

To the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States,

My name is Jennifer Frazee and I am a citizen of Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma. I did not attend a boarding school but my grandfather did. My grandfather's name was Joe Lee Thomas, he was a Choctaw man from Oklahoma who attended Carter Seminary in Ardmore Oklahoma for a short time. I know very little about his time there, didn't even know the possibility of the horror that was government run boarding schools had touched my own family, and it is for this reason that I support H.R. 5444 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act. It is part of my grandfather's history. It is my history and my children's and it will be their children's history. We must have the care of it now.

Carter Seminary started as Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw girls but when the building burned down, they rebuilt it in Ardmore where it became Carter Seminary, a coeducational school for Native kids. This is one of the schools once under the domain of the United States Government. I am unsure of when my grandfather attended the school though it was likely in the 1950s. He was at Dickson by the time he was in highschool and he turned 18 in 1963. I know next to nothing of his experiences while there. I only know that he was young and that my Uncle Bob, his youngest brother, did not have to attend because he was a baby. My grandfather told me he didn't have too much trouble, that he ran off and spent as much time as he could in the areas outside of the school. I got the impression it was a wooded area with gullies and the like that he could play in just like we played in on our allotment when I was growing up. I thought he just meant playing hookie, skipping school. Then I grew up and began learning more about boarding schools and what that was like for the children who attended them.

He spoke of it only once and did not answer any questions but one: Why did he run off? He said because he didn't like the school. I don't believe he would have said even that much if he didn't feel he had to and I don't think he spoke about it to many others. My grandmother, mom, and uncle said he never mentioned it to them. I have not asked his younger brother. I likely never would have known what I did find out if I had not complained to him when I was 14 that my mom would not let me attend Carter Seminary with some of my cousins and he said he did not want me to go either. By this time, Chickasaw Nation had control of the school again, but he still did not want me to go and refused to hear a word of argument. I don't know what else he experienced, how long he was there, or how he was able to stop going. By the time he was a teenager, he was no longer attending Carter Seminary because my grandmother met him at Dickson High School in 1963. I don't know any of this part of his history but I should know it.

Hearing the survivor stories, I have cowardly moments where I don't want to hear of bad things that may have happened to a person I love so much, but they pass and I know these stories need to be heard. My grandfather is not here to lend his voice in support of the people of our Nations who faced these terrifying and sad moments when they were children. But he is my blood and so I will lift my voice in support for him. We must hear these stories. Other kids hear of the shenanigans their grandparents got up to as kids. They hear of walking to school uphill both ways, favorite teachers, least favorite teachers, even the people who should not have had the care of young minds, but Native kids do not hear those stories. Our histories are locked in trauma and hidden like a poison thorn. It is my hope that H.R. 5444 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act can bring these histories into the light. Give the folks who are still alive the support they deserve so they can begin to heal. Do not let another elder die without that relief.

I am grateful to the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States for undertaking this heavy work and wish you strength in your pursuit of truth so our Nations can begin to heal.

Sincerely,  
Jennifer Frazee