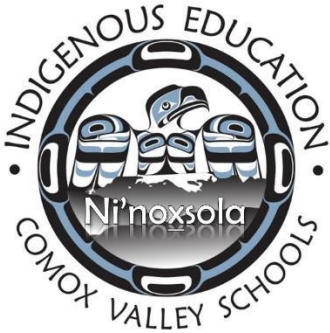


# *NI'NOXSOLA*

Elders in Residence Program  
Indigenous Education Comox Valley Schools



Sheila Buchanan  
Residential School



I saw the news about a student being assigned to write about 3 positive things about residential schools.

It enraged the mother of that student. I cannot say I blame her for her reaction.

I have experience through family who were in residential schools. My grandmother was snatched from her parents' home and placed in residential school. She spent several years suffering from loneliness, abuse, and hunger while being housed in that school. The abuse was mostly physical, but also verbal. She indicated that they wanted to take the Indian out of her. She was not allowed to speak her language. She could not understand English when she first went into the school, therefore was punished when given direction when she did not know what was being said. She did not want to talk about her experience in the residential school very often. She would answer questions when asked about it. It was a painful experience for her.

A lot of the things she learned in the school followed her throughout the years. She would take out her anger on her children and grandchildren because she was taught that strict discipline was an accepted behavior in raising them. When a chore was being worked on, and it was not up to standard, she would make the child do it repeatedly until it was perfect. She did teach us a lot of things that she learned once she was taught the way of life outside the school. She became skilled in the way of life in her Metis culture and made sure what ever task she took on was done meticulously. This was because of her discipline from the residential school.

It appeared that she was always afraid to make a mistake in whatever she did. Years later, two of my brothers were scooped from my mother's home. I was 12 years old but living with my grandparents, so they did not take me or my oldest brother. My 2 brothers were 3 and 5 years old. It was so painful to come home from school and to find out my brothers had been taken away. This procedure is not only painful for the children taken away, but also for the family left behind. I was 18 years old when I finally found my brothers after a long search. They related their stories about the treatment they were given and shuffled from school to school. Once the residential schools shut down, they were put into foster care where the treatment was no better.

There is nothing positive about their experience in these residential schools. They were separated and finally found each other when they were placed in a foster home with great people which they consider these people as their family. It took years before they finally found a positive place to live where they were treated like family.

It is true the government tried to make restitution by offering them money to try and make up for the abuse they suffered. This was not such a positive move, because survivors had never had such a large amount of money, therefore did not know how to utilize it positively. It did more damage than good. Rather than or along with the money, counselling to deal with the abuse should have been offered.

My brothers did not receive any money, they did not apply. My one brother is doing well for himself and has had the same job since he was 15. He is now retired. The other brother did not do well when he was younger and always got into trouble but has since lived a positive lifestyle.

Sheila Buchanan (Kookum)