

Good day,

I feel like I need to write to share my stories of attendance of Indian Boarding Schools.

First, I acknowledge that I did not have any of the abusive treatment stories that I have read and heard. Even mom told some sad stories of forced hair cuts and getting in trouble for speaking native languages and getting in trouble for talking to her brothers due to her being a girl and them being boys.

I went to 5th grade at a Catholic run boarding school in the 1960s. I was not forced. It was an option that my parents chose. My 4th grade teacher was mean and an ugly human being. She was part of the public school system. My parents chose to ship me to a Catholic boarding school to get me out of that public school system. Some of the nuns were some of the strictest I had been around, but strict to us all.

I also went to a BIA run boarding school in Oklahoma for my 8th grade year. This was again not any 'forced' but a choice of my mother. I was in shock being 2,000 miles away from home. I learned a lot. Maybe not always 'Academia' but a lot of life skills. WE had chores that took half a day on Saturday, but not abusive I recall learning how to run the stuff to clean and polish tile floors.

I suppose I should say that I had both positive and negative school experiences in those boarding schools as well as public schools. Academia was often better in public schools.

I then went to 10th, 11th & 12 grade at a different BIA boarding school. This was my choice, approved by my mom of course.

I still communicate with friends that I made in school. I talked with a LOT of other students who were glad to have the opportunity to attend these Indian Schools as the boarding schools were a better environment than home. (Oh no, am I touching a Sacred Cow?) Some of those friends made were students and some were faculty of those schools. Some of those have been friends that I go stay at their house and them at mine. Social Media is full of groups of us that keep in touch with our friends and make news ones through our connection to one of those boarding schools. Did bad things happen at those schools? Yes, I got into fights, got beat up, beat up others, got drunk, , ... was that the schools fault? The 'systems' fault? Would I have been better off at my local public school system..... would never have gotten into fights, got drunk.....that is a rhetorical question.

I also went on to Eastern Washington University and sometimes regretted the academia of some of those schools that I might have gotten better education at some of the public schools I attended, but I also recall I did better in my freshman year at EWU due to the fact that I was more ready to be living in dorms and doing my own laundry and making my own life decisions that some of them struggled with.

I am not minimizing the trauma that some, including my mother felt, I simply feel that if we are seeking 'truth', then more than the negative must be looked at and discussed. I feel like my words should carry some weight, since I have more 'experience' than most. I attended a lot of different boarding schools ran by the Catholic church, the BIA and the State of Washington. Again, I do not minimize abuse. That is wrong. I just know that for me and many of my buddies that went to various boarding schools, it was a good option that I am glad was there for many of us and I am thankful for the friends that I made in those boarding schools that are buddies to this day. There were many of us that had wonderful experiences at those various boarding schools made awesome friends of both fellow classmates as well as teachers, dorm staff,

coaches, administration staff many of whom had the best they could hope for for each of us as students. It bothers me when I read so much that seems to just try to demonize the entire boarding school systems. That is simply not factual.

Have a wonderful day,

Steve Filkins

Umatilla Tribal enrollee

I have had the joy to have began working for the Umatilla tribe in 1983 to give them back part of what they paid for and help me obtain on my secondary education

Currently living in the Pendleton, OR area