

Arlene Dangeli Roberts, Tsimshian/Nisga'a Tribe, I attended the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA)

### **I am in full support for "H.R. 5444 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act"**

I was about 15 years old when I went from Washington state to Santa Fe New Mexico, traveling with an older girl (last name McCloud). We are originally from Alaska.

When I arrived at IAIA I was put in a room / share with a girl named Charlotte, when I first got there and unpacked I left the room to look around and came back to the dorm and saw a girl named "Boots" wearing my sweater that my Mom had got me, I told the house mother but nothing was done because "Boots" was the workers 'snitch' and told them everything that the other students did or didn't do.

I then moved into a larger room sharing it with Diane – Sioux nation, and Mary from the very northern section of Alaska – I think Barrow Alaska. (in the other attached room was 2 other girls)

Mary used to cry every night all night for days and weeks on-end. We can hear her deep cries down the hall at night. After weeks of this, Diane and I came back from classes and all of Mary's stuff was gone, and her bed looked like she never existed. We asked where she went – what happened – and were told they sent her home. No warnings – no goodbyes – no information on how she left - nothing, one day she was there – the next day she was gone – erased. And that's when the madness started.

I started questioning everything – why haven't some of the students been home in years? Why is the school run by two white blond people (a couple) who clearly didn't like us and laughed at students daily. Why is "Boots" allowed to steal and sneak around and spend hours in the House mothers' office not required to do any studies? Who else got "sent home" without anyone else knowing it? Where's Mary? Why won't the workers give us her address to write to her and see if she's ok, I was originally from Ketchikan Alaska and was so happy to have a fellow Alaskan at the school. We were told to just forget her.

We, as a school attended the State Fair – the day was called "Indian Day" anyone who was an Indian was allowed to ride free and play games – there were no other 'whites' anywhere (except at the booths) it was bizarre, same with going to a concert (Glen Campbell) another "Indian Day" – no other people – very few 'whites' anywhere. Why I kept asking 'why' and I was constantly ignored or told to 'shut up'.

I kept asking other students why they stay., why they haven't gone home, a lot said they weren't allowed or it was so far away to get there and there's no money or any way to leave or they were told their family didn't want them.

A few older guys got a few trucks and about 5 of us ran away one weekend, driving as far as we could north and ended up at a reservation, we were caught and taken back. I had to scrub pots and pans for the week at lunch time for doing that (I was hungry too but not allowed to eat until the work was done.) Then about a month later, the guys stole another truck and we were off and running, trying to get away from the insanity of hate that was there at the school through a lot of the workers. We were caught again, when I got to the dorm the House mother wanted me to tell her who was all involved – she was about 6 feet tall – yelling at me in the building entrance way, I wouldn't say anything – she slapped me across my face and I went flying toward the wall, I got up and still refused to say anything., the closet for the floor cleaners was next to me, she wanted me to get the floor brush and scrub my knees – she said I was dirty and ugly. I wouldn't do it. Boots was there snickering and watching everything.

I called my Mom & Dad and told them what happened and to get me out of there. It took a few weeks but they did it. I was hurt and shocked at how easy booze and anger and hate was so much a part of what was supposed to be the best 'art' Indian boarding school in the nation.

Me and my Mom & Dad met with the BIA representative when I got home, I told him everything that happened, and how the blond couple was so awful and seemed to contently laugh and making fun of students, how abusive the house mother was, how lonely and sad the students were. He managed to get the blond couple fired, and asked if I wanted to go back – I said no it was too awful and sad., and then hugged my family. I used to tell some of the students how rich our family was – we were rich in hugs and love.

My Dad Reggie Dangeli was sent from Kincolith BC Canada Coqualeetza Sardis BC Indian Residential School when he was about 6 years old. Kincolith is one of four Nisga'a Nation villages on the north west coast of BC.

The children were the farm labor there, getting very little education because they were always taking care of the fruits. Him and a few others used to hide fruit in their clothes and take them to the other kids to eat, sometimes that was their only food for the day. When he was older he was sent to Wrangel Institute Indian Boarding School in Wrangel Alaska for high school. He was always told he had no family so could never go home, which wasn't true. He was active as a drummer in the band and did his best to make a lonely life good. Kids would disappear or run away never to be found or heard of, they were told not to talk about it or would get in trouble for asking. Never allowed to speak their language or practice any sort of Native culture, they were to 'just behave' and stay out of trouble. He said there was a lot of abuse going on at that school. When we were little kids, my Dad would sit and cry remembering how hard life was in residential school and boarding school, how sad and lonely. He said sometimes they'd get sick just so they could be taken care of, but a lot of times when they were really sick they were ignored – he often said "you were lucky to get any medical help in all the years".

My Grandfather William Barton (my Mom Louise Dangeli's Dad, and son of Charles Barton) was sent from Kincolith BC Canada to Chemawa Indian School in Salem Oregon in the early 1900's. Kincolith has always been a beautiful fishing community close to the Alaska boarder. In Chemawa there was strict and hash rules never to speak Nisga'a language or speak or do anything 'Indian'. They were punished harshly; physically and mentally. Always told how dumb and ugly our people were. When he came home He became Mayor and bookkeeper for our village. He never spoke to others about the degradation and racism at Chemawa but he did tell my Mom some of the humiliating things that happened there, the physical abuse and mental abuse was daily. The people that ran that school had a lot of hate in them – according to my Mom.

My Great-Grandfather Charles Barton (my Mom's Grandfather) was sent from Kincolith BC Canada to Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Carlisle Pennsylvania when the school first open. He was beaten whenever he spoke Nisga'a language and basically used for labor to further the school building and economy (as were many students). Physical, mental, and emotional violence were common and almost daily – they wanted to beat the Indian out of the Indian – we always heard that growing up when my Mom would talk about her grandfather. When Charles "graduated" from Carlisle – they just told him to leave, so he had to make his way back to the Pacific North West alone – and on his own, having to take odd jobs along the way to earn food and money. He eventually made it to California then back to BC. He taught himself French and fine-tuned his English, he always would remember our language and would practice to himself daily. When he got home to Kincolith he became the first Interpreter for our Nisga'a Lands settlement executive committee – fighting against the government for their mistreatment and abuse of our people and lands.

Four generations of our Dangeli – Barton family attended residential school and survived the racism, physical and mental abuse and acts of genocide. Four generations of emotional and spiritual abuse, loss of language and culture, bits of family history missing that can only happen when families are actually together and growing up and growing old together. Identity and language is our healing tools, four generations of our family have hung on to family history and knowledge to overcome generations of abuse at boarding schools. So many of our people didn't have that, so many students have disappeared without question, we need

answers, we need to bring our people home for proper burials not just left in some hole that the government workers at the schools dug and dropped them in. Their extended family members need to know the truth of what really happened at so many boarding schools. Healing and Ceremonies need to happen to heal the generations of genocide and atrocities that occurred at the hands of the government workers.

The resilience of our family and our Native people needs to be told so history does not repeat itself and genocide becomes obsolete. The true history of "Go West Young Man" needs to be taught in all the schools. I once saw a poster that said: "If Indian children can survive boarding schools – white children can spend a few days learning the true history". Healing opportunities need to be created according to Ceremony.

Again: I am in full support for "H.R. 5444 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act"

Thank you for creating this opportunity to share what our family has gone through.

And a special "Thank you to the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States"

Respectfully,

Arlene Dangeli-Roberts, Nisga'a/Tsimshian Nation



*Note: I currently work for the Indian Residential School Survivors Society in BC Canada and a Grandmother of six beautiful grandbabies, and I have 40 years of sobriety now.*