

I was 10 years old when I was told by my auntie that I was going on a trip to a wonderful school where I would get new clothes and shoes and have a lot of fun. I boarded a yellow school bus and never got to see my family, or my parents for what seemed like forever. Remember I'm ten.

We got to a place that had brick buildings. All of us children had to line up and the girls went to one building and the boys went to a different building. My three brothers went with my aunt and uncle and I went alone with all these strangers into the building. Remember I was ten.

The first thing I was told is I had to go with this woman. I followed her to a large bathroom with open showers. I had to take all my clothes off in front of the adults and other girls. I had to get into the shower and was told "now scrub yourself clean". I scrubbed and then a woman (matron) had me stand in front of her while she inspected me. She told me to go back and scrub the dirty spots in the spaces next to my groin because I was still dirty there. I scrubbed my skin until it was raw (my skin was brown in color not dirty). Remember I was ten.

Finally I was taken to a room filled with clothing of different sizes and another woman picked something out for me to wear. Then I was shown to a large room with stacks of bunk beds in it and assigned one to me. I was then instructed to make sure it always looked like it did just then with tight corners on the blanket and sheets. Remember I was ten.

I wondered why I was here. Where was my family? Where were my brothers? I was scared and lonely. Who were all these other girls and where were their families? I went to sleep and was awakened early in the morning by the matron. She told me to get up, get dressed, make the bed like it was before and line up by the door. Remember I was ten.

Then the matron led us out the door to a walkway to another building that she told us was the cafeteria. While standing in line if you touched your face or rubbed your nose you were sent to wash your hands and in the back of the line. I only had to do that once to learn. Remember I was ten.

After breakfast I was told to go to another building that was the school. I met Mrs. Eastman my fifth grade teacher. She was kind and caring and taught me to always capitalize the I on Indian and to be proud of who I was! I finally met someone I could trust. She gave me a reason to be. I looked forward to being in her presence and learned to love school because of her. She became one of my earliest mentors. One time she took me to her home and showed me how to bake a cake. She then took me to her reservation in Sisseton, South Dakota to meet her parents. I remember thinking where is my family? Remember I was ten.

One night in the girls dorm where I lived a few girls wanted to play so I joined them. One of them wanted to rub my back with lotion. So I laid face down on the cot and she started rubbing my back but pretty soon she was rubbing my butt and trying to do more! I jumped off the cot and never "played" with them again. Remember I was ten. It did get me thinking what happened to them in their homes? Why were they here?

Many weeks go by and the school is doing programs for the Christmas holidays. I never really get to see my brothers and my aunt and uncle. I'm all alone. I'm standing in line and two adults are walking towards me. I can't see distance very well but the woman was dressed in a fur coat and has red hair and was beautiful. She was carrying a huge doll. They finally got close enough to see and it was my mother and father! I ran out of line and hugged them but the matron pulled me away and made me go back into the line. My parents had come for me but I couldn't be with them! Why? I found out they had to get jobs, get a home and prove to the authorities that they were fit parents before I could leave! I did get to be "checked out" to go visit them but always had to go back.

Summertime comes and the school buses load up to take the children back to their reservation. My one and only friend gets on the bus but I have to stay behind. I cry and cry until I fall asleep. I begin to stay by myself and realize now as an adult that I become a very depressed 10 year old. End of summer I turned 11 and had to endure another year without my family. With no explanation of how I came to have to be here in the first place! I had all these questions but really couldn't ask anyone.

Mr. Wellington the school administrator noticed my depressed state and call me into his office. He's also was very kind and caring . He had decided to send me on some trips. So I first went to Fort Abercrombie for an outdoor excursion and to learn with two adults to supervise. Then I went to Minneapolis MN to see the Foshay Tower, the highest building from Chicago to Los Angeles and got to stay in the Curtis Hotel where presidents stayed. Finally I got to go to Washington , D. C. But this trip was to examine 6 of us Indian children from head to toe so we stayed in the Bethesda Naval Hospital also where the presidents went. "They" tested us in the morning and took us sight seeing in the afternoon. I was there 1 month. My birthday is in end of August so I turned 12 then and the hospital staff made a cake and had a birthday party for me. I don't remember ever having one at home before that.

That sixth grade is a blur for me because all I wanted was out! I felt like a prisoner in an army camp. Always being told do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that! I kept thinking I just wanted to go home. I want to find out what happened!

I want you to know that if it wasn't for Mrs. Eastman and Mr. Wellington I may not be here today telling my story because depression can seep into your soul and take you from this earth. It has taken a lot of therapy and ceremonies to : 1) find out what happened, 2) forgive my parents, 3) to be grateful that the Creator watched over me and guided me through this process of healing. But not one day goes by that I don't forget about children and how important it is to talk to them, to love them and to protect them! Mrs. Stevens, Mrs. Cook and Mrs. Eastman my 3rd, 4th and 5th grade teachers helped me to love school so I graduated and became a Nurse Practitioner so I could help others in this life as a healer.

I am Niiganii Ginew Ikwe (Golden Eagle Leader Woman), I am from the Bear clan and I am a Sundancer, Ojibwe from Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa who is married, has 3 children, 5 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren. Bi survived.