

Written Testimony of a boarding school survivor

My name is Marcida B. Eagle Bear (Morrison), I am 69 years old and I went to the Rosebud Boarding School located in Mission South Dakota on the Rosebud Indian Reservation.

I was 4 years old when I went to the Rosebud Boarding School in the fall of 1955. As a 4 year old, fluent-speaker and not knowing a single word of English, I faced some hardships immediately as we were brought to the boarding school. My older sister and 2 older brothers were separated from me and that was traumatizing. My family lived in a one "L-shaped" room house so I was not familiar with the separating of my siblings. I cannot remember much other than, the food was unnatural to me and the more the matrons forced the food onto me, the more I resisted and I eventually vomited all the food. I did not like the smell or the looks of the food, it made me gag. The smell of the matrons, bedding, everything was unfamiliar to me and it made me sick to my stomach. I wet the bed because I can remember my older sister helping me undue my bedsheets and taking them to get washed and I'm sure that happened often. I cried a lot; I was homesick and I was terrified because the teacher was hitting me with a ruler and I did not know why. I remember needing to go bathroom really bad and somehow I knew that this line of girls in front of a door meant that if you wanted to use the bathroom, you had to stand in line. I couldn't wait but didn't know how to say it so, I crouched behind a box and went to bathroom there. I'm not sure what happened thereafter. I can only remember "moments" but nothing else. I just wanted to go home. My experience was horrific and knowing that small children have a protective shield in which it chooses which memories they keep and mine were sporadic. For some reason, the school made a decision to send me home as I was too young to function there so they sent me home in a mail truck, I was told by my mother. I cannot remember the trip home or anything else beyond what I am sharing. What I do know is that when I speak of my experience at the boarding school in 1955, I still feel the emotions today like I was still back there when I was just a small 4 year old girl; heavy feelings of extreme terror, sheer loneliness and helplessness. Interestingly, it is 2 colors that reflect my experience and they are shades of gray and black.

I was sent back to the same Boarding school when I was older and can take care of myself. I was able to speak some English. I followed rules to survive and although the treatment was not so extreme during the later years there I still heard whippings that took place on the ones who ran away and were caught. Many children kneeled in the hallways for simple infractions. There were many times, humiliation and shaming tactics were used on the little girls and older girls in public. (example; "Sally, your jeans are so tight, it looks like 2 pigs fighting each

other” or “you allowed your boyfriend to suck your neck or touch you all over”), another example: checking heads for lice was a public experience. They had long tables with white sheets on them so each child will stand close to one another and bend over so matrons can comb your hair onto the sheets. If head lice is detected then their names were on a list that signified if the child had either Bugs or Nits beside their names and this list was on public display. If you wanted your name off the list, you had to find someone to clean your head plus you got demerits that needed to be worked off due to having head lice. Those practices occurred frequently.

The worst experience I encountered when I was 6th or 7th grade was when the head male Matron used his fist on a young boy right in front of me. (a runaway) He beat him with his fist while screaming hateful words at him. This young man was a friend of mine and he was 2-spirited. That experience stays with me and several years ago, I went to a graduation at our local university and this elderly man sat next to me as it was crowded and somehow it seemed like he was meant to sit by me as I thought later. So, during the graduation, I was just looking around at the crowd and then I looked at this elderly man sitting next to me. He was maybe in his late 70's or 80's and he looked really rough. Then I recognized him; He was the head male matron who used his fist on a young boy in front of me many years before. My feelings and thoughts of that incident came rushing back and I thought, I need to confront this man and tell him that I witnessed him beating a young boy with his closed fist and that I had nightmares about that for many years. I wanted to stand up at this graduation and tell all of them that this old broken man sitting next to me was a child abuser during my boarding school years and I seen him beat a child with my own eyes. I sat there pondering, “should I stand up and finally give voice to that incident on behalf of my friend because as an adult, I had no fear left in me for this cowardly man?” (..and if I did, I would disrupt this special occasion for the graduates) ...or just pray and let creator deal with this old man's consequences? My thinking was that if I can confront this man, I can then move on and let it go. After a long moment of thought, I told myself that after all the years of praying to our Creator and dealing with painful issues with Creator's help, I have come to realize that itsnot my responsibility to make this man face consequences in this place or time; I just simply said a prayer asking Creator to take this burden from me and so, although I continue to carry some of the pain and memories of that childhood; for now it is not so devastating or crippling for me anymore. I can say that as an adult I still have moments of sadness, bouts of depression, some struggles with self-worth but after years of addressing those issues, I am a survivor and Im still here.

I am grateful that this government is finally addressing the impacts boarding schools have left on our people; it is criminal behavior on the part of the government to steal

children, separate them from their families and grossly mistreat them under their care and control for many decades. It is child abuse at its worse and this investigation will bring out the truth to the world the extent of these mistreatments on native children enforced by this government. I support the passage of HR 5444, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act. And I want to thank the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States and the Secretary of Department of Interior Ms. Deb Halland for bringing this historical issue to the forefront to be investigated and bring awareness and long-overdue justice for the Indigenous peoples; most importantly for all the children who were severely victimized in these boarding schools and for many who never returned home.