

May 20, 2022

My name is Marjeanna Burge, I belong to the Paddyaker (Parriekivit or Red Elk) family and the Comanche Nation (Kwahada band). I did not attend the Indian Boarding school but did travel to Kansas (from Texas) to attend Haskell Indian Nations University to attempt learning more about the culture that was stolen for our family. This is where I found out the stories of ancestors at Indian Boarding Schools.

My grandfather never discussed his personal experiences. It was his younger sister that I interviewed during my time at Haskell that I first learned about the story, which I will give more detail about further down. My grandfather (Deyo Paddyaker) and his sister (Wakeah) were sent to Ft. Sill Indian Boarding School. Later on my great aunt was sent to Haskell Indian Boarding School, where she stated that she was taken by train. They lived in the Lawton, OK area and Haskell Indian Boarding School was in Lawrence, KS (which eventually became Haskell Indian Nations University that I attended).

I fully support H.R. 5444, the "Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act" because I never knew these stories growing up, I only happened to learn about them because we had a class assignment to interview someone that had attended it when it was a boarding school and I found that my great aunt had attended there.

I was raised by my grandparents. My grandfather was the 'silent type' and never spoke about the things he had gone through as a child. He knew the Comanche language but as much as I pleaded for him to teach me, he refused. He told me I needed to know English and get a good education, which I did. We only engaged in the fringes of the Comanche culture and that is most likely because my White grandmother loved the culture! I never understood a lot of the sentiments about 'being Comanche' but I just held on to the pride that I was, not really practicing much with what I know to be cultural practices now in my life. My time of learning during my education at Haskell helped me to understand much more about how Indian children were treated and the practices in place for the erasure of the culture and being taught to be ashamed about who they were. My interview with my great aunt made it become much more vivid for me. She told me about how 'mean' they were at Ft. Sill Indian School, how she didn't speak English but they would NOT ALLOW her to speak in Comanche. So there was no communication! She mentioned a specific incident where she needed to go to the bathroom but didn't know how to tell them, so she told them in Comanche. She was whipped, and then ashamed because she ended up wetting her pants. Putting myself in her place, thinking of this little child, it broke my heart. It helped me understand what I felt was a bit of shame from my grandfather. It still breaks my heart to think about what these CHILDREN went through. Shown no compassion, taken from their families and taught who they were was dirty and shameful. The more I've learned and heard stories, the more I believe this is one of the most shameful practices there is with the violence to these children.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate my strong support of H.R. 5444, "The Truth and Healing Commission on Board School Policies Act". I visited Cape Towne, South Africa and heard about the healing that was happening with the similar efforts concerning apartheid. We're probably all familiar with the saying, "the truth shall set you free". It is time for healing in this country and that healing is only going to happen with the truth being told, so healing can begin. Finally, I want to say thank you to the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States for these efforts.

Ura, Marjeanna Burge