

*Dr. Lena Hammons*

My name is Dr. Lena Hammons, I am an enrolled Tulalip Tribal Member. My grandparents attended the Tulalip Boarding School.

I am in support of any legislation that protects our people from such laws that caused the generational/historical trauma inflicted on my family from the boarding schools. Our people lived on this land, hunted, fished and gathered as a means of sustenance. They were healthy and strong. Boarding schools weakened them and their way of life. Now, we are having to spend millions of dollars of health care funding and insurance to reverse this damage.

The trauma caused by these schools did not colonize our people as expected, rather it failed to provide parenting skills to generations of native people, it created alcoholism and learned behavior such as molestation. Our ancestors afraid to speak their language, afraid to speak about their time at these schools. Adults – just afraid.

I grew up with memories of my Native grandmother being so mean and angry to anyone and everyone. I have friends who do not have good memories of their grandparents because their grandparents were so mean they didn't want to be around them at all. Boarding schools took our grandparents away. The most loving and influential people in the lives of children. The boarding schools failed to teach our grandparents how to parent, when they had kids they had no parenting skills. Many of our grandparents were molested/raped in these schools. Growing up believing that molestation/rape was ok and learned to behave in the same manner. Alcohol introduced to them after boarding schools created another night mare for children.

1965, at five years old, I had five brothers and sisters. We were removed from my parents and given to my non-Indian grandparents. We rarely saw our parents well into our teens. Although our grandparents did their best to give us a great life, we missed our parents. Our parents were never told what they needed to do to have us returned to them. They divorced and ended up states apart. We were adults when we were reunited with our Native mom who had suffered from severe addiction after we removed from her. As the oldest of six siblings, three in diapers, I provided care to my siblings to help our grandparents care for us. I am grateful that we did not experience molestation/rape or physical abuse during our childhood, however the lack of parental bonding and removal from our inherent culture created other trauma issues for each of us.

I have strived to provide a life for my children that includes their culture, strength and resilience to meet the daily challenges life creates. My children work even harder to provide their children with a better life than they had. I work at being that grandmother that I missed out on. I work hard at trying to understand the trauma that we all experience and demonstrate through various behaviors, not just for my children and grandchildren but for all of our community members. We need and deserve healing. We need to make sure that boarding school mentality and legislation does not appear in our future.

I did not suffer with racism or cultural identity as a child in school. I did experience indifference while in college though. Many professors expressed their lack of appreciation for my Tribal status, I have had to retake classes due to failing classes by specific professors. Every paper I wrote received failing grades, but only by specific professors. I refused to let them keep me from graduating and moving forward with

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my education. I have to teach my grandchildren to do the same. This is not something a grandparent should have to teach. Teaching love and respect, should my grandmotherly duties.

Just because we may work hard at making our lives better, does not mean that all Native people have that strength and resilience to step out of their trauma to make a better life for themselves. Therefore, the need for community responses and compassion to make sure resources are available to them to get them on a better, stronger road to healing is required.

Thank you for your time

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