

Dear Legislators,

Where does one begin to unravel events that have shaped one's outlook on life, one's demeanor, and how one responds to events in the present, past, and future?

My story, in short as I really do not enjoy revisiting the pain of separation from my mother, my home and my relatives. I left home, not yet six years old as my birthday is in November. I have profound trust issues; how do I know if telling my story will affect future outcomes? I recall my initial departure from home and traveling by school bus on an unimproved road. I experienced extreme home-sickness. Even now, I have separation anxiety. I plan future events in my life in great detail as I have been fending for myself since before six years.

Fortunately for me, my mind has chosen to blot out most of my memories of boarding school, the little details with a few glimmers of hope and relief remain. I recall a set of favorite teachers, the Roanhorses—they were a teaching Navajo couple at Shiprock Boarding School. Many years later, I became a teacher and I was their grand-daughter's teacher.

I carry the pain of family separation for my Grandmother Mary whose older sister went off to boarding school at Ahéheshíjh, a Place of Constant Summer. I could be somewhere in Arizona or even California. We don't know. My grandmother Baa' Yázhí whom I never knew died at boarding school. My grandmother Mary grieved the loss of her sister throughout all her 96 years of life.

I also carry my younger sister Lorraine Nakai's pain. She was brutally terrorized and bullied by fellow boarding school attendees. She was a sensitive child. I cried with her many times. We both went to counseling to deal with these traumas. We became writers, speaking of our pain. She died two years ago and I grieve her loss

I am also an assault survivor and a suicide survivor. There is a connection between the two.

My solace is my language. I am fluent in my tribal language, Diné, however my own children aren't fluent in the language. I grieve that.

Yes, I am angry. I am angry about many things. I pray for healing for myself and my relatives. The burden is tremendous; the uprooting and collapse of familial ties. The trauma expresses itself evidently in so many dysfunctional manners. Surely, I am also a survivor of genocide.

This is all I can bring to light, at this time.

Eirene Nakai Hamilton



Survivor

Hai Asdzââ, shimá.

On cold wintry, windy days

I think of my mother, *Shimá*

Shepherdess astride her horse,

Bundled up against the cold

Keeping herself warm with thoughts of,

And prayers for her children away at

BIA boarding school.

She was never separated from her mother,

But she got separated from her children

As they went to learn of another way of life,

A way of life

So foreign to what she knew,

but they lived, they survived.

It was a trade-off.

Áshinee' Shimá, bless me with courage.

I remember you as I bundle myself

Against the cold.

Áshinee' Shimá, bless me with courage.