

## Testimony of Jolene Thomas (Hawk)

### BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE UNITED STATES

May 18, 2022

**Please accept this testimony in support of H.R. 5444 / S. 2907, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the US Act.**

Re: Rapid City Catholic Boarding School - Mary Charboneau age 11

I am here to share the story of my Aunt, "Mary Charboneau." The daughter of the late Robert and Sarah, "Vondal" Charboneau. She was born 1914. An Indigenous female child, who died at the Rapid City Catholic Indian School. My aunt, Mary Charboneau was an enrolled member of the *Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians*, located in Belcourt ND.

Information obtained through the Bureau of Indian Affairs of South Dakota, documented that she entered the Rapid City Boarding School, August 31, 1923 at the age of 9 along with her two older brothers: Clearance and Anothony Charboneau.

As we read through the boarding school documents, we find her death occurred in the year of 1926, stating, "Mary Charboneau date of death." According to those records. Her death occurred December 22, 1925 at the age of 11. The cause of her death was not indicated.

Additional information recovered from the records included: Mary wanted to be a sewer and she was one year younger than her brother, (even though she was several years younger than her brother). It becomes obvious we have discrepancies. We then obtained the Native American census report it indicated that our auntie Mary Charboneau was still alive in 1928.

My grandpa Anothony often talked about his little sister. My mom Cindy recalls her dad's stories as, "His little sister Mary: was separated from them when their dad left with her, transporting her by buggy to live with relatives in Montana." That was the last time he had seen her. He spoke often of her with all family members and friends stating, "I have a little sister, her name is Mary." He often said he would love to know what

happened to her. He referred to Mary in present tense form, he believed she was still alive. He often wondered how she was living her life. His goal was to one day become united with his sister.

My grandpa's stories were also of him and his brother Clearance Charboneau, attending Rapid City Indian School and how they left the school by running away. They ran away because they were being abused, by the nuns and priests. They were demanded to live in silence and he often talked about it being compared to his experience as a soldier. He said, "too much despair, lives lost and imaginable abuse." He was ashamed to go into detail but made it very clear to, NEVER trust the government." The abuse also included his boarding school classmates and his brother Clearance. He stated, "My life was on the line and the sadness weighed heavily on me. I will never forget what I had seen and personally went through." If my grandpa knew his sister Mary was also at the boarding school, he wouldn't have left her. His stories of the boarding school never included his sister.

In July 2022, a family member received a phone call from someone telling them about a Mary Charboneau showing up on a list of boarding school children who are deceased. Next to her name also read: Turtle Mountain, age 11. This person hoped someone here could claim her.

My grandpa never forgot or stopped talking about his little sister Mary. He suffered a deep sadness of his lost sister. He talked about her up until his last moments prior to his death. Because of his deep love for his sister, it affected all of our family. My grandpa's story keeps revolving, generation after generation, it is now my family story; my story.

We immediately made the connections of my grandpa's stories, of his little sister Mary and the information obtained from boarding school records. Without any hesitation we knew that she was our missing aunt.

As of today we are here, together with the same goal as my grandpa. Mary Charboneau an innocent little girl whose only crime was being born Indigenous. We have uncovered pieces of her story but unfortunately they led to more missing pieces that need to be uncovered. My aunties remains have never been found and we do not know how she died.

As a family of Mary Charboneau we stand united. WE are Proud, strong and determined. We want answers, the missing pieces. We are prepared to be hurt and

angered in exchange for the truth and justice Mary Charboneau, an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Tribe, a missing child: deserves to have the rest of her story told.

Respectfully

Family of the late Mary Charboneau

- Cynthia Hawk (Charboneau)
- Betty St Claire (Charboneau)
- Richard Charboneau
- Anthony Charboneau
- Roger Charboneau
- Lorna Charboneau
- Bernadine Charboneau
- Jolene Thomas (Hawk)
- Rheannon Charboneau

**\* Please note that family members listed (1-7) are all also board school survivors.**