

Gordon's Indian Residential School (1986-1996)

My name is Gavin. I am Plains Cree, and I lived in Punnichy, Saskatchewan. When I was only 7 years old, I got taken away by white people and sent to Gordon's Indian Residential School. I did not really understand what was happening at that time. I only remember my mom crying and everything feeling wrong. (1)

When I first got there, I was terrified. The building was big but felt cold. A sister brought me to see the father Louboutilier. There was another boy standing beside me. The father asked us some questions. The boy answered in our Indigenous language; I needed to help him to translate to English, and right away the sister punished him. She said we were not allowed to speak our own language and we must only speak English. That was one of the rules. (2)

That boy later became my friend. His name was Jackie. (3)

Life in the residential school was always the same every day. We woke up at 6:00am, lined up, and went to eat breakfast. Before eating, we had to pray. The father and sisters made us pray to Jesus, even though many of us did not believe in that religion. It felt forced. Breakfast did not taste pleasing. Sometimes it was like old canned herring, and we were always still hungry after eating. (4)

After breakfast, the sisters became our teachers. They taught us the Bible and other things, but everything was strict. If we got bad marks on daily quizzes or made mistakes, we got punished. My teacher was Sister Ingenious. She was the meanest teacher in the school. She would hit our hands or yell at us for small mistakes. Even

she was quiet, it felt scary. (5)

One time I forgot part of a Bible verse, and she hit my hand with a ruler. It hurt, but what hurt more was how everyone just stayed quiet. No one helped. In that place, staying quiet was the only way to avoid more trouble. (6)

At night, Jackie and I would sometimes whisper to each other. We talked about home and our families. He said he missed his mom a lot. I did too. Sometimes he quietly said a few words in our language, even though we knew it was not allowed. Those moments felt important, like we were still ourselves. (7)

But the school kept trying to change us. (8)

Next year, everything started to feel heavier. No one talked much anymore. Even at night, Jackie and I whispered less. It felt like something bad was coming. (9)

Then one day, Sister Ingenious caught Jackie speaking our language again. It was only a few words, but she got very angry. This time, the punishment was much worse. She used a whip and then locked him in a small cell. I tried to help him, but I got punished too and was locked away. (10)

When I came out, everything felt wrong. No one said anything, but everyone knew. (11)

A few days later, Jackie passed away. I heard that his wounds got infected because no one treated them. But it was not only that. He was already getting weaker every day. We were always hungry, and the food was never enough. He had a fever before, but the

teachers did not care. They just told him to keep going like nothing was wrong. (12)

The rooms were cold, and he was already tired all the time. It felt like his body was slowly breaking, but no one wanted to see it. (13)

In the end, it was not just one thing that killed him. It was everything. (14)

The wounds, the sickness, the hunger, and the way no one helped him. (15)

The teachers did not talk about it. They just took his body away like nothing happened. (16)

Like he never existed. (17)

That moment changed me. I stopped trusting the teachers. After that, no one dared to speak our language anymore. Even at night, it was just silence. (18)

When I turned 10, the school finally closed. People said we were free, but I did not feel free. I just felt lost. (19)

Where should I go? (20)

Where is my home? (21)

End