

To whom it may concern:

My name is Kelli Leiter Lord and I am a descendent of a Carlisle Indian Industrial School survivor, and I support "H.R. 5444 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act"

I can't give you an exact tribe because the school did its job by erasing history. I can tell you that what little I could get my grandmother to speak about, she would say we were "Iroquois", which as you may know is a grouping of six tribes that all speak the same language.

Based on what I can piece together, my Great-Grandfather Percy Flurie went to the school somewhere around the early 20th century. Very little was spoken about him other than interesting stories of his "shenanigans". My grandmother would often comment to me how much I was like him and that, to use her words "the papoose really showed up in you Kelli".

When my grandmother Mary Anne Leiter would be questioned by me (or my cousins) about our heritage, she would immediately shut down all conversation and either leave the room or "blow it off" and then leave the room. No amount of asking or begging for information would sway her. It was obviously too painful for her to speak of. Towards the end of her life, I managed to get two pieces of information out of her:

One: "If you were an Indian in my day, you did not admit it."

Two: "I would be thrown out of restaurants because 'we don't serve Indians here'."

She was clearly traumatized by being identified as Native and most likely feared for her safety. She then passed that "whitewashing" on down to her sons, who like her grandchildren wanted to know. I can tell you it hurt them all greatly as they were proud of being native, but knew no more than that. They celebrated any way they could buy incorporating what little they knew of Native culture into their lives. My uncle, William Leiter, even went by the callsign "Indian" when parachuting into enemy territory during Vietnam.

I found out I was Native in the second grade when we had an assignment in class about where our ancestors came from. I was the only one who didn't know. My teacher said I was "probably Italian". I went home to ask and was quickly corrected by my father "You are American Indian" (that's what we were referred to in that timeframe). I was SO excited and went back to school the next day and spoke very proudly of my heritage. I was laughed at and ridiculed to the point of tears by the other children. "They are all dead!"

That is my pain, knowing who I am, but not being connected to my community. My father suffered that same longing, as did his brothers. Generational Trauma is real. It is with my whole being that I support "H.R. 5444 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act". I want to come home to my people, and start the healing process on behalf of my Ancestors.

Thank you to the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States for hearing my testimony.

Sincerely,
Kelli Leiter Lord