

My name is Tetana Adkins, and I am an enrolled member of the Colville Confederation of Tribes located in Washington State. I am 50 years young and grateful to be here today!

I never did attend an Indian boarding school, but I will tell you that I am an intergenerational survivor. Multiple generations before me were made to attend these Indian boarding schools: my mother Carmelita Adkins attended St. Mary's Mission for four years starting in 1957; my grandmother Ann Mary Laducer attended boarding school in DeSmet, Idaho (the name of boarding school and time she attended are unknown), and my grandfather, Joseph "Joe" Laducer attended Chemawa in Salem, Oregon, for some time unknown to us as well.

I am writing this testimony sharing with you my own personal story today in complete support of H.R. 5444 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act because I have firsthand experienced and witnessed the impacts the boarding school experience has had on me as well as my family.

I am an intergenerational survivor of the Indian Boarding School experience, a third-generation survivor. I grew up on the Colville Reservation, located in the north central part of Washington State. I am not even sure where to begin, but I will share with you that my family suffered much from the Indian boarding school experience. It has only been in the past ten years that we began to talk about it following a legal settlement with the St. Mary's Mission of which several of my own other family members (aunties and uncles) received financial compensation following a lawsuit on behalf of victims for the years of various abuses they endured including physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and sexual while attending the Indian boarding school at St. Mary's, the very same school my mother attended, see article at https://www.wenatcheeworld.com/lifestyles/family_and_faith/former-st-mary-s-mission-student-speaks-out-after-settlement/article_747b7ed7-75e1-5153-b34d-c73aa5003bed.html.

One of my aunties, who was like a second mother to me, received funds from this settlement, and I remember asking her about what she went through – she looked me right in the eye and told me, "You don't even want to know what I went through. It's unspeakable," and I will never forget the deeply sad look on her face as she said this. Her simple statement spoke volumes, and I had no idea of what she endured until my mom later told me some of what she knew – the repeated rapes my aunty experienced by a priest in his office, starting at the age of probably 8 or 9 and continuing for years. This very same priest was known for using his office to carry out these horrors and more. I look at pictures of my mom, aunties, and uncles when they were little, trying to imagine what they went through, seeing their child faces in photos with their hair cropped short, looking prim and proper. I would joke that my favorite aunty had a Ramona the Pest haircut, but I had no idea what the cutting of her hair really symbolized back then...I just thought she resembled a favorite childhood fictional character, and now when I look at that same photo, I see how empty her eyes looked and realize the cutting of her hair meant cutting away a part of who she was.

My own mother mentioned that my grandma Ann never talked about what she went through at the boarding school in DeSmet, Idaho; she would only say that they were punished severely for speaking our native language. When I was around 3 or 4 years old, I would often hear my grandma talking to others in our native language, and one time I asked her to teach me. She looked at me and said, "You don't need to learn NDN (pronounced In-Din), just speak English." I remember feeling really hurt and confused by that even back then. So, I never got to really learn my own Indigenous language, other than the few words that my grandpa Joe taught me. Today, when I sit and think about it, I feel a lot of

loss and sorrow not being able to speak my own Native language and my own four children were never taught either.

When I was little, I was made to go to the public school system in Omak, Washington rather than be allowed to attend the Paschal Sherman Indian School (formally part of the St. Mary's Mission) that many of my own cousins were able to attend, and I never really understood until recently why my mom didn't want me to go there. Starting around 1957, my mom was made to attend the Indian boarding school known as St. Mary's Mission, and it was four years of horror for her. She has only begun to tell me of some of abuses she directly experienced and witnessed that were carried out by the nuns and priests running the school, including physical abuse, emotional/mental abuse, and sexual abuse. She noted suicides of students, kids who disappeared, and never came back. She spoke of being smacked upside the head for talking to other students during dinner, and a time where she and another classmate (one of her very good friends) were disciplined for whispering. She told me of a time she got yelled at by the nun for whistling while doing the dishes, and how she along with the other children there were often deprived of food. The priests and nuns ate heartily of good food while she and the children were given scraps of food. My mom told me she would sneak food such as bread rolls to her room and tuck them under her pillow so she can eat them later when she would get hungry. To this day, my mom likely has disordered eating and significant food insecurity from these experiences. I think the saddest story she told me was of the student suicides – one boy hung himself and another jumped off one of the cliffs that surrounded the mission. I know that my mom, my grandpa Joe and grandma Ann have experienced many horrors during their respective times at the boarding schools. No one ever talked about it in our family, and I imagine there are more painful experiences there that we may never know. My grandma Ann and grandpa Joe have long since passed on, and with them, their stories of pain they never got to share with us.

Generations in our family were taught punitive ways to parent, and the abuses my grandparents and mom experienced passed on sadly to my generation and even that of my own children, because we were taught no other way. We did not know hitting was wrong, that by ignoring our children's needs, it was neglect. I can think of several instances of crying for my mom's attention as she would leave the home to go drink and party. I remember being afraid often of losing her and that she might not come back. I realize now she was coping with her pain through alcohol, and my grandparents did the same thing. Ultimately, even I started drinking to cope with my own pain from life on the rez – I started using alcohol at the age of 11 and I tried huffing gasoline with friends around the age of 11/12. I didn't like huffing much but I did try marijuana for the first time at the age of 13. I drank and partied throughout most of my middle school and high school years, essentially using alcohol from the ages of 10 to 21. I had a stint in rehab at the age of 17, but only maintained one year of sobriety then used for another three or four years. I realize now that alcohol and drug use were ways my family coped with the intergenerational pain we all carried from the boarding school. In my life, especially as I was growing up, I experienced all the abuses as well – physical, mental/emotional, and sexual, not from the boarding school, but from intergenerational trauma.

I could go on and on about what I witnessed in growing up, and honestly, it is overwhelming to recall things. I can feel myself shutting down. I will just contribute what I can for now and offer this much for now.

I conclude my story, my mother's story, and my grandparent's story reiterating my support for H.R. 5444 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act.

Lem'Lempt (thank you) to the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States for giving me this opportunity to speak on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Tetana Adkins Mace, LMHC

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