

Boarding School Written Testimony

My name is Ronald Singer of the Navajo Nation. I attended the Tuba City Boarding School in Tuba City, Arizona from 1964-1967.

I want to add my support for H.R.5444, The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the US Act. I believe this Bill is long overdue to help those boarding school survivors and their families heal from the impact boarding schools have had on their lives. Healing to include an apology and just having our story told to be acknowledged.

I am a second-generation boarding school survivor in that my father also attended Tuba City Boarding School (herein identified as TCBS) and my mother attended Sherman Institute in Riverside, California. My younger sister also attended TCBS at the same time I did. Whereas my kid brother did not so much as step on the school grounds. My parents only attended five years of school in contrast now have five of their grandchildren who graduated from college. These five grandchildren never attended boarding school, but it still impacted their lives from the intergenerational trauma.

Sometime back I opened up to my wife and children about the trauma I experienced as a young child. They encouraged me to talk with a counselor who had never had a client with a story like mine as a boarding school survivor, and she helped me begin to heal.

The boarding school was like a prison to many students, and I call now Federal Prison. The experiences like having our dorm mother expose herself to us and watching some boys having their mouths washed out with soap for speaking Navajo were terrible. The worst one was being swatted with a counter brush by the dorm father who it seemed had no mercy on us. Each boy who got swatted would cry and cry as I also did because it hurt so bad. We'd have to pull our pants and underwear down to our ankles and then bend over in front of other boys. It was pure humiliation bending over touching my toes and swatted numerous times. Swatting is one thing, but the dorm fathers it seemed to me did not care about the degree of pain they inflicted on us. I don't know maybe they were having a bad day and took it on us.

Every Friday IF you were lucky your parents might check you out from the dorm for the weekend to spend time with family at home. Sadly, going home on the weekend rarely happened for me. I felt so alone and abandoned and would cry when I was not checked out by my family.

It seemed to me there were only two reasons we went to Tuba City: to go to the hospital or return to the dorm. Both made me very anxious, and my stomach would tighten up and I'd become nauseated. The one time I recall my mother bought my sister and me each a hot dog at the Dairy Queen, but I couldn't eat it as I was anxious about returning to the dorm.

As a point of clarification, the dorm fathers and mothers were either Navajo or Hopi for the most part. I am sure they had also attended boarding school at one time and some served in the military. Dorm father or mother, no difference, were mean to us by constantly barking out orders to us. To be truthful, I hated my boarding school experience. Luckily it was only for three years.

Lastly, I want to thank the House Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples as I take the opportunity to voice my support of H.R. 5444. Also thanks to National Native American Boarding

School Healing Coalition to give me a forum to express my feeling about my boarding school experience which in a way has been therapy for me as I wrote it

Thank-You for your time.

Ronald L. Singer