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Grade 12, Age 18

A Day of Healing

The sun began to set and all was calm across the lake. The boy would now take his only rest before he reached his destination as he sat upon a fallen tree, gazing into the shimmering light reflected off the water. The boy would wait until night before he moved and as night came so went the boy. Running and running through the bush, sure to stay clear of any roads or paths and taking no time to rest the boy grew weary. Though gasping for air on every breath the boy knew he could and would not stop, just as he was told to do. Just as the boy felt as though he would faint morning light broke through the clouds. The boy had not yet reached his destination but was relieved to get some rest.

The boy fell onto his stomach, lying in the dewy grass. He could now rest and was grateful for that, but the fear and anxiety he had built up over the course of the night overwhelmed his soul. The boy laid in the grass panting reminding himself over and over again what he had been told to do. He was reminded of everything that had taken place the last few days and prayed to the creator for strength. The boy wondered to himself why it was that his mother had acted the way she did. He knew she loved him more than anything in this world but he could not make sense of the occurrences over the last two days. He did however know that whatever was happening had to do with the white woman in the green dress.

She had driven up to the house in a new black Buick, a material luxury his family would never own. When she stepped out of the car the boy, his sisters and mother watched on from within the house. The white woman in the green dress walked through the broken fence and abruptly knocked on the front door. The boy's mother answered the door and kindly invited the woman in. The white woman in the green dress told the boy's mother that she was from social services and was there to talk about the children. The boy's mother told the boy and his sisters to go play outside. The children did as they

were told but watched in the window from outside in an attempt to hear the conversation that the white woman and their mother were having. The children realized that they could not hear anything of what was going on in house, they could only watch. It seemed to the children that the white woman in the green dress was upsetting their mother. The boy's mother began acting erratic towards the white woman and soon chased the woman out of the house. The white woman in the green dressed left in a calm manner looking back at the boy's mother before getting into the Buick and saying "There's nothing that can be done, we'll be taking him soon enough." The boy's mother screamed in rage at the woman and told the woman to leave. It was right after that when the boy noticed his mother began to act differently.

The boy had finally caught his breath and quickly rose to his feet. He looked around at his surroundings and tried to construct a plan. The boy could hear a river flowing close by and his thirst lead him toward the river. When he got to the river the boy immediately jumped in. The water felt like silk against the boy's skin and with every gulp the boy swallowed enabled him to regain his composure. After having quenched his thirst and bathing the nights sweat off, the boy found a thickly covered area of bushes and trees where he could not be found, just as he was told to do. Once again, he would wait until night once again before he moved. The boy again tried to make sense of what had happened and went over what he was told to do.

Once the white woman in the green dress had driven out of sight the boy's mother grabbed him by the hand and pulled him into the shed, slamming the door solidly behind them. She tried to speak but the tears from her eyes flowed so constantly that her hands were too busy wiping them away - at every word she tried to speak her voice sounded as though she was being strangled. Clearly something was wrong, the boy had never seen his mother cry this way before. The boy's mother was finally able to calm herself to a point where she could talk to her son. She looked at him and told him that social services had labeled her an unfit parent. The boy, unaware of what this term meant was confused. His mother explained to him that he had to leave if he wanted to keep living with her and his sisters. His mother also explained that if he did not go he would be sent to The Mush Hole. The boy did not know much about the mush hole but what he did

know made him feel sick to his stomach. He had several friends and family members that had been sent to the mush hole, all of which were children. The boy knew that social services scooped up a lot of children on the reserve and had been doing so for sometime. He also knew that when they were sent to the mush hole they did not come back until years later when they were all grown up. He was then told the instructions he was to carry out. His mother told him that he was to go to the lake and wait until night to move and was to do this until he reached his grandmother's house, where it was safe. During the day he was to hide and rest. Whenever he reached his grandmother's he was to stay put and wait until someone came to get him.

Night fell and the boy new he had not much further to go. He got up and began running to his grandmother's house. He seemed to feel a lot better than the night before. The feelings of anxiety and fear were gone and all that was left was the anticipation for what would come next. He could now see the smoke from his grandmother's chimney in the night's air, which acted as a better guide than his limited sense of direction. When the boy cleared the tree line his face lit up with relief and cheer at the sense of his accomplishment, he had made it to his grandmother's house and done as he was told. He could now stop running, rest and wait until someone came for him. As the boy proceeded to walk towards the front of the house he once again saw the new black Buick with the white woman who was wearing the green dress standing nearby. The boy's face soon lost its radiance and fell towards the ground like an overhead bombing. He heard his name cried many times from the porch, as he turned his head to see he was suddenly picked up off his feet and shoved into the back of the Buick. From the back of the car he could see that it had been his Grandmother calling his name but was being held back by a man in her attempts to help her grandson. The boy had not fought the man that had picked him up and tossed him into the car like a bag of garbage, as he was exhausted from his journey. All he could do was watch out the back window as the car drove off down the road with his Grandmother chasing behind it in desperation. A single tear rolled down the boys chin clearing a line of dirt from his face, as he knew he would not see his family for sometime or never again – a truth that he knew he had to endure.

Awakened, the boy, now an old man. He was at first disorient as to his whereabouts. He looked to his right from which the nudge that woke him came from, there sits another old man much like himself holding an eagle feather and motioning to pass it to the boy. The boy looked around the room and found that he was seated in a circle of many people, and the soothing aromas of sweet grass and sage filled the atmosphere. He realized that there is a flip chart in the middle of the circle, which read “WELCOME RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS: A Day of Healing.” He now knows where he is and why he is there. The boy reaches for the feather in a hesitant manner, with his hand shaking wishing that he was reaching instead for the bottle he left at home in the top cupboard to escape this reality. The boy grabbed hold of the feather but remained silent gazing into the space as if it were the shimmering light that was reflected off the water when all was calm.