

May 16, 2022

To: Members of Congress

Re: "Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act"
(S.2907, H.R. 5444)

Copy to: Deborah Parker, CEO, NABS

My name is Ben Sherman. I am submitting my testimony in support of the above Act.

I am 82 years old and a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, Pine Ridge, South Dakota. I attended four years of boarding school at the Oglala Community School in Pine Ridge, a school administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

My three sisters Mayda, Marilyn and Amy attended the same boarding school in Pine Ridge.

My immediate family has attended government and church boarding schools for four generations. My great grandmother Lizzie Glode (Sherman) was in the first group of Indian children to attend Carlisle in 1879. Another relative to attend Carlisle in that first group was my other great grandmother Lucy Standing Bear's older brother Luther Standing Bear. Lucy had one sister and two other brothers attend Carlisle at the same time.

My grandfather William Sherman (son of Lizzie) and two of his sisters attended the government boarding school in Genoa, Nebraska.

My grandmother Victoria Hunter (Sherman) attended the Catholic boarding school at Holy Rosary Mission, Pine Ridge, South Dakota.

My mother Alice Kemery (Sherman) attended the Episcopal boarding school at St. Mary's Board School for Indian Girls in Springfield, South Dakota.

My boarding school experience was not terribly unpleasant. I adapted fairly quickly and did well in my academic studies. The big disadvantage was the curriculum. All students went through one-half of their studies in academic courses. The other one-half was vocational. That set me back one full year in college, and I had to repeat one year of high school.

I suffered from loneliness for my parents and home. I believe we returned home only twice during the entire school year. I ran away once and made it all the way home, but was immediately returned to school. I imagine that loneliness created most of the emotional stress on boarding school children.

I always felt sorry for the youngest boys in the dormitories. They were managed by matrons who could not provide the loving for care they needed. I wonder today how they were affected by the absence of family closeness. Some of those little ones spent the entire year at school because their parents were unable to visit them.

I mentioned earlier my great grandmother Lizzie at Carlisle. She stayed there for a few years. She learned primarily homemaking skills, which was the standard teaching for girls. After Carlisle she went to Genoa, not for school but to work. She met Frank Sherman and they were married.

They moved back to Lizzie's home on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation where they raised a family of five children. Three of the older children were sent to school at Genoa where they eventually finished and returned to Pine Ridge.

Lizzie and Frank's fourth child was Mark Sherman. He was sent to school at the Rapid City Indian Boarding School. The school environment was harsh, with regimented routines intended to instill highly controlled behavior. Mark and three other boys ran away from school in 1910. They decided to follow the railroad tracks from Rapid City and go south toward the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. At some point they decided to rest, with Mark and James Means sleeping on the railroad track.

A train rolled through, striking Mark and James, killing Mark immediately and fatally wounding James.

Mark was 17 years old. He was buried by Lizzie and Frank in a cemetery near their home in Kyle, SD on the Pine Ridge Indian reservation.

This is my personal story given in support the Act mentioned above. The committee will have volumes of testimony regarding the often cruel treatment of Indian children in boarding schools, some of which was fatal.

This cruelty was a government policy of a continued war against the children of an Indian population that was hated and reviled by many powerful Americans.



Ben Sherman

