

As a descendent of a boarding school survivor/drop out, my family was impacted by my Dad's experience. My Dad was Born in British Columbia but was raised in Metlakatla Alaska and Ketchikan Alaska. He attended Ketchikan Indian school until 4th or 5th grade. Then he and his siblings were shipped off to Sheldon Jackson Boarding school in Sitka, Alaska. There my Dad was beaten for speaking his native language, had his mouth taped up, and was forced to miss meals when he was caught speaking Sm'algyax (Tsimhian).

My Dad said he had is worse then his bother and sister who were also shipped to Sheldon Jackson because he was always trying to protect them. Since Southeast Alaska is a series of islands there was no way to catch a bus or walk home. When my Dad was 12, he had enough and did not return to Sheldon Jackson. He and his siblings dropped out of school. They hid when the boat came and did not return to boarding school.

My father's lack of education impacted our family with our low income. He worked as a journeyman electrician but was only paid as a lower-level electrician. He could never pass the test for journeyman. Later in life when he had lung cancer, he was disabled and started carving for a living, but back in the 70's native art was only for the tour boats, and it barely kept food on the table. We lived on fishing and hunting for most of our meat.

My Dad did take me to learn hos to weave cedar baskets, and taught me how to carve, but I mainly did that to help pay for things. I had asked at the time to teach me our language, but he said "no, that would hurt me in school." And he wanted me to be "successful" in school and not be labeled and hampered by our language.

Now at 60 I am finally learning Sm'algyax. I am thankful to be learning this through a zoom online class form Juneau, but I think about all I lost when My Dad wouldn't teach me. He also only talked about our stories and oral history a little because again he didn't want us to have the stigma of different beliefs.

As a result of the breaking of his language, culture, beliefs...I have only taught my children some of our beliefs. I truly regret that and wish I could have done more to pass on what our teachings are. I am doing that now, but my children are grown and the time to do this would have been when they were young.

What is sad is my Dad was from Tsimshian royalty. He was fluent in our language, he was a carver and artist. Because of his experience as a child, I can only share in parts of that. Our stories and our language, and our culture are less because of boarding schools did part of what they wanted to they beat the culture and language out of my Dad's generation. My sister is also learning our language now, and my cousins also missed out of being taught this as they were young. So my extended family is still working on reclaiming our cultural roots.

On the other hand I am glad my Dad and his siblings dropped out of boarding school so they survived.

Thank you for listening,

Jewel Bruton Brumley

Tsimshian