

INDIAN AFFAIRS BRANCH
DEPARTMENT OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION



DIRECTION DES AFFAIRES INDIENNES
MINISTÈRE DE LA CITOYENNETÉ ET DE L'IMMIGRATION

Ottawa 2, December 10, 1965.

OUR FILE NO. 1/25-20-1 (E.24)
Notre dossier n°.....

[Mr. Russ Moses,
Information Section,
Room 425,
Bourque Building,
Ottawa, Ontario.]

Dear Mr. Moses:

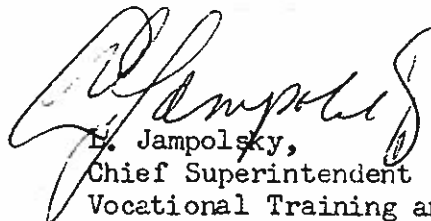
During the week beginning with January 10, 1966, the Residential School Principals from all regions will be meeting at Elliot Lake, Ontario, to discuss various aspects of residential schools.

In order to bring as many view points as possible to these deliberations, a selected number of Indians have been invited to submit their views and you are one of the persons who has been selected.

We would be most grateful to you if you would put your thoughts regarding residential schools down on paper and send this to me by the end of December. Please feel free to express your views candidly. We want to benefit both from your experience and your insights and frankness will be appreciated.

All the best to you and yours during the Yuletide Season and I will very much appreciate hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,


E. Jampolsky,
Chief Superintendent of
Vocational Training and
Special Services.

WILL SUBMIT
VIEWS.
R.M.
13/12/65

Done
28/12/65

28/12/65

First, a bit of what it was like in the "good old days".

In August 1942, shortly before my 9th birthday a series of unfortunate family circumstances made it necessary that I along with my 7 year old sister and an older brother, be placed in the Mohawk Institute at Brantford, Ontario.

Our home life prior to going to the "Mohawk" was considerably better than many of the other Indian children who were to be my friends in the following five years. At the "mushole" (this was the name applied to the school by the Indians for many years) I found to my surprise that one of the main tasks for a new arrival was to engage in physical combat with a series of opponents, this was done by the students, so that you knew exactly where you stood in the social structure that existed.

The food at the Institute was disgraceful. The normal diet was as follows:

Breakfast - two slices of bread with either jam or honey as the dressing, oatmeal with worms or corn meal porridge which was minimal in quantity and appalling in quality. The beverage consisted of skim milk and when one stops to consider that we were milking from twenty to thirty head of pure bred Aolstain cattle, it seems odd that we did not ever receive whole milk and in my five years at the Institute we never received butter once.

This is very strange, for on entering the Institute our ration books for sugar and butter were turned in to the management - we never received sugar other than Christmas morning when we had a yearly feast of one shreaded wheat with a sprinkling of brown sugar.

Lunch - At the Institute this consisted of water as the beverage, if you were a senior boy or girl you received (Grade V or above) one and half alices of dry bread and the main course consisted of "rotten soup" (local terminology) (i.e. scraps of beef, vegetables some in a state of decay.) Desert would be restricted to nothing on some days and a type of tapioca pudding (fish eyes) or a crudely prepared custard, the taste of which I can taste to this day. Children under Grade V level received one slice of dry bread - incidentally we were not weight watchers.

Supper - This consisted of two slices of bread and jam, fried potatoes, NO MEAT, a bun baked by the girls (common terminology - "horse buns") and every other night a piece of cake or possibly an apple in the summer months.

The manner in which the food was prepared did not encourage overeating. The diet remained constant, hunger was never absent. I would say here that 90% of the children were suffering from diet deficiency and this was evident by the number of boils, warts and general malaise that existed within the school population.

I have seen Indian children eating from the swill barrel, picking out soggy bits of food that was intended for the pigs.

At the "mushole" we had several hundred laying hens (white leghorn). We received a yearly ration of one egg a piece - this was on Easter Sunday morning, the Easter Bunny apparently influenced this.

The whole milk was separated in the barn and the cream was then sold to a local dairy firm, "The Mohawk Creamery", which I believe is still in business. All eggs were sold as well as the chickens at the end of their laying life - we never had chicken - except on several occasions when we stole one or two and roasted them on a well concealed fire in the bush - half raw chicken is not too bad eating!

The policy of the Mohawk Institute was that both girls and boys would attend school for half days and work the other half. This was Monday to Friday inclusive. No school on Saturday but generally we worked,

The normal work method was that the children under Grade V level worked in the market garden in which every type of vegetable was grown and in the main sold - the only vegetables which were stored for our use were potatoes, beans, turnips of the animal fodder variety. The work was supervised by white people who were employed by the Institute and beatings were administered at the slightest pretext. We were not treated as human beings - we were the Indian who had to become shining examples of Anglican Christianity.

I have seen Indian children having their faces rubbed in human excrement, this was done by a gentleman who has now gone to his just reward.

The normal punishment for bed wetters (usually one of the smaller boys) was to have his face rubbed in his own urine.

The senior boys worked on the farm - and I mean worked, we were underfed, ill clad and out in all types of weather - there is certainly something to be said for Indian stamina. At harvest times, such as potatoe harvest, corn harvest for cattle fodder - we older boys would at times not attend school until well on into fall as we were needed to help with the harvest.

We arose at 6:00 a.m. each morning and went to the barn to do "chores". This included milking the cattle, feeding and then using curry comb and brush to keep them in good mental and physical condition.

After our usual sumptuous breakfast we returned to the barn to do "second chores" 8:00 to 9:00 a.m. - this included cleaning the stables, watering the young stock and getting hay down out of mow, as well as carrying encilage from the silo to the main barn.

We also had some forty to eighty pigs depending on time of year - we never received pork or bacon of any kind except at Christmas when a single slice of pork along with mashed potatoes and gravy made up our Christmas dinner. A few rock candies along with an orange and Christmas pudding which was referred to as "dog shit" made up our Christmas celebrations. The I.O.D.E. sent us books as gifts.

Religion was pumped into us at a fast rate, chapel, every evening, church on Sundays (twice). For some years after leaving the Institute, I was under the impression that my tribal affiliation was "Anglican" rather than Delaware.

Our formal education was sadly neglected, when a child is tired, hungry, lice infested and treated as a sub-human, how in heavens name do you expect to make a decent citizen out of him or her, when the formal school curriculum is the most disregarded aspect of his whole background. I speak of lice, this was an accepted part of "being Indian" at the Mohawk - heads were shaved in late spring. We had no tooth brushes, no underwear was issued in the summer, no socks in the summer. Our clothing was a disgrace to this country. Our so called "Sunday clothes" were cut down first world war army uniforms. Cold showers were provided summer and winter in which we were herded en masse by some of the bigger boys and if you did not keep under the shower you would be struck with a brass studded belt.

The soap for perfuming our ablutions was the green liquid variety which would just about take the hide off you.

Bullying by larger boys was terrible, younger boys were "blaves" to these fellows and were required to act as such - there were also cases of homosexual contact, but this is not strange when you consider that the boys were not even allowed to talk to the girls - even their own sisters, except for 15 minutes once a month when you met each other in the "visiting room" and you then spoke in hushed tones.

Any mail coming to any student or mail being sent was opened and read before ever getting to the addressee or to the Indian child - money was removed and held in "trust" for the child.

It was our practise at the "Mohawk" to go begging at various homes throughout Brantford. There were certain homes that we knew that the people were good to us, we would rap on the door and our question was: "Anything extra", whereupon if we were lucky, we would be rewarded with scraps from the household - survival of the fittest.

Many children tried to run away from the Institute and nearly all were caught and brought back to face the music - we had a form of running the gauntlet in which the offender had to go through the line, that is on his hand and knees, through widespread legs of all the boys and he would be struck with anything that was at hand - all this done under the fatherly supervision of the boys' master. I have seen boys after going through a line of fifty to seventy boys lay crying in the most abject human misery and pain with not a soul to care - the dignity of man!!

As I sit writing this paper, things that have been dormant in my mind for years come to the fore - we will sing Hymn No. 128!!

This situation divides the shame amongst the Churches, the Indian Affairs Branch and the Canadian public.

I could write on and on - and some day I will tell of how things used to be - sadness, pain and misery were my legacy as an Indian.

The staff at the Mohawk lived very well, separate dining room where they were waited on by our Indian girls - the food I am told, was excellent.

When I was asked to do this paper I had some misgivings, for if I were to be honest, I must tell of things as they were and really this is not my story, but yours.

There were and are some decent honourable people employed by the residential schools, but they were not sufficient in number to change things.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS FOR RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

1. Religion should not be the basic curriculum, therefore, it is my feeling that non-denominational residential schools should be established. (dreamer)
2. More people of Indian ancestry should be encouraged to work in residential schools as they have a much better understanding of the Indian "personality" and would also be more apt to be trusted and respected by the students.
3. Indian residential schools should be integrated - the residential school should be a "home" rather than an Institute.
4. Salaries paid to the staff members should be on a par with industrie - otherwise you tend to attract only social misfits and religious zealots.
5. The Indian students should have a certain amount of work (physical) to do - overwork is no good and no work is even worse. I believe that a limited amount of work gives responsibility to the individual and helps him or her to develop a well-balanced personality.
6. Parents of Indian children should be made to contribute to the financial upkeep of their children - I realize that this would be difficult, but it at least bears looking into.
7. Each child should be given individual attention - get to know him or her - encourage leadership, this could be accomplished by giving awards for certain achievements.
8. Last, but most important, solicit ideas from the students, we adults do not know all the answers.

SUMMATION - The years that an Indian child spends in an Indian residential school has a very great deal to do with his or her future outlook on life and in my own case it showed me that Indian are "different", simply because you made us different and so gentlemen I say to you, take pains in molding, not the Indian of to-morrow, but the Canadian citizen of to-morrow. FOR "As ye sow, so shall ye reap".

Russell Moses,

28/12/65

