

Spiritriver Striped Wolf
Saskatoon, SK
Pikani Nation
15 yrs.

Tears From a Grandmother's Story

It was a hot Spring afternoon, my mother had brought my sister and I to give a visit to our grandmother. Everyone in her house had gone out, as a result was only the three of us. We were sitting at the kitchen table with our only living grandparent. Such a beautiful afternoon it was, the sun shining through the windows and onto the clean floor. The sight out the window of the Rocky Mountains in the distance, the hills that were close by... Sincerely I could never have asked the creator for a better day to hear my grandma's story.

She had been making berry soup from Saskatoon berries that she had froze in her freezer from the past summer. She sat down at the table, we all had already been telling stories of the past, till a certain subject came across us; her life when she was a child. I had brought the topic up. As my sister and I were talking about our pasts living in the city, laughing and having fun with the time we were sharing with our grandma—I asked her, “Mom, how was it like when you were a child?” I have, and still have called my grandma ‘Mom’ because of how much she was just alike my own mother.

“Well, my son. It was a difficult time.” Immediately I knew she was talking about when she had to leave her home to attending Boarding school. “What kind of difficult time, grandma?” Said my sister who had no idea of the colonization and boarding school troubling time of our people. “When I, and my brothers and sisters had to move away from our family to attend residential school.” She got up from her chair to attend her soup, looking a bit uneasy. My sister looked at me and shrugged, I shook my head at her. “But I wont bore you with my old depressing past.”

“But... Mom, it's the past that tells us who we are now.” I had remembered talking about that in social studies. How the past is important and tells our individuality, who we are today. Since I knew what she was referring to, I would think it would be amazingly interesting to hear the story from someone instead from a textbook. So I pressed on. “Oh, alright. You see, back then, it was a time of turmoil and depression for our people...” If I were to explain with quotation, the story would take much longer with my sisters' questioning in almost every sentence my grandma spoke. The story went like this...

She lived with her mother, father, and all her bothers and sisters. They lived poorly; they didn't have a lot of money or food. Her father worked all that he could find and do. They didn't have any type of electronic, except maybe a radio, so she usually

spent her time outside playing in the bushes and simply using her imagination. They lived like this till she was around five-seven years old.

After having a day of helping her mother clean the house, playing in the plains of the reserve near her family of course, is when she spotted her life's change. There, she had seen a truck coming down the road. In there was a white man. When he reached the house, her father came out and greeted the man. They talked outside for a little bit then proceeded inside. This is where it got a little sad, something neither my sister nor I could ever handle.

After a while, still being outside, she saw some of her brothers and sisters getting in the truck crying. She had seen this before with other brothers and sisters she had that were her age when they left. Her mother was crying and her father the most upset she's seen him. As young as she was, she knew that she was now leaving her mother and father to a new strange alien place, to her. And she did something not a lot of children of her age thought of doing in those times—ran, ran straight into the bushes with tears going down her cheek. Deeper and deeper into the bushes, afraid of being caught by the scary looking white man that once had to chase one of her brothers that tried to escape a while back. She found a ditch that she laid in, hoping no one would find her.

It was around evening, still hiding from everyone, crying aloud. It was then that she heard something in the bushing coming towards her, in fear she screamed not knowing if it was the white man or a wild animal, either way, it knew where she was. "My... my daughter." Said a familiar voice. He came and sat next to her and held her, "My daughter, a new life is waiting for you. And you must go to it. Just—just do what they say, and don't fight them or run away from them. You'll understand eventually, and you'll see your mother and me again, I promise." She was in tears, but got up. And then, took her to the truck in which her life was dramatically changed with sorrow and depression while in the residential school from kindergarten to grade 12 graduation.

"While I was in the school, I had my hair cut short, dressed in clothes materials I never felt before, we weren't allowed to speak our traditional language, talk back, we had to eat what ever was in front of us, if we liked it or not, and were beaten when we didn't really listen.

I, however, listened to my father and did all what he told me to do. I never got beaten or abused, but the emotional abuse from seeing my brothers and sisters and friends getting beaten was torture. Sitting there, unable to do anything about what was happening right in front of you..." she looked down, looking sad "I got off lucky. But a lot didn't. That's why afterwards a lot of us went to alcohol." She shook her head and smiled as she gave both my sister and I a small bowl for the berry soup that we both honestly enjoyed.

She sat down, taking a big breath. "My past was difficult but I learned how to deal with it through counseling and self healing." I looked down, remembering something particularly interesting I heard of. "Although... I mean—Like, didn't you get money from being in the school? Residential, or boarding school apology money?" I asked

nervously, not sure if it would be rude or offensive to ask, since I already knew she did. “Yes, I did. I was almost not going to take it either.” My sister looked up from eating her soup, “Give up free money?” She naively asked.

“No, you see, I didn’t need money to help myself. I got back on my feet, went to AA meetings, got myself a big house, a family who I love and that loves me. I knew, that if I took that money, it would just go to show that all the suffering our people had to go through was just worth whatever was on the check, and I think that’s just stupid.” She emphasized the ‘Stupid’ and shook her head.

“But when the deadline day came to get the money, everyone was pushing me over the cliff to get it. So I went and got it.” She took another deep breath; we could all feel the emotion that was in the room. So much, if someone walked in I would be almost positive they would feel the tension as well by just walking in. “And when I came home, seeing no one was home, I sat on the couch and—cried.” She wiped a tear off from her cheek, “I couldn’t remember how long that I cried, but it must have been hours.” And that, was the first time I was ever really touched and teary by a story before.

The residential school changed the aboriginals’ people’s worldview, the identity. There are many opportunities the generation of today can do to help our people. But stories like what my grandmother told my sister, and I, really opened our minds about things. Imagine a world if aboriginal youth, like myself, can change the world of tomorrow.

A world that would be.