

May 18, 2022

Hello. My name is Ernestine Hayes. I was born in 1945 in Alaska territory. I am Tlingit. At the age of 14 i was sent to Haines House, after which i was sent to Valdez childrens home. I stayed for a total of about a year and then was allowed to go home to Juneau, after which my mother and i moved to California when i was 15.

As far as i know, my mother and grandmother escaped being sent to boarding school; my grandmother was a rebel and fought enumeration, rolls, and unfair treatment. However, by the time i was a few years old she was lost to alcoholism.

The people in my family suffered tuberculosis, alcoholism, drop out, rheumatic fever, diabetes, poverty, hunger, loss of language, loss of Indigenous status, loss of belongings, loss of right to land use and resources, loss of rights to resources from our waters, loss of art, loss of kinship system, loss of our history, our names, our self-respect, parents, grandparents, children, and each other. If there is healing to be done, it can start at finally facing the genocide that was visited upon Indigenous people of what became the united states during the boarding house years, but it must not end there. Our pain and loss didn't end there, but instead has been perpetuated throughout each generation, just as assimilationist policies intended.

Thank you for this opportunity to say part of my story. My subsequent accomplishments according to western measures have been the result of my own efforts, and they are poor replacement for everything that was lost. Gunalchéesh. Ernestine Hayes, Tlingit nation, Eagle side, Kaagwaantaan clan, Wolf House.