



A PROJECT OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE

I'll Never Forget

By: Nicole Selkirk

One day I received a call from my granddaughter.

"Grandma, I have to write an essay on Residential schools for Social Studies and I was wondering if I could come over so you can help me?"

I told her I would love to help her and not a moment after she hung up there was a knock at the door. She came in and sat in the big chair beside me.

"Can you tell me the story of your time in the residential school?" she asked.

Memories started to rush back to me.

I began to tell my story,

"During the time of residential schools, Indians were considered savages. A man named Duncan Campbell Scott created the schools to get rid of the 'Indian Problem.' I'll never forget the day I was taken from my parents. I was eleven years old. It started out a beautiful day and I was helping my mother get lunch ready. A man and a woman arrived at our place and told my mother and father that me and my brothers had to go with them and there was no option. As we rode away with the man and woman on the horse I remember looking back and seeing tears running from my mother's eyes."

I continued,

"When we arrived at the school me and my brothers were separated and I was taken to a little room down the hall. In that room, I was bathed because Indians were thought of to be dirty and have lice. They gave me a dull grey dress to wear and worst of all they cut my hair. I had been growing it for years and it was almost down to my knees. I was taken to a big room where the other children were and we had supper. Upon seeing my brothers I went running over to them. Only to be dragged unwillingly back to my seat and told I could not speak with them. As I sat with the other girls, I decided to engage in their conversation. I was hit and told I wasn't allowed to speak my own language. That night I cried myself to sleep."

I picked up a tissue and wiped the tears from my eyes,

"I had to learn to do the things the other children did like speak English. Every day was the same. We'd wake up, eat, do our chores, go to chapel, go to school, have supper, have some supervised recreation time, then go to bed. Every night for a month I cried myself to sleep. I missed my parents so much and not being able to speak to my brothers made it worse."



A PROJECT OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE

My granddaughter interrupted me,
"Grandma, did you make friends at the school because you know friends are good to have to help you get through things."

I replied,
"Yes, after a while I had made some friends at the school who helped me learn the things I had to and I began to write letters home to my parents. I was always so excited to receive a letter from them. One day I went to pick up my letter. As I read, a knot suddenly appeared in my throat and tears rolled down my cheeks. It was a letter from my father telling me that my mother had gotten very ill and passed away. I started to cry. Thoughts ran through my head, it can't & true. I should have been there. I never got to say good bye. I ran to my room and lay on my bed for hours that night and I got only 2 hours of sleep. It just hurt so much to know that it had been so long since I had seen my mother and I would never see her again."

I paused a moment to cry before I continued,
"Before my time at the school got better it had gotten worse. Shortly after my mothers death my father came to visit at the school. We were allowed no longer then 10 minutes to visit. At the end of our time, I was dragged from my father's arms back inside the school. After that, my brothers and I had tried to run away a few times but were always caught, brought back and punished. My best friend decided she had had enough and put an end to her life."

I waited while my granddaughter buttered a piece of bannock,
"It was the winter of my 14 birthday when things seemed to start looking up. I had received a letter from my father that said me and my brothers would be going home for Christmas. I was so excited I couldn't wait. Those two weeks before I got to go home seemed to last forever. Finally, the day came and I would go home. Me and my brothers got on the plane and arrived around supper time. We were so happy to see our father. Things seemed different though because the last time I was home my mother had been there: The thought of that brought tears to my eyes. Me, my brothers, and my father all sat down and had supper together. After supper, we could visit without time limitations. Me and my brothers told our father stories of our time at the Residential school. When the time came for us to go back, we didn't want to leave. My father told us we had to go back."

I stopped and poured myself a cup of tea,
"During my last few years at the school I worked hard. I acted the way the teachers wanted us to act. My brothers and I had continued to go visit my father on holidays. Finally, the day had come where I would graduate. I was both happy and sad."



A PROJECT OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE

I was finally getting out of that school but my brothers had to stay for another two years. I knew inside that they would be alright."

I looked over at my granddaughter and could see tears in her eyes.

I continued, "Residential Schools were created to kill the Indian in the child. Aboriginal children were robbed of their culture and traditions and they were forbidden to speak their language. They were also abused physically, mentally, and sexually. And I am so glad you don't have to go through that."

As I wiped the tears from me eyes my granddaughter came over to me to give me a big hug.