

My name is Dennis Decoteau and I am an enrolled member of the Turtle Band of Chippewa Indians. I attended two BIA run boarding schools in the late 60's and early 70's, Room Nineteen is one of several stories I want to share with you and is a story about abuse, neglect, and torture that I witnessed during my attendance at Wahpeton Indian School and Flandreau Indian School.

I want to first tell you that my attendance was not voluntary, me and my siblings were rounded up by BIA police and forcibly removed from our homes.

WIS was a BIA run boarding school located in Wahpeton, North Dakota and was attended by Native American Children from the upper Midwest. By the Midwest I mean from North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska, Montana, and Wisconsin. I'm assuming that the children who attended these boarding schools were also removed from their homes and came from reservations located in upper Midwest states.

While at WIS, I was placed in the big boys dorm which was grades 5th thru 8th. That dorm had two wings, one wing for 5th and 6th grades and the other wing was for 7th and 8th grades.

The 7th and 8th grade wing had 18 numbered rooms that held four boys in each room. The next room or equipment room had no number on it so we called it Room Nineteen. We also referred to this room as the torture chamber because this is the room where matrons administered punishment for misbehavior. Boys were beaten in this room and because the door had a small metal grill at the bottom, we could hear boys screaming while receiving torture.

On one occasion, I took some food from the cafeteria and brought it back to the dorm for a later snack. When I returned to the dorm, I was immediately taken to room nineteen for punishment. The punishment was a beating with the choice of a razor strap or a fiberglass fishing pole. The Matrons would beat you until you would start screaming in pain. My choice on this particular occasion was the fiberglass fishing pole but that didn't lessen the pain any. I took my punishment and immediately started screaming in pain from the whipping, We would all stand around room nineteen and listened through the grill while male matrons administered beatings.

Some of the boys would not scream or cry during these beatings and so their punishment was rather severe.

My younger brother Andy was stubborn this way and endured a severe beating which I'm sure he'll never forget. I found out about his beating several years later and I sure it affected him in many ways. This is one of my stories that is difficult to share with you. This story is also published in a book written by Denise Lasjmodierre entitled "Stringing Rosaries". I also shared this story with a New York Times film crew who was doing a documentary on boarding school survivors.

I am sharing this story now because I have more years behind me than I have in front of me. I do not seek fame or fortune, but I guess this is my way of healing.

I have several other stories that I would be glad to share with you. I have entitled two other stories as "Green Dresses" and "The Cookie Monster". I'm not happy to say that the Cookie Monster drove me to the edge of suicide but I feel the world should know about these atrocities. I call them atrocities and I don't even know if this is the appropriate word but if I could prevent this sort of thing from happening to Native American children by sharing this, that is my goal.

