell him that I have to talk to someone else, some older people. Even my kids when they went to school, they didn't know about Aboriginal traditions until we started going to pow-wows, they started to grasp it.

*A: Did your parents or grandparents speak Cree or Saulteaux?*

B: They spoke Saulteaux. My dad spoke a mixture of Cree and Saulteaux. My mother was Cree. My grandmother spoke Cree to us. That's where I picked up a little bit of Cree. I can talk a little bit of Cree but I can't really carry a sentence. I say a few words and the next person will complete the sentence for me. When the old people are praying in Cree, I am able to follow what they are saying. I'm picking that



up pretty good.. Most elderly people talk Cree to me. They tell me, “That’s the only way you’re going to learn by listening because you’re not going to learn by reading a book because you’re not going to understand those dialects. You have to listen to somebody, just don’t gawk around.”

*A: That is interesting that you said that the FHIRS experience was not that bad. I just wanted to ask you, “How old are now, Bernard?” I have a lot of respect for older people and I just wondered how old are you?*

B: Oh. I’m about 29! No, I am 70 years old. I was born in 1931.

*A: One of the things that stayed with us that is the humour and I’ve always known you to bring lightheartedness to a situation. Do you agree that our Indian humour is one of our outstanding characteristics?*

B: Definitely. I go to a lot of places, and visit these older people. They are sitting there and I say “Hello” and add some stupid little things, half in broken Cree and they laugh like hell. That’s the way I am even with white people, I say something stupid and we’ve gained a lot of respect through that. There is one thing I wanted to add, is this, in File Hills, religion was never driven to us. If we wanted to go to church, usually they had it on a Sunday, we could make an excuse and they wouldn’t say nothing. Christianity was never forced on us, not in classroom; just through the principal trying to be a preacher. But she was pretty good . They didn’t try to drive it into you,”You go there, you gotta go here, you gotta do this.” That is one of the reasons I liked about File Hills. You said your prayers before you ate and your prayers before you went to bed. I still do that at home. I taught my kids to do that. They pray for that little boy. He won’t go to sleep until his grandma’s there to pray with him. He says, “I got to pray first.”

*A: You know, thinking back, you and I come from the same community and our parents worked very hard. The missionaries, Miss Drake and Miss Brown worked very closely with the people and the community was strong. Do you agree?*

*B: They used to make visits and if you asked them to say a prayer. They didn't say, "Well, let's sit down." They liked that.*

*A: They were everything, family counsellors, spiritual counsellors.*

*B: One time I was down and out. She came and talked to us for two hours and I felt really good about that. I understood why she was there; she wasn't just there to get up and preach on Sunday.*

*A: I hear you saying that you have the capability to ... you're able to blend these two ways, Indian ways and Christian ways today in your life.*

*B: It really is. I didn't learn that at school. I learned it from my mother. She was a strong Christian. She didn't drive it into your head; she talked in a way you would understand it. If you didn't want to listen, she told you to go outside and play. There were some families that were divided by religion. Some of my relatives were like that.*

*A: You, your wife and family attend Indian ceremonies?*

*B: A lot of our people at first had difficulty accepting that but now they understand.*

*A: I want to thank you very much for allowing me to talk with you. Before we began this interview, we had a very good time revisiting the old days and we talked about the good qualities of our parents, their high morals in life and how we ourselves as parents, grandparents and great grandparents are trying to follow in our daily lives. Ah-how!*

## **Millicent Stonechild**

*Good Morning. Today is September 5, 2001. It is a beautiful fall day as we sit in the Qu'Appelle Valley. I'm here to interview Ms. Millicent Stonechild. She is another survivor of the File Hills Indian Residential School (FHIRS).*

*Ann(A): How old when you went to the FHIRS? Please tell me about your experience at the FHIRS and Milli, feel free to approach this topic from your own perspective.*

Milli (M): Thank you, Ann. I was seven years old. There needs to be some things said about where I came from before the FHIRS, because these are the things that have maintained me all my life, after all. Before I went to school, there were a lot of Kokums and Mooshums who had very regular lives. Our lives were very simple; there was no welfare; there was no electricity. In many ways, we had a good social life . There was no fear of violence. My own father was one of the first drinkers.

Our lives were very much enriched by having the Elders living in our midst. These Elders came to help my parents who would come to take me home with no hard feelings; didn't hold it against my family or my Dad. I was very fortunate to experience the spirit of the old people. There was a lot of safe places; a lot of happy places. I think it's very important to say that I wasn't brought out of a miserable situation. In fact, before I went to school, I was able to say my peace to my father because the old people listened to me. He really didn't hold it against me because the Elders, my grandparents, encouraged me to speak as a child. They heard me.

And I think that is something that should be addressed when one thinks now of we as seven year olds into a highly regimented place. We may as well have been in away out in Siberia. We were so totally isolated in this boarding school. All around the school yard, there were fences, beyond which we didn't set foot. Bells were ringing all day long; determining our every move so there was no room for self-direction, our innovative kind of way of playing. We had nothing to play with so we

really made the best of things as little children. We'd make believe stories; believedness all over our playground. Then we'd tell stories just to make each other laugh. The laughter spared our little hides, spared us from what Melvina called, "an ungodly energy". The regimentation was so fierce. It left us with a sense of fear all the time because the staff could just lash out slap you on the head or box your ears. It was very different from the life we experienced as children that all of us had. So when the children reached the age of seven, it was time to enter the FHIRS in September. Many of us as survivors, experienced September as "Sad September." Many of us have now found a way through all that and have made a different life for our children.

I stayed at FHIRS for seven years. Then I went to Brandon Indian Residential School and I went to Brandon Collegiate for high school. That was fine. While I was a child patiently got to be up where Melvina lived with the great grandparents. I was too young to learn the ceremonies but experienced the spirit of the people. We communicated with Kokum in sign language which I can still remember. My great grandfather was blind. My grandfather, Mooshum Alec, Melvina's dad was doing Sweats all the time way back in those days. I was aware of these very sacred things. Somehow in my little child heart, even though I don't speak Cree, I was to know the presence of these old people. In my own life, I never looked to Hollywood for any role models; my role models were the parents, grandparents, great grandparents. They were there for me therefore I knew definitely I came from good people. Then into the boarding school where we experienced a total emotional barren atmosphere whereby we felt rejected. We seemed to have lost our identity not only as individuals but that of a culture. We wore the same kind of uniforms and we had our hair chopped off in the same manner. Another thing we had to do was to try and get rid of our accent. We started the morning off with singing, "God Save the Queen." I think we should've been singing, "God Save Canada." Then we'd say the Lord's Prayer. Then we went

into this spiel, “Here we are, ready in a row, to oil our speech machine, it needs it, you know.” Austere environment, one that evoked great fear prevailed. This fear had its roots in the dread of punishment. But for the most part, I didn’t get into any mischief.

When we are getting discouraged and in need of healing, we must remember those people who helped us. In particular, I think of my friend, Mabel Star. There was much laughter amongst the children, a sustaining factor. We also comforted one another from the loneliness. In September, we took turns crying. In spite of some of the ‘bullying’ that went on, we established life long friendships

I didn’t know much about my own culture when I entered the FHRS to experience any alienation. When I went to boarding school, already we’d been going to Sunday School at the Wanapew United Church on the Peepeekisis Indian Reservation.

I never had a deep ingrained way, not a solid life decision about churches. Now we’re gathering together in these days, way past boarding school to talk about healing. It is wonderful to me, that now within the cultural framework that we’ve all found each other, those that are Catholic, those that are Protestant. Those lines are fading. That’s what I like to find now as we enter old age Those things are coming together because I didn’t want to be identified as belonging to this group or that group. Now there is acceptance of one another. Along with this going to school, there is this sense of not being unacceptable as you are. To this day, I detest the expression, ‘make something of yourself.’ So I’m very aware of presumptions.

In those days, there were different attitudes of helping a child develop. They were two diametrically opposed views. We were treated like we were born in sin therefore we were unacceptable beings when we are born. These attitudes are so ingrained. It’s as if parents are trying to beat the child’s will out of them to bent

himself/herself to please the parent and that's how we were treated at school, like we'd never measure up. This sense brings one of rejection. Severe punishments were inflicted on us. Our way was to teach the child his/her own inner discipline. I would like to point out some spiritual violations which are of a non-Aboriginal origin. Some of our parents have copied those ways without being aware they are doing it. This has been going on for three or four generations. So today, we are finding our way out of that. We, as Aboriginal people, are trusting our own judgements with our own children; trust that we can be gentle but firm. We are learning that discipline is not something that is exercised from outside as whacking your child on the body or hitting him or her on the head. That is in no way, shape or form, discipline. That 'ungodly energy' that Melvina talks about, I cannot get over that expression but it certainly means rampage and anger being inflicted on a child.. So discipline was.... they used to have an expression, 'payatuck' - watch yourself, because their way of disciplining was that we see our own styles and own behaviour, and not to be afraid to admit our wrong doings. To reiterate, discipline that comes from within the child is more purposeful - inner discipline. Their way allowed us to try to fix things and if they don't work, try another way. We weren't flogged with recriminations like, "You should have listened to me." The old people wanted us to see for our own selves, our own behaviours. To me, that is a great respect, "here are the guidelines, they are here for you to see where you have transgressed." We were given the responsibility for ourselves. This has not even begun to be addressed for the Native people in our struggles for big 'S', Self -government and what I'm talking about is small 's', self - government. There comes amongst the people, a new life. It's there but for me, of course, I feel it's not going fast enough. They're still looking at trying to educate people. These things I speak of; they're there amongst the people; that's where the power is.

Why would we want to be going looking to the perpetrators to help in our healing. Our own answer, our spiritual energy is here amongst us. In the last twenty years, my own interest has been going to do for my own family, for my own self; things that I needed to do. I didn't call it healing. For the last forty years, I've committed myself to trying to be different with my children before it's not too late.

In the last twenty years, I've tried to be like my own Kokum with my own grandchildren. Her kind of discipline entailed the teachings that the Creator gave us a consciousness and which way we were to go. The Elders helped us to see that we were capable of using our own judgment which helped me to keep on the straight and narrow as a young woman working outside our own community in the summers and when I was going to high school. The old people gave us strong teachings about our own personal conduct. The strongest messages came from the old people, and from the grandparents and our parents, Ann. These Moshums and Kokums spoke out and we listened.

To this day and that day as a child, it's been dreams; it's just like having visits with them. I don't try to will anything; it just comes. When I quit drinking, I didn't know the culture. I took the attitude for myself, "it's a new day; abandon yourself to the Creator." I had an absolute belief that the ones that are gone were assisting me when I came off drugs and alcohol cold turkey.

I was truly to experience true healing by being aware that those Old Ones who had gone ahead were walking with me. I, myself, have experienced marvellous physical healings. I'm not a ritualistic person. I learned more of ceremonies in the alcohol work when I began to invite Elders to help us with Sweats. That became very acceptable and I was very happy to have used our own cultural ways in helping us to deal with alcoholism.

The more we gather at the grassroots level; and identify these things that have been there for us and now we find them amongst ourselves; the power of the Sacred Circle and the power of the people who come to gather together. That is a powerful resource. The more we do this amongst our people the more we'll advance despite whatever is going on politically over our heads. We're free people. We must gather; we don't need permission. We don't need experts. They're with us. I really question Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Creativity is at the top and my own Social Work philosophy is totally different. We are a creative people. there are many other cultural things besides the inner - discipline that are required of us. One of these is that everyone has a sense of creativity and to feel a sense of the Creator.

One positive outcome of the boarding school is the regularity of the daily routine. There is a lot to be said about order; it gives the children a sense of security. There does not have to be the ringing of bells and the straight line marching. I'm speaking about an orderly life. It does not to be regimented whereby so everything falls apart if someone steps out of line. Have a regularity that gives children a sense of what to expect. Our atmosphere is very important. I see healing much more than just what happened to me in boarding school. I carried this atmosphere unto my children's lives and I was fortunate enough to recognise that I didn't have to parent that way. I could find a gentler way; I learned to trust myself as a parent. My children responded. I didn't need to 'play the heavy' with them. In that way, as a parent, I facilitated their problem solving skills. I didn't have to answer their questions for them; I merely listened to them as they sorted out their problems and they were able to make their own decisions. I was able to instill confidence in my children. If they want to say something, they were heard. I learned to do it with respect. As a child, as long as I sat quiet in the back in the old people's cabin and they were doing their pipes, I was allowed to be in their presence.



Perseverance is another quality with which I learned at the boarding school.. When you had to scrub that old floor three or four times a day, so you could make someone happy, you did it. One Saturday morning, we were peeling potatoes, the principal came by and said, "See these thick potato skins, don't throw these away." After lunch, four of us potato peelers sat all afternoon peeling the peelings. And then we got another third pot of potatoes, which just goes to show you how clumsy we were and we didn't know how to peel potatoes. This was something different in the break of the routine, there were many things that would happen that would be something different, like peeling carrots or peeling peelings that would be great excitement. It didn't matter how silly it was.

My own concerns of the last twenty years as far as healing goes, for my own self, just go there, be there, do all those things that my own mother missed and I don't want to miss with my children and grandchildren. So that they will grow up to be people that will make their way and be strong without being violent. Even now, I am happy for the lives my little grandchildren have and am eternally thankful that I've lived long enough to go and be with them when they were babies. I am at a very good time of my life and also because we are talking about boarding schools and many of us have come through strong after all our struggles. And now we are able to help wherever we can, wherever our people gather and just in our own daily lives. So my old age is really wonderful! So that's it, Ann Callahan, and good luck with your paper, I hope you do well and I am very happy for you.

*(A): Thank you Millie, You have a very strong message for all of us. Your parenting skills certainly profited many of us, not only as parents as grandparents and now you are a great-grandmother. A very strong person in the community and I sure like your approach and just listening to you talk has helped me heal and you give me freedom to express, "Yes I am a worthwhile person" and I thank you very much for sharing today and I would like to hear*

*more from you, maybe at a later date. And on such a beautiful day, you have given me a wonderful gift, the joy of being an Aboriginal woman. Ah-how!*

**Irene Creeley**

*Today, I am interviewing Mrs. Irene Creeley whose maiden name was Irene Thomas. Mrs. Creeley is from the Okanese First Nation. She is 67 years old and is the mother of twelve children and has many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, "too numerous to count." She is a survivor of the File Hills Indian Residential School (FHIRS). My name is Mrs. Ann Callahan who is seeking out the stories to gain a perspective from the survivors regarding the experience at this school. Today is May 4, 2001.*

*Ann (A): How old were you, Irene when you first went to FHIRS?*

*Irene (I): I was six years old.*

*A: That's very young to leave home. Did you experience the ceremonies of the Old Indian Ways ?*

*I: There weren't many people into the Indian ways as the ceremonies were outlawed by the Indian agent. So many times, we attended these ceremonies out of sight of the Indian agent. But we were often reminded by our parents to respect the old people and to always acknowledge all our relatives. When we approached our relatives, particularly the older members, we were instructed to kiss, hug and shake hands with them. There were several old people whom I clearly remember. Two names are Old Keewisk and old Ochapowace. These men were healers and advisors as to the way we should conduct our daily lives and how to live harmoniously with everyone in the community. We only saw these old people in the summer months. Our mother would talk Cree to these old people and introduce us children to them. Sometimes, it was a reintroduction, reminding these old people that her children were relatives of theirs.*

The boarding school had much to do with taking away our Aboriginal culture, our language, our ceremonies and our dress. All that was of an Aboriginal nature was put aside. For instance, we were to speak English only. As children, we heard the Cree language when we were home for the summer holidays. Parents spoke amongst each other but not to us children. We were told not to talk our own native language, Cree, in boarding school because we still had to abide by the white man.

*A: So the manner in which your mother approached the old people was a re-uniting or re-bonding of the relationship among the family members, particularly the older people, who were respected members of the extended family, so to speak?. Mrs. Creeley, I am going to give you this microphone and please feel free to talk about your experience and give us some words of direction for our children, grandchildren and those yet to come.*

I: Yes, we were fully accepted and asked to join in or to be observers, for instance, at feasts or Sweats and name -giving ceremonies. When we joined the old people at feasts, we were glad to be in their presence and to enjoy eating wild meat, berries and bannock when we were home in the summer time as we were often hungry at the boarding school. We travelled by a team of horses to Okanese and Starblanket Indian Reservations. We went to the Rain Dance at Okanese; I did not fully understand as a young child as we did not participate at any of these ceremonies at the boarding school. Even though our parents were quite busy keeping livestock, planting and harvesting bumper crops, they strived to keep up with the Old Indian Ways like the burning of Sweetgrass. Our mother would do this before fierce electric storms in the summer. Although we attended church services at the Wanapew United Church regularly, our parents sought to have us participate in the ceremonies like the Rain Dance and the feast.

I will now talk about the FHIRS. We had very poor meals, very poor meals. We had skim milk on our porridge. The staff got the best; they got the cream. One of the tasks when you worked in the staff dining room was to warm up their plates

before meals. We were glad to change jobs once a month, especially if we were assigned to the kitchen. Here, at least, we could eat an extra scrap of leftover food from the staff table after meals.

We had a very hard life at the boarding school. We were made to line up for activities of the day. There were constant commands fired at us. If we didn't do as the matron said, we'd get slapped on the head, cuffed on the ears, or spanked on our bottoms. Miss Staples was one matron who strapped on our bare behinds. We were made to lean over the bottom of the cot, take down our bloomers, then she lay several heavy wallops on our backsides. When we ran away, we were captured, made to line up. The staff did not like the answer when we said we were always hungry as to why we fled the place. We were then strapped with a leather belt or strap. The principal lay these blows forcibly down on our arms, from the wrist up to the inside of our lower arm, up to the elbow area. Our hands, wrists and arms by the end of the strapping were so swollen and puffed up, we could barely bend our arms. Our heads were shaved bald. We were told not to say anything to our parents; not that they could do anything about it. Our parents were discouraged from visiting us frequently because the staff were afraid the children would tell their parents about the abuse. When our parents did learn of the abuse, they were powerless to remedy the situation, after all, the parents' view was that they were under the hands of the government. One situation of abuse which I cannot forget is the sad incident of when this twelve-year-old boy passed away at the school. At the outset, the staff told his sister nothing when she inquired about his illness. She was merely told that the children should mind their own business.

I have never known the staff to have meetings to review the way the school was being operated. There was much confusion amongst the staff, an inconsistency of their punitive measures. Only a few staff members showed some sort of empathy for our situation, like dear old Mr. Cowling who gave me permission to go to bed

when he found me standing in the dark basement hallway all night. At this one particular time that I am talking about is the incident whereby I was put behind two glass doors. I must have done something wrong. I stayed there all night. I was very tired, I would sit down for a while then I'd stand, waiting for someone to come and tell me to go to bed. Mr. Cowling, the night watchman, came just about the time it was coming daylight as he was making his rounds around the barn, the school yard and throughout the boarding school itself. He instructed me to go to bed which I did.

It was very hard for the children especially those that were only five years old. Some of these children came from far away; northern Indian communities near Prince Albert. Others came from southern places like Carry-The-Kettle, and communities along the Qu'Appelle Valley like Pasqua, and Muscowpetung. There were children from the File Hills four reservations, Peepeekisis, Okanese, Starblanket and Little Black Bear. Then there were those who came from Keeseekoose Reservation, north-eastern part of the prairie region in Saskatchewan.

I was very lonesome in boarding because our parents treated us in a very special way. When we went home for Easter, Christmas and New Years, we experienced these occasions as very happy times.

After I left the boarding school, I went out into the 'white world' to work. I worked on a farm, then I worked at a summer resort in Manitoba which I truly enjoyed. After this life, I raised twelve children. My oldest son, Lindsay, is in the medical field work. I made contact with Lindsay in my later years. Life was challenging and things didn't come easy. I raised the other children from William Creeley. I ran away from my home to try to locate Lindsay, my baby, who was in a foster home. My friend, Ruth Brass and I hitchhiked to Lipton, Saskatchewan, a few miles from my home but we were unable to find him. In those days, there was no protection for women who were being mistreated by their spouses so I pled with my husband to please not to hit me when I returned to our home. My children were all

breast fed. My husband was a great hunter so my children were raised on wild meat and berries. They were very healthy.

I married William Creeley who was a strong believer in the Old Indian Ways. Through his teachings, I learned a great deal about those ways. I'm quite happy about it. There should be more of these teachings to the people especially the younger generation. There is much crime on the reservations. There are programs in the jails to help our young Aboriginal people to help them change their lifestyle, one that is for the better. While young people are serving their time, they have a lot of time to think and it is good if they take up the Old Indian Ways to help them in their rehabilitation. We pray for them and think about them. We haven't forgotten them because they are our relatives.

I am very glad our children are attending schools on their communities and they are much happier than we were at boarding school. I'm so comforted knowing my grandchildren will not have to go through the Indian residential school system that I did. Many of the First Nations people are again taking up the ways of the old people and they are giving those teachings to the younger generation.

*A: Mrs. Creeley, I wish to thank you for giving me the time and most of all, the nature of the FHIRS and your experience there. You have come full circle from being a little sister to that of a great-grandmother. Thank you for your words of wisdom.*

### **Alvin Stonechild**

*Today is Dec. 4, 2001. I'm sitting in the home of Alvin and Ramona Stonechild on the Okanese First Nation Community. It is a nice frosty day. I'm here to interview, Al Stonechild, who cares for or maintains 16 head of buffalo for the Okanese First Nation Community. He is then known as a bison rancher. For the purposes of the study entitled "Reclamation and Retention of Aboriginal Spirituality as a Means of Healing for the Survivors of the File Hills Indian Residential School",*

*I will now introduce him as one of the survivors of that school. I feel very honoured to be talking with Al, an Elder.*

*Ann(A): My first question to you is this, how old were you when you entered the FHIRS?*

*Al: I was seven years old*

*A: How old were you when you left there?*

*Al: I was 15 years when I left in 1950.*

*A: Before you went to the FHIRS, Did your parents and grandparents take you to the ceremonies of the Old Indian Ways ? And can you remember what those were?*

*Al: Yes, My folks took me to such events as feasts. My old Mossum Keewisk held Sweats way back in an old shack back in the bush. We held Rain Dances at that time in the neighbourhood. I was always close to him and he and my Kokum spoke Cree to me all the time so I learned to become fluent in that language before I went to the FHIRS.*

*A: Do you remember if the people held these ceremonies out in the open or did they feel they were always under the scrutiny of the Indian agent?*

*Al: Before my time, the people were closely monitored by the Indian agent. However, in my time the Indian agent was less inclined to monitor these dances. As a matter of fact, it was during this time that the Rain Dances were held to honour the men who were going to war. It is even said that the Indian agent brought blankets and special food for the occasion.*

*A: This is a very interesting part that you are telling me about the men who went overseas. Your dad was one of those men who went to war in the First World war and we honour that very much. In addition to your ability to speak Cree, having learned*

*the language from your old grandfather, old Keewisk, are you able today to speak Cree today?*

Al: I can speak it partly only however I am able to understand it quite well. When I attend the ceremonies, I understand the Elders when they speak in Cree. Often, during these events, they will then follow up what they said in English; there will be an interpreter as many of the younger people are not fluent in the Cree language.

*A: When you were in FHIRS, were you allowed to speak Cree?*

Al: No, if ever we were caught speaking Cree, we were punished by receiving the strap or being scolded. So we talked Cree in very soft tones.

*A: Your parents and grandparents spoke the Cree language, Our parents spoke to each other but not often to us children. Have you any thoughts on why that was?.*

Al: They knew that English was being taught to us in school and it would be better for us children to learn to speak English before we went to school.

*A: What was your experience like when you went to the FHIRS? I appreciate that this is a very difficult question as it was for many of the other survivors with whom I spoke. Was it mostly a negative one or was there some good times?*

Al; The boarding school experience was not a good experience from day one. I didn't like it at all. I and the other little boys were taken up into the boys' dormitory and thrown into the bathtub. The water taps were turned on full blast. Water was running and gushing out and this scared the hell out of me. The supervisor was scrubbing the hell out of us. Our hair was completely shorn off to baldheads. There was a great deal of yelling and screaming from us younger boys. We were full of fear. It was a very disturbing experience.. From there on in, I stayed close to the older boys, more or less, for protection and to learn from them what to do and what not to do. After that ordeal, I had to learn how to conduct myself around the teachers, supervisors and principal. As well, there was a new religion to be learned.



During my time at school, I was required to work like a man even though I was just a teenager, maybe 13 or 14 years old. I was big for my age. They took advantage of me. Not only that, I was made to do other tasks, like running errands which included taking me way out onto the reserve. I was to carry messages that were relayed from the Indian agent to the principal then to the supervisors. In the cold winter days, I was one of the boys who was always chosen to hook up a team of horses or take a couple of good riding horses and take two boys and go out and take a message, usually these messages were not good news. Sometimes, if some of the children had run away from school and went home; some of the distances these children had to travel was an average of ten miles in very cold winter conditions. We'd have to go out all hours of the night to see if the children made it safely to their homes to make sure that they didn't freeze to death. We were ordered to do this. They didn't call in the police to do this; they used us. If we didn't obey the principal when he carried out this command, we'd get punished. It was a very hard thing to do, taking the news to the parents that the children had to return to school and taking children back to school. We realized that the reason they ran away from school was because of the loneliness and homesickness they were experiencing. It wasn't easy to tell the children they had to return to the school. Either the parents would have to bring them back to school or else they would send one of the staff supervisors out to get them. Usually we'd find them home, spent time with the children and their families who would feed us. Eventually, the parents would accompany the children back to the school but somehow we the messengers would take the brunt of this unpleasant act from the parents or people in the community. One time I had to deliver the tragic news of my sister's death who froze to death in a fierce winter blizzard. That was sad! I spent some time with my family. It was very hard for me as my family was in mourning. The government officials didn't have to pick me; they should have picked someone else other than myself. I was taken advantage of and if

I didn't obey, I would have been strapped or would have had my privileges taken away. I didn't feel comfortable carrying out those things; sometimes I felt it would have been easier to desert or run away myself. I did run away, myself, a couple of times for which I was beaten severely and had my head shaved bald.

At our young age, we worked hard, a great deal of manual labour was carried out by we boys at our young age, like working in the gardens. We tended to rows of vegetables so the children could eat vegetables for a good part of the school term. We stored these vegetables in root cellars which we cleaned out from time to time. I can say that I had six years of work experience even though we were driven like slaves. One could term this kind of work as child labour. Today, I still have the knack of doing things properly even though I had some training from the supervisors and instructors. Some were still not satisfied. If there is anything I can derive from this experience at the FHIRS, it is this. I execute a great deal of efficiency in chores or projects that I carry out today. I have learned to do fencing, building corrals and sheds for livestock. I do general repairs around the ranch. To this day, I utilize the work ethic I learned from the school but not all of this was learned solely at the school. Much of what I am able to do today came from life's experiences later on. I worked on farms and ranches in the western part of the country and way down into the southern United States. I learned to groom horses, to take care of large herds of cattle, chickens and hogs. I have learned to do fencing, building corrals and sheds for livestock. I also do general repairs around the ranch.

We were not dressed properly, especially in the winter. We'd freeze our hands, ankles, feet, ears, and noses. We'd get severe frost bite. We were hungry much of the time so on occasion, we'd steal food for which we were hauled into the office and get pounded and strapped if got caught. Performing hard labour, not being dressed properly and being undernourished left us in poor health. All these poor conditions later had their toll on our general health in later years. Today, I have had three major

surgeries. I don't know what these United Church people were taught but it was not good.

We never received any nurturing, no appreciation for the work we did nor did we get paid for anything. We were over worked, under fed and abused. It was a hard way to learn. They (the staff) sure done a good job of taking our culture away. We were made to feel pretty ashamed of being Indian. They tried their best to teach us the religion of the United Church. I didn't feel comfortable with it. I always remembered my traditional ways what my Mooshum Keewisk taught me. Those teachings are still with me even today. Some of his teachings have come to me in visions and dreams. So by spending the few years in that school, the FHRS, we actually didn't completely lose much of the Aboriginal Spirituality as we knew it and know it today. Mooshum told us to listen to our visions, dreams and signs. In our time of healing, he told us that these Indian ways would be brought back to us and given back to us even though we didn't have a teacher with us all the time. I experienced some of that so I am very grateful for that. I still have and practise those ways and I feel strong. I didn't buy those ways. Those ways came to me by being a good person and by meeting with our own people on traditional grounds across the country. The Sweat Lodge was given to me by Keewisk in a dream and in a vision. I can't talk to you fully about that. In our way, you'd have to sit down, give me tobacco and I'd also have a little ceremonial to bring you some of these visions and stories that I experienced. Look at the buffalo. How did they come? They're here. The buffalo are doing us a lot of good. They are quiet and humble animals. I love them; they tell me something. They give me peace, comfort and protection. I've heard a great deal about what they done for our people. They sustained our people over the years. They provided us with food, clothing, tools and shelter.

In closing, Ann, I didn't feel comfortable about bringing up the boarding school past. It is not easy to talk about it because I suffered myself and I seen a lot

of our people suffer. The results were not good from those times. Some of the people are not even interested in pursuing a lawsuit against the perpetrators of the FHIRS. Many of our people have passed on. It was hard for me. I didn't like the first lawyer that tried to handle my case; I just walked away from him and went to another one. When I seen this lawyer and told him what I wanted to bring up to him, he was willing to listen to what I had to say. He advised me to get to the bottom of what you want to tell me and what your feelings are about the FHIRS experience. He had me breaking down because it meant bringing up the past and I couldn't handle it. Today, Ann, I didn't feel good when you passed me tobacco and asked me for my story. I wanted to burn Sweetgrass to ask the Grandfathers for support but there was none available earlier when we first started this interview at another person's house other than my own place. So I talked to the Creator in my mind and asked for strength to share with you the information about my experience at the FHIRS. I hope you can use this; there is a lot more I can bring up but I am not fully prepared. Anything I share, sometimes it is about the past, I can do in the Sweat Lodge, in a Sharing Circle, while we're smudging. I hope you manage O.K. with what you are doing. I just wanted to let you know my feelings about talking about the issue about this boarding school experience. As you go, talk to the people and ask them if they want to smudge first before they talk; that way, they will feel much stronger and more comfortable with what they have to share with you. I don't know where this information is going after you use it in your education. I hope it doesn't go any further than that; we don't like to see it used by white people to make a personal financial gain from stories that we have to share. Ah-how, heya, heya.

*A: I want to thank you warmly for sharing your story and for the courage to complete that part of your life as a student in the FHIRS in a story. You are to be commented for overcoming such adverse conditions. You are regarded as one of the respected Elder of the Okanese First Nations Community. Thank you.*

## **Ben Stonechild**

*Ann (A): Today, I am interviewing Mr. Ben Stonechild this December day in the beautiful Qu'Appelle Valley. Mr. Stonechild has allowed me to tape to give me his story about his experience at the File Hills Indian Residential School.*

Ben(B): My name is Ben Stonechild from the Peepeekisis First Nation reserve. I attended the FHIRS from 1943 to the day it closed in 1949. I can't recall the grade I was when I left school, I was just a young boy with so many things happening and with so many things to fear. That we really didn't have time to do, this type of thing other than the everyday thing of the life of survival.

But we lived today because we survived this abuse and this terrible bringing up we went through in the boarding school although I remember some good things such as hunting rabbits out in the bushes there. We hunted with slingshots and there were some bad things that happened by the old woods, they shot at us with slingshots too. The rest there was nothing nice to remember about the bringing up in school other than Christmas day, we had Christmas evening when we had singing and all that going on. Kinda of a nice time, we had a little extra to eat in those special times. Kind of took us off of the old boring everyday life we had of survival.

Before I went to the boarding school I was raised in Drumheller, Alberta and when I was six years old I was brought to the FHIRS. My parents weren't brought up with the Indian ways although my mother knew some but we never took part because this fear was in our people not to mention this to the children or to be caught taking part in them. That was the experience my parents had. So they never spoke too much about these things. I can not name the ceremonies because they never spoke about any ceremonies other than that they did carry some words that were in ceremonies that my mother picked up from the old people. That is as far as things went.

In the boarding school we were not allowed to be practising anything, any of our cultural ways - burning Sweetgrass or anything like that. It was very strict in that area that we only go to the church and hear what the church spoke about towards the not so good things about our cultural ways. Calling us 'pagans' and calling us 'little savages' and things like that, that seemed was our ways.

My experience in the boarding school was not good, it was something I wanted to get away from as I got older and started thinking on my own a little bit - that I didn't want to have anything to do with this type of culture or type of learning because of the strictness of it and because of the beatings we got in there and it was something that would be that I disliked about it. That bothered me.

It bothered me just to be there in the day school on the reserve after I got out of the boarding school. I just bided my time to get out of there and go work. There were many worse things in the boarding school, things that I remember, getting beat up, getting my hands strapped and getting hit across the head with a strap. Suffering the sexual abuse that I was subject to through this boarding school.

Being as little as we were, we were afraid to voice out anything about these things. But today now, it is a little different, maybe we can get rid of all these mean and evil things that happened to us there - happened to me through this experience. But it hasn't bothered me so much, that I just forgot about it, just left it all behind and just remembered the good things that was hunting rabbits with slingshots, snaring gophers, things like that.

But as far as the education and things I don't recall too much about them, I recall the work we had to do which was heavy work for us little boys that we were forced to do, pile wood (green wood) and this wasn't easy. I had some bad experiences that possibly...getting hit with a stick of wood in the head and cutting my head open, that type of things happened to me. Things like getting thrown out of a

... racing down a team of horses and garbage barrels in the back and getting put in there and getting thrown out and rolling out on the ground and getting hurt in that area. So my experience there was not all that great in the boarding school.

What was good about being in the boarding school like I said was... the best experiences I had was hunting rabbits, these are the good times we had, at Christmas time. We got little gifts of clothing, maybe games and things like that, we looked forward to that. The playing I guess could be the only good thing about the boarding school. Where we were sometimes not being subject to being meaned on, being in the environment of being meaned on, there was no love in the boarding school. You had to show endurance because you couldn't cry if you got a strapping otherwise they made fun of you. So.. nobody ..you.. the supervisors...or the ones who took care of us... school head didn't seem to show us any love or we grew up without it therefore it was hard for us to show that kindness to others. Grow up being afraid to do anything thinking people would laugh at you, always being afraid of seeing the RCMP, still is that way today. Because of the threats that we got if we did anything wrong we would go to jail. We were afraid of jail at that time, today we don't seem to be afraid of anything like that.

After I left the boarding school I went working, thrashing, stooking, thrashing, doing all the type of labour that if you did your work, then nobody said anything, not like in the boarding school. Even if you did your work in the boarding school, you were still subject to the harshness of that job. When I left the boarding, school, I found work. I got married and raised a family. I did some farming. Farmed pretty good for awhile. My parents were farmers, my grandfather, Ben Stonechild was one of the first farmers on the File Hills Colony farm, an experience which was called an experiment, was moved from the Okanese reserve onto the Peepeekisis reserve where the type of life that we carried on in the boarding school was somewhat there where

the Catholics looked down on the Protestants and the Protestants looked down on the Catholics.

Being who we are, from a different reserve we were kind of called replacements, we were accepted on this reserve, so life had been one turmoil as to what the whiteman had done, had his hands in doing from the boarding school 'til after I got out of the boarding school. His effects are still felt on the reserve, it hasn't been forgotten. It hasn't went away, it is still there, it is still alive today, the effects he left on the colony. Now it is even getting worse, can't even make a claim because of the many people from different reserves live there and not really entitled to a claimant unless they are on their own reserve. So we have a lot of backlash suffering what was done in the early years and still effecting our families today whereas the Stonechild family is living off the reserve. We haven't got a land base to make a living on the reserve, so we go on suffering from the aftereffects of the decisions made in the earlier years. After I left the old boarding school, I did not follow the Old Ways, I followed the destructive ways of that culture. Destructive ways of civilization which seem to only show us Indians destructiveness, we've seen our country destroyed, all the waters and everything polluted through civilization.

Today there is not much we can do other than to use our cultural ways to pray and try to bring about some type of an in-between of where some of us are. It has worked by returning to our Old Ways to bring about contentment for us. After you find out who you are as an Indian person instead of trying to be something else through the whitemen's education, trying to be built up through someone else, to look down on your people through the ways of civilization, the oppression we feel from the white culture and the oppression we feel from our own people who follow the whiteman's culture and churches. Even then they have been learnt to say oppressive things against ones who follow the Old Ways. But the Great Spirit gave us our culture but being very fortunate I did find our cultural ways through searching - not



by asking anybody but through having belief that someday I would. Sure enough today I have quit drinking, quit smoking, I have done many things which a good culture should have - no gossiping, no swearing, things like that we try to follow these ways, we try to forget those ways. We have not looked back, we have looked only ahead. Even though things weren't good in the past, today we try to fix them up.

They have a cultural fund, they have a fund they call the healing fund. Even this I have no access to even though I like to get it but with the education that I have a hard time to follow the things, it makes it impossible for me to make application for the use of it just to learn my language even if there may be several of us, couple or three families of us to learn our language which we seem to feel is very essential at this time. If we want to pursue our cultural ways it seems it works better with our language. And therefore if it would be just simple for me to write in there...and draw up a little proposal to say that I needed a money for this purpose, that's why I find it impossible to do that, it doesn't make it possible for me to be able to get funding like that. So it is only the ones with the education and connections to certain things, certain governments, and certain leaders that seem to get this money and I don't know exactly what this could accomplish. But I try to get along without it, follow my ways the best way I can. But there are many people down to the grassroots, those people who are being neglected in this area of that healing. I went to the boarding school back in the 40s and to find myself finding it impossible to make application for this money. It is too bad that these funds are made available to guys like me who haven't got the education for filling out these papers or having the connections of bank funds and things like that.

But the system out there, I try not to have anything to do with it because I know what it has done to my life. I have been denied the rights of a treaty Indian, my rights have been denied to me because the promises that were made in treaties the

obligations weren't lived up by these people who go around civilizing people. They don't seem to know, talk about good things but they can not carry them out. That is not in their ways when it comes to our Indian people. I have not much good to say about that one, our boarding school and the treaty it says we will build a little school for you on the reserve and when it comes time we will give you a teacher. It didn't say boarding school and we find in this area the government has violated a treaty, breached a treaty or breach of trust committed when this took place. Many breaches of trust took place and I hope that the lawsuit that these people will think of the harshness that we went through to be who we are today, to try to keep those Old Ways. We went through a lot of harshness, a lot of ways, a lot of things that we shouldn't be here today, but here we are.

I will touch a little more on how I came about our cultural ways. It started sometime ago when I didn't pay no attention to our cultural ways. I was out hunting coyotes out on a skidoo with my brother-in-law. A coyote which I should have got within a short distance instead of a two mile open stretch which it took me and I still didn't get him and until he come to the edge of the bush and he just stopped there and looked at me. Something said there at the time that I was to quit, so I just left that coyote there sitting there looking at me and come back to my brother-in-law and told him I had to quit this. So at a later time, something came to me and said that I was to stop trapping which I done at that time, trapping, which was part of my life, wasn't really trapping, still getting hides, chasing coyotes and foxes. So something said I was to quit your old people referred to this as your little brothers and sisters so that it wasn't good to take their lives for a dollar. So I quit that not knowing that this was going to lead in farther.

So one winter we spent the winter having church meetings, church gatherings, just several families of us got together and always come back to speaking about our Old Indian Ways, our people's ways. That spring a Medicine Man came down from

the south to my place and when I listened to this man he spoke like no other man I had ever heard, not even from around the areas I lived in. But this man had a way of speaking which seemed to be wise, something I never heard before and it impressed me and what he left with me when he left. From that time on I went up to the north where they were practising these ways, using these ways and I went there for one whole year.

And the peyote ceremonies where they taught only good, taught of respect, taught to be a good person. So I followed that for one year and this Medicine Man up there gave me a Sweat Lodge. And in this Sweat Lodge I was told, always told, was mentioned to me many times, ... when I went up in there to the north you have to be a good person Ben, you have to be a good person. So this is what I started practising doing, I had quit drinking already. I smoked so I had to quit smoking, I had to quit swearing, I had to quit many of my old ways that was gossiping, I had to forget about that. Leave it behind, so this is what I did. Today I am still working on these things, I still have weaknesses just like everybody else. And people come from all over, from Germany, all over the world, and they sat with me - professors, preacher men, nurses, doctors even want to come and sit and see what it is we have in our culture. They are welcome to come but like I say it is not for me to take it all over the lands. I cannot wander around as this is not my way. It is the Great Spirit's way which was given to me to do in the one particular area. This is the way I try to keep it.

But my language again is something. Just only my mother spoke Cree and Saulteaux fluently. My father may have spoken a few Blackfoot words because he was raised up in the glacial area of the Blackfoot Reserve.

But these are things that we can only maybe think about but like I say been trained here in the ways where I sit not by a man or by a woman nor by anybody but by the Spirits of these ways themselves that show me that the ways to carry on. So

like that I have many people, young people coming in with their alcohol and drug problems. Some have quit, some haven't. I am not in the position to be able to make people quit. I can only share with them the ways on how to be with themselves in a good way.

So like that my life has been very good. My grandchildren all know about these ways, my son has quit drinking and using drugs years ago, he was bad at that. Though we didn't bring our children up... many people haven't brought their children up in the ways in the...we'll say ugly ways - drugs, sniffing- we didn't bring our children up that way. It is a way of life that they picked up somewhere. Even though these children know right from wrong it seems impossible for them to follow the right ways that they learned. Maybe through experience and given the time in life maybe they will do as I did, quit and come back to the culture, come back home to the culture and again learn the ways while they still have some life left in them. We know that they are going to need these ways when they get up to the Happy Hunting Grounds or Heaven as some know it. You have to be a good person to get there and this is what many of our elders are there for - as guidance to our young people. Trying to warn them of the dangers of alcohol and drugs, trying to warn them of the things that are going to cause them harm on the road, difficulty in life, suicides, the breaking up of families which civilization has brought amongst our people.

Today I feel proud of who I am. I don't have to care how I look, I don't have to be the most handsomest person, but I am proud that I have this country, the Great Spirit gave us to his Indian children. Since we haven't been looking after it, taking care of it, the whiteman has taken charge to take care of it, it is his turn. For the air is polluted, the water is polluted, the fish is polluted, a lot of our animals are getting polluted this is the way they take care of things. They have restricted the freedom that was given to us by the Great Spirit. To be born free like the animals, even the animals nowadays - nothing is free. Whiteman and his culture and his civilization

have gotten their hands on it. I still urge my people to come home, pretty soon it will be too late. The doors will be closed on them, you have to come now while the time is right. There are so many things to talk about in these ways, these teachings I am not a teacher of these ways. I can only share. A teacher, you will find him after you come to these ways, the teacher is the Great Spirit. He will teach you through the book of life which is all around us, the animals, the birds, all the things that grow out of the Mother Earth, this is the book of life that I use. These give you comfort, for the black book cannot talk to you, cannot make you feel good unless you know how to read, then you need the whiteman's education to read that. Here you do not need the whiteman's education to know about, ... to see the birds flying, to understand their mating and their habits of life. You do not need whiteman's education to understand that. I am happy that I do not have to depend on him to know my culture. I may have to depend on him someday but again I don't think I have to. We seem to have fallen to their monetary system where we say we need their money to learn our language, we need their money to heal. We seem to have fallen victim to that. Sit back and think, do we need their money? But some of our people see that money right away and they grab for it and don't really deliver what they're supposed to deliver. Sad to say that but that's the way it is. I feel sadness for all our peoples who went to boarding schools across this nation - Turtle Island, from the east to the west, from the north to the south. The oppression we had to go through, understanding civilization was a good thing yet finding out that it is not so good. Finding out that we went through many bad experiences with this thing that was supposed to be good.

I'm kind of running out of words, there is lots I can say about my culture but there is certain places we talk about those too. In my case it's in my Sweat Lodge or my home, but I said a little bit here, hopefully give some hope to some people. We must stand on our own feet now, we must come to the place where we are supposed to come to the Great Spirit and his ways. Anytime we have some problems in this

civilized world, we are running to the whiteman for help, we are running to the AA counsellor for help. It seems we do not know how to stand on our own feet and come to our own cultural ways and beat these little weaknesses that prevail in our culture.

Getting back to our ways, I did mention the peyote ceremony. Me and my wife first went up there for a meeting and we didn't know anything about a meeting of this type thinking only an hour or two because we had plans for the next day where we were going to Carlyle, Saskatchewan. So we said it will only be an hour, so we went up, about a two hours drive north from our home. We found ourselves having a meeting all night, 'til next day 'til dinner time, so we ate a medicine which a lot of people look down on, saying it's a hallucinating drug. We didn't experience that, never did experience that in the whole year we followed this way of learning to be good people. Now today I was given a Sweat Lodge from this way and today I just use a Sweat Lodge and I stay in the Sweat Lodge. Maybe someday I will go back to a peyote meeting if I ever should, should one be that close to my home. For the time being, I just use the Sweat Lodge and share the many good ways I learned through the peyote way and through the sitting in the Sweat Lodge to share with the people how I learned to stand on my own two feet and it could be for them to stand on their own feet and feel good about it. To take everything, their little pains and aches to the Great Spirit. Someone can sit with an Elder who knows something about all this and help them to recover from the harshness of civilization. I want to thank you very much, Ann, for allowing me to share a little bit on this boarding school life we had and all I can say is that I experienced the good things of hunting rabbits and things like that. The harsh things I don't like to remember because it only makes me angry at the system which I am trying to forget and I hope never again will our people have to experience something like this. To make them lead a life of sadness or suicides or sniffing or alcohol, they have lost the meaning of love, it is missing in their life. That is why they have to turn to things like that. I want to thank you.

*A: Ahh how! Thank you very much Ben, I feel very honoured to hear your words of wisdom and they will go a long way when this thesis is documented and printed wherever it ends up. Certainly it is a piece of history that our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will have because as First Nations people we are recovering from that and there are many ways that our people are seeking healing and the Aboriginal Spirituality or the ceremonies or the Old Indian Way is coming back very strong and the spirit is getting stronger and we thank Elders like Ben Asinawasis here for helping us and leading us and giving us direction in our lives, thank you, Ahh how!*

**Pauline Creeley**

*Ann (A): Today is December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2001. I am sitting in the home of Mrs. Pauline (Keewatin) Creeley on the Okanese First Nations community. We had our first snow fall on this fine winter day. Mrs Creeley is confined to a wheelchair and still has a great deal of energy. She spends her leisure hours making beautiful StarBlanket quilts. She is a survivor of the File Hills Indian Residential School (FHIRS). I feel very humble, indeed, to come and ask her to give me her story as an 'incarcerate' of the FHIRS. As a small child, Pauline was one of the older girls who took me under her wings to help me get through the ordeal of being a resident in the boarding school. After she left the school, she visited us on Sunday afternoons; she sat with us, talked and laughed with us. There were moments of silence which were very calming for us. She made our afternoons very enjoyable. After the visit, away she would go into the night, walking back to her home. At this time I want to say thank you to her for those comforting visits. Then, I am going to ask her some questions and now we will begin.*

*A: Pauline, how old are you?*

*Pauline(P): I'm 75 years old.*

*A: How old were you when you entered FHIRS?*

P: I was seven years old.

*A: How old were when you left there?*

P: I just turned 15 years old in April and I left in June.

*A: Do you recall what year that was?*

P: That was 1942 when I left school.

*A: Before you went to FHIRS, do you remember going to the ceremonies of the Old Indian Ways with your parents and your grandparents, your Mooshum and Kookum?*

P: I remember going to the feasts and rain dances. During one of these Rain Dances, the policemen and the Indian agent arrived by a horse and buggy. They came and tore down all prayer cloths and started yelling at the people to go home.

*A: That is what we call suppression of the ceremonies and that was the result of the Indian Act whereby the ceremonies were prohibited. When you were in boarding school, were you allowed to carry out any of the traditions of our people like burning Sweet grass?*

P: No, we were not allowed to do any of that in the school. However, my parents burned Sweetgrass when we were home.

*A: Did your parents and grandparents speak a native language?*

P: My parents talked both Cree and Saulteaux, amongst themselves, but they talked English to us, knowing that we had to learn English. It was very hard for those who could not talk English in the boarding school; our parents prepared us for that in that they spoke English to us before we went to the school.

*A: What was the experience like when you went to the boarding school? What was good about it; what was not so good about it?*



P: When I went to school, I liked to school very much. I went to school for half a day when I was in grade four. During that half day, we had to do laundry. We practically ran that school. It was hard work for me because I was in the bakery when I only 12 years old. I had to handle 100 pound bags of flour. Somebody made me a stool so I could reach into the ovens.

The worst part I used to have to scrub the cement floor every day, sometimes twice a day. It was very hard on the knees. In those days there was no such things as kneeling pads or mops with long handles. I used to kneel on my hands and they would get very sore. We used to make 100 loaves of bread a day. That wasn't easy, my back used to be sore. After making the bread, I'd have to get down on my hands and knees and scrub the hard cold cement floor in the store room. The work was finished in the afternoon. I had no time to play. I returned to the bakery and make bread overnight. I'd pan it in the morning and cook it by dinner time.

In the afternoon, I got to go to school in the afternoon or the morning, whatever the schedule was. We had supervisors who were very strict. They were all old. I really thought all white people were mean when I left school.

We'd try to help each other with the hard work that was required of us, especially with the lifting of the heavy bags of flour. There were four of us working in the bakery. There were three tubs of bread dough to be panned every afternoon. Some of the students worked in the laundry room which was a big and noisy place to work. I used to have to scrub the dairy where I separated the milk. There I was on my hands and knees again. Sometimes I worked in the sewing room. I learned to sew and to patch torn garments. The worst place to work was in the kitchen. The cook was very strict. She was always calling us "little Indians". We didn't know what that meant till after we found out what it really meant. Miss Pugh was always seated in the hallway, watching both ways, looking at the boys' side then toward the girls' side. She talked to herself a lot; that's how old she was. When we talk, we are praying.

So we thought that what we witnessed, that is when she was talking to herself, we took it as being very strange. She often talked about the 'old country'; eventually I found out the 'old country' was England. We were very scared of her. The least little thing we did out of turn, she would cuff us. That hurt, you know. Our ears would burn or ring. There was one sewing matron who pinched us on the arm and pulled our ears. If we got caught talking at the table in the dining room, we were made to stand in the hallway. We knew enough not to talk at the table as we knew what the outcome would be. We'd be cuffed for nothing, it seems.

Our food in the morning would be made up of porridge for the most part. We had skim milk on our porridge. We never knew what toast was. We had bread which we ate with a cup of prunes; the prunes were a treat. At dinnertime, we'd have some kind of mush, a stew of some sort, a pudding and a slice of bread, no butter. At supper time, we'd have the same kind of mush, some vegetables. We were hungry all the time. I used to steal bread for the boys; put them in the milk cans. I would watch them eating the bread as they made their way to the barns. I didn't care if I got caught but I never got caught. Thank goodness or else I would have been severely punished. I always knew all of us children, both boys and girls hardly got enough to eat. We got a scoop of potatoes. When we were given roast potatoes, we were told not to eat the peelings but I ate my peelings, that's how hungry I was. There would only be a little heap of peelings left from all the children's plates when the staff checked the plates. We hardly got any meat. We used to get baloney. Our meals were practically slapped together. I vowed I would not feed my children the way we rationed our food in that school. Oh, peanut butter we would get once in awhile. We didn't know what apples nor bananas were. At Christmas time, we'd get one orange. As the saying goes, we "licked our platters clean".

At Christmas time, I don't remember eating turkey. As a matter of fact, I don't think we got turkey. We'd get an orange, and that was it, eating this orange, once a

year. The staff ate much better than the students. They had specials; they had fruit and deserts at every meal. The girls waited on them. They were treated like royalty, doing everything for them like serving them. They must have liked the service we students gave them at their meal times.

At Christmas again, the United Church sent us presents. The gifts were old fashioned beads, colouring books but no crayons. Crayons were not allowed anywhere except in the classrooms. We got puzzles which we enjoyed. We received games but we had to be quiet in the playroom while we played the board games.

In the summer time, we'd go home for holidays. We 'd go to the ceremonies like the Rain Dance and the Sweats. Those ceremonies were performed on a sly. They'd have to go way in the bush and not to tell. We used to go to powwows and sports days. The powwows before the '50's almost went out of existence because those things were forbidden. The school staff cuffed those students who spoke Cree or Saulteaux. We were told to speak English all the time, As far as the religious teachings, we were taught their religion. We were read scriptures from the bible. However the meanings of the verses from the bible were not fully explained to us. Nowadays, I am able to understand what those scriptures mean. We all have different ways of worshipping the Creator. It is the same Creator that made all of us and He listens because that worshipping is for Him. In school, the staff made us sing hymns. On sundays, the staff would preach to us, read a portion from the bible. Of course, we learned the Ten Commandments first. We already knew some of that in our Indian Ways. It was just about the same thing.

*A: Do you feel the Old Indian Ways are coming back?*

*P: The Old Indian Ways are coming back. We feel more at peace in their way; we feel more at home because the Old People taught us to talk to the Creator. He is*

every where, in all of his Creation, in the wind, the animals, plants and His children. You can know He is around because a great deal of our people are returning to the Rain Dance and Sweats. We are free to attend these ceremonies now. You don't have to hide and it is a good feeling.

*A: Pauline, there is one thing that has always been dear to my heart and that has to do with our relations and how we love each other.*

P: There is one thing about Indians is to love one another, to love our children. We were raised on love. In school, we were not allowed to talk to one another and to love one another. We were just strictly individuals. Love goes a long ways. We are closely related, a closely knitted family. Say nice things to people and tell them you love them. I love my grandchildren in my own way, and my children in my own way. But our Creator gets all the love. You have to be patient.

*A: You spoke so eloquently about the love we have for each other. You also talked about how the Old Indian Ways are coming back strong. I thank you for those words. What in your opinion, has helped you get through this boarding school experience? How do you see your self in healing from that experience?*

P: That experience is always on my mind. I still dream about those days. Sometimes, it gives me a good feeling of what I learned in school but I never got enough education. This part of not getting a good education is the part I regret very much. When I left school, I was supposed to have grade eight but when I think about it, it probably was a grade four. If I had a proper education, I could have gone on and on and likewise my children would have followed me. The Indian Affairs wouldn't let me go to school. Now, they want everybody to get an education and that is good. They should have done that in the first place; maybe we could have gone a long ways. Now, we are way behind. I always taught myself; I always had and still have a dictionary to look up words of which I don't know the meaning. You learn something

every day. You are never too old to learn. Instead, I stayed home and raised a family. Now, they are all gone.

*A: You have done a fine job of raising your family. You are a good mother and grandmother.*

P: In my family, I had ten children and some are here and some are gone. My four boys are gone and my six girls are still living. Between all of them, I have 35 grandchildren and 36 great-grandchildren and I am very proud of them.

*A: Yes, Pauline, you are a very rich person. I often wonder how it was for our parents who were the first generation to attend FHIRS.*

P: When we went to FHIRS, there was about 100 children. In our parents' day, it started with the United Church. They often spoke about Motherwell, my Dad did anyway. My mother and father went to that school too. I don't know how much of an education they got but I do know they were taught to read and write; they were taught to cook and sew. They had days that were unlike ours. Ours were very strict. We were scared all the time; we were just like mice. I always thought that all white people were all mean. They weren't. I never knew that. I was always scared of them.

Anyway, I'm a survivor even if I used to freeze. in the winter time. The staff would send us outside in the cold; just barely dressed. They would send us out. The staff told us to stay outdoors for 15 minutes in 40 below weather. When we came in, we would be just cold. The classrooms were very cold: they were all heated by wood. As a matter of fact, the whole school was heated by wood. The water was not that good. I could taste the iron in it. But we survived. Not like now, we have good drinking water.

*A: What were the clothes like that the school provided?*

P: Our boots were not warm. We only had one pair of cotton stockings. Our coats were made of heavy melton which were warm. We had mitts. I cannot remember if we had sweaters. We had big bloomers. Our uniforms were made like a jumper with a dress underneath. They were not warm. On sundays, we had a black and white outfit, midi and a jumper, sleeveless dress with a white blouse under. That was our Sunday best which we wore to church only. Our parents came on Sundays, not everybody's parents came. They would make a meal outside on the visiting grounds. That was very enjoyable. We'd come in for supper and share what food we had because we were full.

We never seen our parents just once in a while. We were away from them ten months of the year.

I learned to work. I wanted to go to school but I couldn't so I had to get out and work. My parents didn't make that good a living. When I went to work, I learned to milk cows, that's the only work I learned to do on the outside but I enjoyed that. Already I knew how to sew, to cook. to make bread, to clean house and to mend clothes.

*A: How did the children get along with one another?*

P: There was just one family that were 'bullies'. They were mean to all the girls. We couldn't go and tell the supervisor. They were bossy with everyone. They even took our food away on us, things that our parents brought us. They were mean just like the staff. We couldn't do anything, just let them go. But after we left school, look out, we met them.

*A: Pauline, I feel very honoured to sit with you and for your sharing of your story. It is very hard for some people to talk about this experience. You have given so freely of your experience. Thank you very much. Until we meet again, I will say, I love you, love you very much, my cousin. Ah-how!*

**Alice Star Blanket**

*Ann: Today is Dec.6, 2001. I'm sitting in the home of Alice Star Blanket on the Star Blanket First Nation Community. It is a beautiful frosty day; the trees are sparkling. Jack Frost has been busy with his artistic works. There is a great deal of snow on the ground which is good for the deer and the little animals have gone to sleep in their winter homes. Alice is a very dear friend of mine and is one of the oldest living survivors of the File Hills Indian Residential School (FHIRS).*

*Ann: Good Morning , Alice. My first question to you is, if you don't mind me asking, how old are you?*

*Alice: I'm 74 years old.*

*Ann: How old were you when you first went to the FHIRS?*

*Alice: I was about seven years old.*

*Ann : How old were you when you left?*

*Alice: I was 14 when I finished grade eight.*

*Ann: You must have been an intelligent young woman to be 14 when you finished grade eight, for myself, I failed grade eight. I had a hard time to achieve academically. Before you went to FHIRS, or boarding school which I will call it that from here on in, did you attend the ceremonies of the Old Indian Ways with your parents and grandparents?*

*Alice: My grandparents, Keewikit and his wife raised me. Also the old people, Kee-win nis-kaws (Wakeups) took us to feasts, powwows and Rain Dances.*

*Ann: When you went to these ceremonies, were the old people allowed to carry out these ceremonies out in the open or were they always scared of the Indian agent?*

*Alice: I don't recall that part.*

*Ann: Did your parents and grandparents speak a native language?*

Alice: Yes, my parents spoke Cree and my step mother, after that, spoke Saulteaux.

*Ann: Did they speak Cree?*

Alice: Our parents and grandparents taught us to talk Cree. My sisters and brothers also learned to talk Cree.

*Ann: You are very fortunate to be able to talk Cree. My parents spoke Cree with the other adults, our aunts and uncles but not to us children. Today, I am only able to utter phrases like, "I'm hungry or cold, Where are you going?"*

Alice: The children do not know how to speak Cree today. In Balcarres, the school teaches culture, they have cultural days there. There may be Cree classes here in the File Hills community which is very good.

*Ann: I will now turn to the subject about the FHRS. What was that experience like for you?*

Alice: The good thing about boarding, they taught us how to bake and sew . The not so good thing about boarding school was that they didn't allow us to speak our native language. We threw our culture away, like speaking our native language. We were not even allowed to burn Sweet Grass. That was the trouble with it.

*Ann: What was the sad things about attending boarding school? What was the food like?*

Alice: Some people take it differently but me, we seemed to eat the same stuff day in and day out. Today, I wouldn't eat that stuff. We ate lamb, parsnips and old lumpy Cream of Wheat porridge. It was poor quality food even though we got enough of this food. We had skim milk on this porridge.

*Ann: Do you remember what the staff ate?*



Alice: They had specials. They had the best. The girls waited on them. They ate things like eggs while we ate our lumpy porridge.

*Ann : Were the boys treated differently from the girls by the staff?*

Alice: I couldn't tell you that because we were kept separate from the boys. They had their own playground. We weren't allowed to mingle with them. We weren't allowed to even talk to them. We were kept like prisoners.

*Ann: Did you go to school while you were at the boarding school?*

Alice: We went to school for half a day.

*Ann: What kind of work were you assigned to do?*

Alice: The staff circulated us around in different places. We worked in such places in the sewing room, dairy room and dining room . The laundry room is one place that I dreaded to work in because it was a place where you were required to work hard, like hard labour. They kept us very busy here; there was washing of lots of clothes and bed clothes to be laundered, hanging them up outside, folding them up and carrying these clothes and bed clothes to the rooms upstairs. There were big machines in the laundry room that we had to man and they were big noisy things like they have in the hospitals, big washers and dryers. Another place that was a dreaded place to work was in the kitchen. The best place I liked to work in was the sewing room.

*Ann: Do you remember what kind of uniforms you wore?*

Alice: Oh my, we had old grey dresses, black stockings and boots. We all wore the same grey dresses.

*Ann: Do you remember your number in school?*

Alice: My number was 45.

*Ann: Mine was 37. I think Gracie, your sister-in-law was number one.*

Alice: They, students and staff, said I was a wicked little girl because I used to fight for my little brother, George's battles for him. He was a small boy when he first came to school.

*Ann: Do you remember if a lot of this, fighting went on in the school?*

Alice: I think so when I think back on it. The girls didn't fight. However, I do remember Peggy Stonechild who was so good to us little girls. We were always following her around so the other students called us, "Robin Hood and his merry men." She probably was our protector. But I do know the boys had their own little battles.

*Ann: How were treated by the staff and do you remember some of their names?*

Alice: There was Miss Pugh who everyone remembers. Then there was Miss Folliet and Miss Baird was our teacher. The rest just is gone from my memory.

*Ann: Who was the principal in your day? What was he like?*

Alice: His name was Mr. Rhodes. He punished and he did the strapping. We were naughty; we deserved it. I was punished myself several times.

*Ann: How were you punished?*

Alice: We were strapped with a leather strap, just on our hands and arms and not on our bodies.

*Ann: What was Miss Pugh like?*

Alice: She was very strict. She used to pinch us, she had very mean ways. The staff were old and all the staff were old maids who never had experience with children before. If they saw us talking to boys, "kee- moosh (on the sly). We were made to stand in the hallways for punishment for an hour.

*Ann: What was the cook like and what was her name?*

Alice: Her name was Miss Alexander. Boy! She was a mean old witch. We used to have to fight her back. We had to otherwise we would have really got 'pounded'. I fought her back one time and my punishment was that I had to go to the dormitory right after supper. It was a big, dark, lonely place, there all by myself and I was afraid during these times. We got fed up with the staff's meanness so we fought back sometimes.

*Ann: Do you remember if any of the children ran away and how were they punished?*

Alice: Quite a few of them ran away. The staff brought them back. They were punished with a strap, shave their hair off, get bald heads, girls included. There were always those who lived far away, like those ones from Kamsack, Saskatchewan.

*Ann: Why do you think they ran away?*

Alice: They ran away because they were unhappy; they were lonely for their families and homes.

*Ann: That must have been one of the hardest things to be taken from their homes and communities?*

Alice: We were put in that school all year round. We just had holidays in July and August. We never came home for Christmas or Easter. We were kept right in that school all the time. It was very lonely for those children who came from far away; these were the ones who ran away. It was pitiful.

*Ann: After you left school, Alice, what did you do?*

Alice: Well, I went to work right away. I got a job in Melville, Saskatchewan. I worked in the kitchen at the King George Hotel. Then, I went to the Waverley in that same town. Can you imagine how long ago that was? I was only 15 years old. I worked there quite a long time.

*Ann: Did you have a family?*

Alice: I was 20 when I had my son. We had no way of furthering our education. We had no chance of going to school. There was no funds; the World War II was on. Not like today, you can just go to school, put your application in. Everything is paid for you nowadays. We couldn't afford it.

*Ann: What do you see as far as the Old Indian Ways go? Do you feel these old ceremonies are returning?*

Alice: The young people are turning to the Old Indian Ways. A lot of them burn Sweet grass in the morning or when they are ready to go some place. That is good. They attend feasts, Sweats and Rain Dances. Recently in the last two years, the people of Okanese and Peepeekisis First Nations held Rain Dances. That is nice for the young people. Then there are now big healing places. That is good if that will only penetrate their minds. A lot of them don't listen, you know. Some listen and take it to heart.

*Ann: Do you feel if you have had any negative effects from the boarding school, have you healed from the FHIRS experience?*

Alice: A lot of times, I think about school, it helped us a little bit; it taught us not to be lazy. We learned how to work, to clean among other things like sewing and doing laundry. However, I get mad, thinking about how we were brought up in boarding school. I get angry especially when they took our culture away on us; we were not allowed to speak Cree. That is why some of us, especially the young people, are unable to talk Cree.

*Ann: In what way do you think you have dealt with the experience of being in FHIRS?*

Alice: I try to put it behind me. I have been busy, working and trying to make a living but still those memories creep into my mind. I think back on how I was badly treated by the staff but the best way for me was to put it away back in my mind. The kids

today are lucky that they don't have to go to these boarding school. We were not allowed to mingle with our own people, our families and relatives.

*Ann: I wonder what it was like for our parents?*

Alice: They must have missed us even though they were allowed to visit us for short periods only, only for a few hours at a time. It was hard on our parents, I'm sure.

*Ann: Is there anything else you want to add? Here, you and I are sitting together and we are at peace with one another on this beautiful winter day. I think about all of you when I am back home in Winnipeg where my family is. My spirit travels to these communities where I was born and raised. I think about the people and I feel sad when I hear some thing unfortunate happens.*

Alice: We don't see each other that often. One good thing about people, when we have bad luck, we all meet, all your relatives and friends come to support you. It gives you strength and makes you feel comforted.

*Ann: Do you remember much about the church services in FHIRS?*

Alice: Oh yes, the principal used to preach wicked to us. He should to just about yell his head off. He preached about everything.

*Ann: When you were in school, did any of the staff make you feel good about being an Indian?*

Alice: No, they never taught anything like that. They wanted us in their way of life. They took our culture away on us. They never mentioned our culture at all. That is one negative thing about the residential system, it took our identity away on us. I never had time to go to powwows or any other ceremonies as I was too busy working.

*Ann: How is your health nowadays?*

Alice: I'm lucky, I'm a healthy woman. I have back problems, arthritis, back problems. My asthma is not too bad. My doctor advised me to use a wheelchair in

the winter when it's hard to get around. Mind you, last year, I found out from the doctor, I had a crack in my back. I was completely helpless. I couldn't get up. Nowadays, I have to watch as I can get overtired and that's when I don't feel good.

*Ann : Well, you seem to be much better these days as I see you are in good spirits.*

Alice: Why be sad when you can be full of humour which our people love. Be happy. I always say.

*Ann: I have a good laugh when I hear you older women teasingly call each other "Miss Pugh." The information you have shared with me has certainly enriched my life and will contribute much to my account of the experiences as related to me by the survivors of the FHRS. Thank you.*

Alice: It sure was nice of you to come and visit me. This is the first time you have come to visit me. I sure appreciate your coming and visiting me.

### **Ann Callahan**

The newcomers to North America had a purpose for the establishment of the residential school system. J.R. Miller (1996) provides this explanation:

The arrival of an age of peace, immigration, and agriculture in British North America meant a dramatically different relationship between Natives and newcomers, a shift in relations that explains the effort of state and church to assimilate Aboriginal communities through residential schools. (p.62)

The File Hills Residential School was one of these assimilative instruments. This section will demonstrate my experiences in this boarding school and the effects of the treatment meted out by those deemed to be our care-givers.

I was the youngest of ten children, some of whom were half brothers and sisters. The early years were the happiest time of my life. My parents loved me

dearly; I was not spanked or hit in any manner. A word of reprimand was enough to correct my behaviour.

Then one day, at the age of seven or eight, I was taken to the File Hills Indian Residential School by my dad. My mother was ill and in the hospital. A look of sadness came over his face and he was very silent as he drove the team of horses down the road. I was excited inside when he told me, "*I'm taking you to a new place....*" His words broke off.

When we arrived at this big red building, he asked my older cousin, Pauline C. to take my hand. He then drove off. I broke her grip, leapt from the veranda and crawled under the wire fence. I chased him down the road. He was whipping the horses to get away from me. As he turned back at me, I saw that he was crying. I couldn't understand this. He stopped the horses, jumped down from the wagon and he scooped me up in his arms. He told me, "*My little girl, I can't take you with me, it's the law, your parents will go to jail if we don't put you in school.*"

I thought my parents had all the power and will in the world. As well, I couldn't understand why they didn't have a choice. I never did adjust to this alien, cruel, unrelenting world of the boarding school. The emotional trauma was long, difficult and lasting.

When I was eleven years old, Doris S. (now deceased) and I stole a tube of lipstick from a supervisor. The temptation was too much. We saw a shiny, glimmering red shade of red in this lipstick which was in a very sophisticated gold holder. As young girls, we used Vaseline and red crayon to make lipstick.

Knowing we did wrong, Doris and I ran away, over the fence and into the darkness of the night. We hid along the trail, avoiding the calls of the searchers, the school staff and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (R.C.M.P.). We finally made it to my parents' home.

My dad was outside chopping wood. He heard a rustle in the bush and he called out, "*Come out, girls, the R.C.M.P. were here. You must go back or your mama and I will go to jail if we keep you here.*"

After a hearty meal of rabbit stew and bannock, we visited. We were soon startled. The R.C.M.P. arrived. We were escorted back to school. There, we were punished. Our heads were shaved bald by Miss P., the girls' supervisor. We were whipped on our hands and arms with a big leather strap by the principal. Our hands and arms were covered with big red welts extending from the wrist to the elbow. Ten blows on each hand and arm were administered. Doris and I were made to walk around with signs on our backs that read, "I will not steal." We felt shamed as we carried these signs in front of the large body of students. G. Kaufman, in his article entitled, *The Psychology of Shame*, talks about the binding effect of shame as follows:

This binding effect of shame is central to understanding shame's impact on personality development. The binding effects of exposure, of feeling seen, acutely disturbs the smooth functioning of the self. Exposure binds movement and speech, paralysing the self. The urge to hide, to disappear, is a spontaneous reaction to the self's heightened visibility; it can overwhelm the self. To feel shame is to feel inherently bad, fundamentally flawed as a person. A consuming loneliness gradually can envelop the self in the wake of shame, and deepening self-doubt can become one's constant companion. Even so, shame remains an ambivalent affect (p.18).

To feel less than a person was to be an impediment to my personality development. I was an emotional cripple. I was lonely and depressed. Academically, I did poorly.



The physical punishment was to continue. Another supervisor, Miss S. gave the girls, including myself, strapping on our seats. We were made to kneel over the end of the cot in the girls' dormitory and pull our bloomers down. Thereupon, she wielded heavy blows to our bottoms with a leather strap. When the pain became unbearable, we yelled out. The more we cried, the harder she came down with the strap. Our bottoms were red and sore for days. Often, these punishments were meted out for trivial misdemeanours like being caught out of bed after lights were out.

Miss McK., another supervisor, a born-again Christian, who preached, "*God is love*" to the little children thought nothing of those words when she used the strap. After uttering those words, one time, she took my older sister, Irene, who was giggling during one of her mini-sermons into the store room and threshed her with the strap. Miss McK. would bite her lip to show the might with which she could carry out the punishment. I put my arms around Irene's legs to console her and she said proudly, "*Don't worry, little sister, she couldn't make me cry.*" Irene was being brave for me.

If we said a bad word like "damn," we would run to Miss McK. to be "*saved*" again. One night during a fierce electric storm, she had us little girls sit around her feet. She held up her arms to the '*heavens*' and yelled out, "*Repent, the end of the world is coming!*" We were all crying, so scared from what might befall us.

Our principal, Mr. L. Mc. acted as a minister on Sundays. We bowed our heads while he prayed, "*Life is a perpetual storm....*" but at the same time, he would walk down the aisle. With his yardstick, he hit our hands if we were looking up or talking.

A young lad, Ronald S. died at the File Hills Indian Residential School while I was a student there. The dormitories of the boys and girls were adjacent to each other. Through the walls of these dormitories, we could hear poor little Ronnie cry

out at night. He likely was very fevered or in a great deal of distress. How we wished we could have gone to his side to comfort him. We still didn't know of what he died. Some say it was spinal meningitis and some say he was beaten. I don't recall him being hospitalized. We lined up on the long veranda that encircled the school to bid him farewell. What a sad, sad day for us. He is buried in the Wanakepew (Cree - a resting place) Church cemetery on the Peepeekisis First Nation community.

There was child abuse in this school. I witnessed a small girl being abused in this manner. Wilma C., a big senior girl, took Wanda's little hand and placed it very close to the steam radiator vent with intent to burn her hand. Wilma made the smaller girls watch; Wanda was eventually let go after whimpering awhile. Wilma was a very aggressive woman who "bullied" the younger girls. Some people say she committed suicide after she left the school.

There were other bullies like her who picked on the younger, more timid girls. We would cry out in order not to get a licking, "I'll give you something when my "mudder" (mother) comes." This meant that we were to give part of our treats which we received from our parents to these 'bullies'.

One other mistreatment we received was the staff having us stay outside to play in the cold rigid winter days. We ran around for awhile to keep warm but mostly we ended up huddled under the veranda to keep warm. Our hands were cracked from the dryness of the cold to the point our hands bled from these open raw areas. We were given a dab of Vaseline, a very sparse amount which did little to moisten these cracks.

Besides being left to the rigours of the cold, there was an experience that was humiliating and shameful for a young Aboriginal girl like me. It was the way our menstrual periods were managed. The girls made pads out of cloths which were sewed in the shape of a menstrual napkin. Every month when we had a period, we

were made to wash out these soiled items. It was a very unpleasant experience as many of us had a heavy flow. For those of us who were well entrenched into our cultural practices, one of which was to stay away from sacred ceremonies during our 'time'; washing out our soiled menstrual pads was quite against the grain of our cultural teachings. Symbolically, a woman's waste product, particularly from the reproductive system was to be disposed of in a place away from sites where sacred events might take place.

As I write, I'm reminded about the roots of my poor penmanship. At the beginning of the school year, we were given one new HB pencil and one rectangular exercise book. Over time, our pencils became very short and stubby. The books, when full, were to be reused. This meant that we had to take our eraser and rub out the work we already did on these pages. Many of these pages had holes in them from erasing too hard. Only one pencil and one book was issued for the whole year.

We went to school for three hours a day. The rest of the day was spent on domestic chores. We were deprived of adequate schooling by this below standard quality of education.

The children who attended this boarding school (although we gained some learning and skills) lost much more. We lost our language; in my case, Cree was my language. I almost lost the Spirituality which is an integral part of an Indian person's life. My mother and father, however, were responsible for keeping our going to the ceremonies. The United Church was a big influence in trying to instill Christianity in our daily lives. However, there were Missionaries who were kind and helpful to the Indian people at the community level. The Cree language and Aboriginal Spirituality, nonetheless, were discouraged.

One of the many sad things I had to endure was the separation from my parents, older siblings and extended family members. Childhood depression is a very

debilitating disorder especially when there is no one to console you. I looked around and became certain that this loneliness was an accepted norm among the young children. Sobbing quietly into my pillow at night was the one way of releasing the homesickness. The spirit and the mind and body are interrelated. As a young child in the FHRS, I was sick in bed for ten months as I had deep impetiginous angry looking sores all over my body. A searing burning substance was used to clean out these sores. It was very painful. I visited my mother from the upstairs balcony while she was at ground level; never being able to be held by her. There was one lovely, kind woman who remains so dear to my heart to-day. She was a tall woman who wore her grey hair with a bun on top of her head. Her name was Miss Munroe (I choose to name people who were of a sensitive nature and who were from the staff group). Every afternoon after my nap, I would stick my hand under my pillow and there was a piece of toffee placed there by Miss Munroe.

The heartache was also felt by our families back home and Dad expressed it in his own way. My dad was expressing how it was for the parents; the experience of having the children taken from the home. One of the many times I protested about returning to boarding school after the two summer months at home, he reminded me of something. He said, *"My girl, there is no spirit of the children here in the community, no laughter of children, all that remains on the reserve is us old people and small babies."*

My parents were hard workers. My dad was a successful farmer. He is mentioned in Sarah Carter's book, *Lost Harvests* (1990), as one of the farmers who yielded bumper crops (p.242). They chopped pickets, made hay, dug Seneca root, stooked wheat for the white farmers in the fall. There was no welfare then. They gave me a spirit to be industrious and strive for a good education. This is one reason I endured twelve years of boarding school.

In spite of the guidance of my parents, I took on many bad behaviours in the boarding school. There was a great deal of 'repair' work to be done in later years. I learned to be sneaky in order to avoid punishment. I was non-assertive because I was afraid or felt powerless in the presence of authority figures. '*White was right*' attitude prevailed in many of my interactions with non-Aboriginal people.

Self-esteem is defined as: "People's evaluations of their own self-worth, that is, the extent to which they view themselves as good, competent, and decent" (Aronson et al, 1997, p.19). Low self-esteem was high on my list of deficiencies. When discriminatory acts were placed on me, I felt even less as a person.

My communication skills with people were poor. I was a good follower and most compliant to people who were either my teachers, Indian Affairs supervisors or the missionaries. I was most ignorant of my rights as a human being.

Not only were my communication skills poor but so were my parenting skills. I whipped my boy when he was small to get him to obey. I felt ashamed and hurt after these punishments. I went to a Parent Effectiveness Training Program to learn a better way.

I found myself deep into depression as a young fledgling Registered Nurse and was hospitalized for a week due to attempts at overdosing. Dr. R. was my doctor and he directed me to counselling. These intense counselling sessions helped me to deal with the deep-seated problems or hurts I was harboring. Extenuating circumstances added to this overdose attempt; a husband who was being unfaithful, alcoholism and the ever present poor self-esteem. I joined Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) in 1969 and will celebrate the sobriety of thirty years this year. The fellowship of A.A. has made me a stronger person along with the Elders teachings in the Aboriginal Spiritual circles.

Triandis (1989) identifies several key features of self-hood that vary across different cultures:

First, the private self refers to how people understand themselves. It involves self-regard, self-esteem, introspection, and the individual decision-making. Second, the public self refers to how the individual is perceived by other people, thus including issues such as reputation, specific expectations of others, and impression management. Third, the collective self involves one's memberships in various social groups, from the families to an employing organization or an ethnic group (Triandis, 1989, in Baumeister, 1998, p 725).

I refer to the private self, as described by Triandis previously mentioned, relating to self-regard, self-esteem, introspection and the individual decision-making. There were several people in my life time who gave me the buoyancy to complete my goals. One of these people is Miss Margaret Cameron, Director of Nursing, Winnipeg General Hospital. She gave me self-confidence by her guidance, direction and understanding. As an advocate, she helped me work out a discriminatory incident that involved a head nurse on a private ward; I was prepared to quit my training as a nurse. She passed away at the age of 91 on November 14, 2001. In my correspondence to her in the ensuing years, I thanked her for her kindness. In reflecting on how my parents, grandparents, Elders and relatives and friends in my community, I refer to the collective self that Triandis defines the times I was away from the FHIRS, Christmas, New Years and Easter, my self-worth was re-affirmed for me by the compassion and love that was accorded me by my people. There was something very profound and sacred about how I felt that I could not explain or verbalize when I attended the Rain Dances and Feasts during the summer holidays from the FHIRS. There was a wee small voice inside of me saying, "You're worth-while; you'll be alright; you'll come through it all just like your parents,

aunties and uncles have done; the “Grandfathers and Grandmothers” (the Messengers to the Creator) hear your prayers.” I was never to question the wisdom of the “Old Ones”. I was totally split apart when I returned to that hard, relentless life at the school. Many times during the rough times in the school, I’d close my eyes and rerun the scene in my mind to when I was inside the Rain Dance Lodge and I was anchored there till the storm was over.

Loss of identity was another consequence; I was ashamed to be an Indian. When I was taking my nursing training, I would walk downtown rather than get on the bus. I didn’t want people staring at me as there were very few Indian people living in Winnipeg in the 1950's.

The Indian boarding school experience was not a happy one. I was robbed of a childhood. Over time, with the kindness, caring and generosity of other people I have met in my adulthood, I have learned to forgive the people who were our supervisors in the boarding school. Through a great deal of hard work, I now feel wholesome and proud to be an Aboriginal woman. The scars from these traumatic experiences are fading and I have promised to myself that I would never have to hang my head nor lower my eyes nor avert my gaze. Hopefully I’ve transmitted self-confidence and other favourable qualities to the younger members of my family, my son and his children, thus enabling them to be free spirited and self-directed.

## Chapter Five - Conclusion

### Individual Perspectives

Everyone has something distinct to share. I analyze four examples from many of those who provided me with an insight into their experiences at the File Hills Indian Residential school. These include Mr.Charlie Bigknife, Mr.Bernard Pinay, Mr.Alvin Stonechild and Mrs. Melvina McNabb.

The words of Mr. Bigknife “ ...cut my four braids off and threw them on the floor...slapped me on the head and said, ‘now you are no longer an Indian’...my feelings were hurt” demonstrate the degrading and humiliating acts placed on a young Aboriginal boy to transform him into someone else from his indigenous self.

Mr. Pinay declared, “I had no culture before I went to boarding school.” This statement would indicate that before some of the students’ entry into boarding school, colonization already had an impact on the traditional lifestyles of the Aboriginal people. When he talked about culture, he referred to the absence of the traditional ceremonies in his family life, and the few Cree words that he picked up from his grandmother.

Mrs. McNabb explicitly stated, “I don’t know where they (the staff) got their ungodly energy” when she talked about the strappings the students received as punishment. The term ‘ungodly energy’ succinctly expresses the severity of the manner in which these punitive measures were meted out.

Mr. Stonechild told me how difficult it was for him to talk about the experience at the boarding school. He suggested to me that I ask individuals if smudging before relating the experience would provide a less traumatic event for them. I was to learn another teaching from an Elder. There is much healing to be done and Mr. Stonechild is on that path to healing through the ceremonies; one of which is the Sweat Lodge that was given to him.



I, Ann Callahan, found that telling my own story was a cathartic exercise; although throughout the whole process I struggled to write about my feelings of loneliness and alienation of what I call 'a lost childhood'. Healing for me came from the Elders, the traditional ceremonies, 'all my relatives', my son, my grandchildren and the many friendships I have made throughout my life's journey.

### **Collective perspective**

Although individuals spoke indirectly, never-the-less, most of them stated in their own way, in order to make them feel of value, that:

a) even though the experience was not a good one, they as survivors are on a journey of healing as some said that they have not healed yet. This is understandable as the abuses were harsh and these traumas left an indelible mark that will take a long time from which to recover. Some may never be erased from memory. In relation to these abuses; most of which were of a physical and emotional nature, only one person mentioned sexual abuse. But because he is an Elder and has a Sweat Lodge, I could not bring myself to delve into that part. Culturally, something was holding me back. The information about sexual abuse was not volunteered when the others spoke about the abuses.

b) they must move on in life. As a researcher, it was very important to them that I listen in an attentive and empathetic way to their stories. There are utterances that are heard on the audio-tapes like "ah-huh" and words like "top-way" (closest Cree translation- "that's true") that acknowledge what the speaker is saying. There persisted the tone of the residual effects of the mistreatment by the staff and the longing for family and home in some of the people's recollections. The anger and resentment relating to the misery of the FHRS experience linger in the back of some of the ex-students' minds; some feel these unpleasant memories are best left there as it is in the past.

c) that they had learned to cope by focussing on the future - each in their own way such as:

- their children and their grandchildren. Some people look to their achievements in life as a means of overcoming those negative school experiences. Women who are now grandmothers and great-grandmothers talked about how proud they are to be in these roles of the family. Many have raised large families through scarcity of resources, maintained healthy families and were expert housekeepers. The good that can be derived from the residential school experience as perceived by some of the women is in their excellent homemaking skills, keeping immaculate homes and good cooking and baking skills.

- their farm or ranches. The men have also accomplished much through the industrious direction of the boarding school supervisors, who were the farmers and grounds keepers of the boarding school. I was reminded that these accomplishments in life were not solely attributable to the training of the FHRS staff. Much of this initiative and determination can be derived from their Aboriginal parentage and from their life work experiences.

One eighty-three year old man, Mr. Bigknife still operates a ranch and Mr. Al Stonechild maintains the buffalo herd on his ranch for the Okanese First Nation. Simultaneously, they are the messengers of the ways of the "Old Ones". Mr. Bigknife spoke eloquently about his 'rebirth', offered his own version on how to live in a spiritual way.

Then there is Mr. Al Stonechild, the buffalo rancher who was given a Sweat Lodge from his grandfather. Elder Ben Stonechild welcomes all people to his Sweat Lodge ceremonies; those who seek healing not only from life events like the boarding school experience but for any personal and family problems.

In addition to speaking of their accomplishments or achievements in life, the theme of Aboriginal Spirituality was heard in the voices of the people in that it always was a way of gaining guidance and strength. To cite Elders Stonechild's and Solomon's explanation of Aboriginal Spirituality: "there is no distinction between spiritual life and cultural life. For Canadian Natives, spirituality is a total way of life." Aboriginal spirituality does not confine itself to a certain day aside for its observance; instead it is a celebration of life and all that the Creator has given His children. These First Nations people are living spiritually in meeting life's challenges in a wholesome and fulfilling way from moment to moment, from day to day and from year to year. This source of healing comes in various forms in a very spiritual manner, in the Seven teachings: wisdom, love, respect, courage, honesty, and humility and respect:

1. To cherish knowledge is to know wisdom.
2. To know Love is to know peace.
3. To honour all of creation is to have respect.
4. Courage is to face life with integrity.
5. Honesty in facing a situation is to be brave.
6. Humility is to know yourself as a sacred part of creation.
7. Truth is to know all these things.

(Laramee, 1997, Kichi Chistemaew Pimatisiwin)

These are the values imbued in the Old Indian Way. The first teaching is about cherishing knowledge is to know wisdom. Wisdom is heard in the Elders' voices as they talked profoundly and with sincerity about the values and morals passed down from generation to generation from the Old Ones. These are the teachings whereby as Aboriginal people we were to live side by side peacefully with our relatives, friends and community. For example, Elder Bigknife talked about how we, as Aboriginal people are to share the land with different nationalities of people. The

second teaching is about love. Love has several connotations; love for oneself, love for parents, love for spouses, love for children and love for mankind. One of the hardships we as children in residential school had to endure was the omission of the love we were given by our parents and grandparents. One of my fondest psychologists was the humanistic psychologist, Carl Rogers whose premise is termed “unconditional positive regard,” “This is an attitude of grace, an attitude that values us, even knowing our failings.”(Myers, 1992, p. 429). Deiter (1999) brings this thought to mind in her words, “Plains Cree believe that children are only on loan and are a gift of the Creator.”(p.19).

The third teaching is about honouring all creation with respect. Elder Ben Stonechild spoke about how he was led to stop killing little animals as he was told these little creatures were his little brothers and sisters. The fourth lesson, facing life with courage in face of all odds like, we, the children in the residential school experienced, can be heard in the plaintive tone of Mrs Elsie Ross as she explained, “We would go for walks around the playground, around and around and around, holding hands, trying to see some joy in life.” Through the only humanistic resource that could sustain their integrity the act of the children holding each others hands and completing a circle of walking around and around could be translated as symbolism that is integral to the spirituality of the Aboriginal People. As the Elders shared their stories, the honesty and bravery they took to reveal that sad part of their lives was apparent in the fortitude and strength in their revisiting the past. This was the fifth teaching that I was to travel back in time with them with empathy and a deep understanding. The sixth teaching addresses the humility of how the survivors showed trust in the Creator’s direction and guidance that the ordeal of the residential school was to come to an end. The trust that many of the children was found in the faith and hope in the words and prayers of the Old Ones as they asked the Creator for the well-being of the young ones who were in the boarding school. I witnessed these Old Ones lifting their arms to the heavens and crying. It is an experience that stays in my

mind to remind me what true prayers mean. In the final analysis, the seventh teaching, to know all these things is the truth that as Aboriginal people, we are the Creator's children and He will not abandon us.

The Elders spoke about the traditional ceremonies in a profound and reverent way and I felt their strength and empowerment when they talked about the Sweats, Rain Dances and Pipe ceremonies as healing comes from within. Traditional ceremonies are being held in most of the First Nations communities without fear of reprisal from any government official like the Indian agent of the old days. The people who I visited talked with a strong commitment to revive and retain those ceremonies so all nations, along with the Aboriginal people, could enjoy good health and well being.

On a lighter note, aside from the sacred ceremonies, I was to enjoy the joviality of a people who laughed heartedly at incidences in the FHIRS. Humour was often used when looking back at certain staff members especially those who were noted for their "meanness"; to the point whereby the older women call each other "Miss Pugh" in an endearing manner when greeting each other. This to me is a way of coping, and a manner of healing from the negativity of the experience. There was much smiling, laughing, gestures and animated body language that is missed when I as a researcher wrote the stories down. It truly is a lived experience.

While conducting the research for my thesis, I learned a great deal. My findings include the following: Most of the twelve people who attended the FHIRS had a negative experience. Traumas were psychological (low self-esteem, low self-worth), emotional (loneliness for family and community) and physical punishments that ranged from strapping, cuffing and pulling of ears, made to stand in a dark foray in the basement all night and other cruel acts of punishments that are revealed in the stories of the survivors' stories.

Children were deprived of their cultural patterns. They were forbidden to speak their Native language and had their braids shorn off. Any identity as an Aboriginal person or as an individual was torn away by each student having their hair cropped in a standard hair style and each male student having to wear an overall type of trousers and plain grey or light beige shirts and each female student having to wear black midis with white long sleeved blouses, black stockings and army-like boots. In addition to removing the individual identity by having these students go about with standardized hair cuts and uniform attire, moccasins were replaced with hard black army-like boots. There was no trace of anything that acknowledged their Aboriginal heritage, for example, there no permitting of the students to burn Sweetgrass which many of the families carried out in their own home.

There was nothing in the school that gave the child an appreciation of his or her identity as an Indian - no pictures on the wall of an Aboriginal nature. The halls were lined with the explorers like John Cabot, Samuel de Champlain and Sieur de La Vereyndrye and John Cabot. The Indian was depicted as the "Red Man" either at the feet of these men or standing opposite to these 'discoverers' of the new found land. Even the literature was very 'middle class'; children were to read a primer that consisted of the characters like "Dick and Jane". The only two pieces of literature that I read over and over again was Hiawatha, probably written by an non-Aboriginal writer but "The song my paddle sings" was composed by Pauline E. Johnson. She was a Mohawk woman. My mother was fortunate to attend her recital in Regina when my mother worked as a domestic for Mr. W. R. Motherwell, Minister of Agriculture with the provincial and federal government. The Motherwells had their homestead in the Abernethy area.

One of the most damaging outcomes of the FHRS experience is that many of the children lost their Native language, Cree, Saulteaux, and Assiniboine as the children were forbidden to speak their own language. A few are still fluent in their

language but nowadays many First Nations schools are teaching these languages in their schools.

In spite of all these things that were bereft of Aboriginal content at the IRS, some of the children kept up the traditional ceremonies by accompanying their parents and other relatives during the two summer months of their holidays but always out of sight of the Indian agent. The spirit of the children could not be killed because the Old Ones kept the kindling and the fire going in the hearts and minds of the children. In spite of all these attempts to remove the “Indian” from the children, the “Old Ones, the Wise Ones” kept up the ceremonies and many of us as youngsters were taken to these ceremonies by our parents and grandparents. The spirit of the Aboriginal people was not to be snuffed out. The Old Ones knew in their hearts that these ceremonies would give strength and power to Aboriginal people so they kept up the ceremonies which these ways could be passed on when the Old Ones crossed over to the Spirit world. In this present age, this is happening, the Aboriginal people are returning to the ceremonies in full force and they invite everyone to come and join them; their non-Aboriginal friends are always welcome.

In summarizing and concluding this study, several revelations emerged: most of the survivors find their healing process to be a life long one. It is an inter generational one; the negative experiences at the FHIRS have impacted on the children of these parents. The rigidity and expected perfectionism expected of their own children can be traced back to the manner in which the staff at the FHIRS treated these survivors. One of the survivors discussed how she returned to the rearing of her children in a traditional way and her children grew to love her. I, as a parent resorted to Parent Effectiveness training to learn a healthier means of parenting my child. I no longer had to strike out and hurt my child physically to get him to obey. Being strapped and cuffed on the ears was the method I and many others like myself endured during our years at the FHIRS.

To read the responses from the people that I interviewed, I had a sense of how the survivors were more inclined to speak about their families and how they met the challenges of raising large families with the little resources they had. Some talked about the joy of watching the children and grandchildren grow and develop into adulthood with the parents and grandparents direction and guidance. Some of the women delighted in talking about their homemaking skills. "At least," one said, "I learned that much at school." The men folk are to be admired. Some have their own Sweatlodges where community members can go for healing, not just from the ordeal of residential schools but from other personal problems. Two of the older men are very active in their ranching pursuits. Mr. Bigknife operates a cattle and horse ranch at the age of 83 years old and Mr. Alvin Stonechild maintains and operates a bison ranch for the Okanese First Nation, Balcarres, Saskatchewan. Many walks of life, school children from surrounding communities visit the ranch. A newspaper correspondent visited his ranch two summers ago.

To continue the summary, the survivors are continuing their journey of healing, each in their own way. The one big hope and assurance they hold dear to their hearts is that the IRS is a thing of the past and their children and grandchildren will continue to enjoy a wholesome and nurturing environment - that is the Old Indian Way. In relation to healing, some declare that they never healed. However, their hope lies in the future, their philosophy which is one of the Old Indian Ways - "We live from day to day, we look forward, not back."

To reiterate my findings, first of all, the survivors expressed their appreciation that someone had come to get their stories. They felt acknowledged to be asked to give their stories and their philosophies on life. They also felt that their stories would be there for the people to read as the residential school system is a part of Canadian history. The boarding school experience was an important part of their lives. Secondly, many said that their hope for the future generations is that the process would not be repeated. Thirdly, healing from the traumas is an individual experience.



Many take pride in raising their families and especially they enjoy the grandchildren and great grandchildren. Finally, the survivors' hopes lie in their children's and grandchildren's future. Many of the older folks are directing them in the ways of the Old Ones: to have respect for oneself and others, to be kind to one another, even to animals, to love one another, to have conviction for one's wrong doings, to ask for forgiveness, to be truthful to oneself and others, and to be humble. On the latter virtue, at an Elders conference, University of Manitoba, Elders and Traditional Gathering, February 8, 9, and 10, 2002, I heard a wise Elder from South Dakota, Arvol Looking Horse say humility means not to go about talking about how many Sundances you danced in, you keep those to yourself and you live those teachings in your daily lives.

Finally, I vowed to hold a feast of all the people that shared their stories with me. Everyone in the community is invited. I have sought the guidance of the Elders in carrying out my promise and they are in full support of my vow. I've been told, "Ann, you are doing what is right, following the "Old Ways." It will be a time whereby we can give thanks to the Creator for bringing us through the ordeal of the FHIRS. In the Old Indian Way, we are asked to look to the future and to live from day to day with the teachings left with us to lead a wholesome life for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The feast will be a celebration, a time of renewal and healing. The feast will be held at the time when the leaves are just starting to come out, a time of renewal of life and it will be held on the grounds of the old FHIRS, we will bury the past and look to the future. We will ask the Great Spirit to bless the spirits of those who did not mean to harm us as forgiveness is an important aspect of the healing process. Ah- how!

To conclude, it was not just the Indian Residential system that suppressed the Indian ceremonies and cessation of the Native language; it was part of the whole process of assimilation. Aboriginal Spirituality then can be said to be a way of healing due to all forms of assimilation. This thesis was created with a lot of laughter, a lot

of tears and we had a good time sharing stories. Together, we are continuing our journey of healing through the Old Indian Way which came through by sharing experiences and by feeling the power of each other's presence. Ek-oshi!

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# Appendix I

## Verbal Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand that I am being asked to take part in a study conducted by Ann Callahan, a graduate student in the Master of Arts program of the Department of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba. I give my consent verbally to participate in the study. The study will examine and document my experience as a student at the File Hills Indian Residential School (FHIRS) and will reveal if returning to Aboriginal Spirituality ("The Old Indian Ways") was one way of healing from the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual trauma experienced by me in the school.

Ann Callahan, will ask me questions on my thoughts and feelings related to the FHIRS experience, and the healing I sought in order to cope and carry on with the responsibilities in my adult life. I understand the interview will take about two hours and that I may choose to have my answers either audio or video-taped or written down by the researcher. I also understand that Ann will tell me who referred me and that I have been asked whether or not I want to participate. I am aware as a participant that I have certain rights:

1. I may refuse to answer any questions at any time;
2. I may ask for clarification for any questions;
3. I may end the interview at any time;
4. I understand that speaking about the FHIRS will not affect the services I or my family receive.

I understand that I will be consulted before the research document is submitted for printing to include or exclude material from the researcher's reports and thesis.

I request the researcher to lock all audio-visual materials pertaining to myself in a secure place and after five years has elapsed, to destroy these audio-visual materials.

Signature of the researcher, Ann Callahan \_\_\_\_\_ Witness \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission to the researcher to deposit all audio-visual materials pertaining to the information I have provided for the research in the following manner: one copy will be placed in the University of Manitoba Archives, Province of Manitoba Archives and the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College Library.

Signature of the researcher, Ann Callahan \_\_\_\_\_ Witness \_\_\_\_\_

I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

This study has been approved by the Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. I understand that if I have any complaints regarding any of the procedures, I may contact the Human Ethics Secretariat (phone: 204-474-7122) or Head of the Department of Native Studies, Dr. Peter Kulchyski (phone: 204-474-6333) or my advisor, Dr. Jill Oakes (phone: 204-474-7352) or the researcher, Ann Callahan (phone: 204-775-7962)

I give my permission to Ann to identify me by name in any the audio-visual and written document she produces.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the researcher, Ann Callahan \_\_\_\_\_ Witness \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix II

### Written Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand that I am being asked to take part in a study conducted by Ann Callahan, a graduate student in the Master of Arts program of the Department of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba. The study will examine and document my experience as a student at the File Hills Indian Residential School (FHIRS) and will reveal if returning to Aboriginal Spirituality ("The Old Indian Ways") was one way of healing from the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual trauma experienced by me in the school.

Ann Callahan, will ask me questions on my thoughts and feelings related to the FHIRS experience, and the healing I sought in order to cope and carry on with the responsibilities in my adult life. I understand the interview will take about two hours and that I may choose to have my answers either audio or video-taped or written down by the researcher. I also understand that Ann will tell me who referred me and that I have been asked whether or not I want to participate. I am aware as a participant that I have certain rights:

- I may refuse to answer any questions at any time;
- I may ask for clarification for any questions;
- I may end the interview at any time;
- I understand that speaking about the FHIRS will not affect the services I or my family receive.

I understand that I will be consulted before the research document is submitted for printing to include or exclude material from the researcher's reports and thesis.

I request the researcher to lock all audio-visual materials pertaining to myself in a secure place and after five years has elapsed, to destroy these audio-visual materials.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission to the researcher to deposit all audio-visual materials pertaining to the information I have provided for the research in the following manner: one copy will be placed in the University of Manitoba Archives, Province of Manitoba Archives and the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College Library.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

This study has been approved by the Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. I understand that if I have any complaints regarding any of the procedures, I may contact the Human Ethics Secretariat (phone: 204-474-7122) or Head of the Department of Native Studies, Dr. Peter Kulchyski (phone: 204-474-6333) or my advisor, Dr. Jill Oakes (phone: 204-474-7352) or the researcher, Ann Callahan (phone: 204-775-7962)

I agree to participate in this study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

I give my permission to Ann to identify me by name in any the audio-visual and written document she produces.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_