

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H.R. 5444

I thank the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States for allowing me to present my testimony.

My name is Lahoma (Hicks) Schultz. I am a proud citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. By blood I am 7/8 Creek and 1/8 Seminole. I am the daughter of Mollie (Jones) Hicks who was full-blood Muscogee (Creek). She attended the Chilocco Indian Boarding School for one semester at the age of 14. This would have been in 1938. During that period of time, she was punished whenever she was caught speaking the Creek language which was her first language.

My mother was not accustomed to such treatment and she chose to leave the school after one semester. She chose to end her formal education upon returning home and began working as a waitress. As a young lady she vowed that should she ever marry and have children, she would not teach her children the Creek language. She had developed a strong fear that her children might experience the same treatment as she had experienced. She did not want that for the children of her future.

She held true to her vow. Although she and my father both conversed in the Creek language at home, with their Creek friends, and relatives, they never taught me nor my siblings how to speak the Creek language. My parents also chose to send all their children to public schools. Although we had many disadvantages such as not having access to dictionaries, encyclopedias and other resources outside of the school library such as our non-Native colleagues had, we managed. Two out of the seven children have advanced degrees (Masters and Doctorate).

What minimal amount of information I have about my mother's Indian Boarding School experience did not come from her. Information was garnered from her older sister who never attended boarding school and my father. My father knew that the severe punishment my mother received had a negative effect on her psychologically. As a child, when one witnesses or observes certain behaviors in one's parents, it creates a curiosity about such, but, in a traditional Native home, a child shows respect to one's elders and does not question. So, it was not until I studied psychology at 40 years of age that I came to understand that my mother suffered from a moderately severe anxiety disorder.

Overall, my mother was a caring and compassionate person. She provided wonderful care for her children. She was a stay-at-home mother. My father provided a good income via his federal employment which he obtained directly after serving in World War II. He began in 1947 and retired in 1979. In all those years, he missed less than a week of work with the exception of vacation days.

Dad died in 2005 and since that time, I have read documents about his governmental employment and have much more insight about his early years. I learned that there was 20 miles between his place of residence and the air force base where he was employed. In those early years, he did not have access to transportation so he would "catch a ride" or "thumb for a ride" from anyone traveling in the direction of his employment.

On one particular day, he was not successful in obtaining a ride, so he walked the entire 20 miles. He arrived late for work. He explained but to no avail. He received a written notice of reprimand and was threatened with the loss of his employment. That is when he learned about the ride sharing that many of the employees utilized but in order to participate in ride share, he had to purchase a vehicle. He did

so and continued utilizing ride sharing throughout his employment. I share this to illustrate that my dad was a young, bi-lingual Native man with only an eighth-grade education doing all he could to support his family. Dad's connection to the Indian Boarding Schools is shared further into this testimony.

Both parents encouraged and supported all their children in sports, extra-curricular activities, and church. Dad served as an ordained deacon of the Southern Baptist Association. They also kept us connected to our tribal traditions, both ceremonial and the traditional Creek churches despite not teaching us the Creek language.

As an adolescent I became friends with several Native adolescents who attended Indian Boarding Schools. Some attended because of a court order. Some attended because they did not like attending the public schools. Others attended because their home-life wasn't stable. No matter the reason, the fact that they had a different and, sometimes, intriguing experience at the boarding schools, upon hearing their stories, my sister and I wanted to attend. Of course, our parents were adamantly against Indian Boarding Schools and would not allow us to attend. Of course, at the time, we did not have knowledge of our mother's experience.

After raising my own children, I began working on a doctorate degree in psychology. In 2003-2004, I chose to conduct research on the Indian Boarding School experience. I had developed a deep curiosity due to my mother's experience. As I was in the middle of data gathering, one of my paternal uncles approached me about my research. During our conversation he informed me that his father, my grandfather, had attended Carlisle Boarding School. This was information that had never been shared with me in my 50+ years. I, of course, had plenty of questions of which he had no answers as that was a subject matter that was not spoken of.

Nothing of my grandfather's experience was included in my research as there was only the knowledge that he attended Carlisle. I did know that as a child, I found my grandfather to be a loving, funny, and caring individual. He spoke very good English although Creek was his first language. My grandmother, his wife, spoke very few words of English. Creek was her first language. She, too, was a loving and caring individual.

I will share that many years after the death of my paternal grandparents, I was employed as a Social Worker for the State of Oklahoma providing eligibility services to the aged, blind, and disabled. As a part of my responsibilities, I would visit the elders at their homes. One of my assigned clients was an elderly caucasian woman who lived in the same rural area as had my grandparents when they were living. As a matter of fact, my grandfather's 160 acres allotment which is still owned by our family was located only a couple of miles from her home. On my first visit to her, she asked who were my people. When I informed her of my father's name, she chuckled and informed me that she had been his school 'marm' when he was a child. She shared stories about the one-room school where she taught.

She also shared stories about my paternal grandfather. The most outstanding story was that my grandfather was a very prolific farmer raising crops and farm animals (chickens, pigs, hogs, horses, and guineas). Several of the local non-Native men (including her brother) wanted to either sharecrop or barter with my grandfather, but he had a rule that he would not work with them until they learned to speak Creek.

In 2019, the Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) reached out to elders who have attended Indian Boarding School survivors and/or their descendants. I responded and provided basic information. Within a few months, I received a box of gifts, a heart-felt letter from the director, and a copy of the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) written document on their research on Indian Boarding Schools. The title of the document was Trigger Points: Current State of Research on History, Impacts, and Healing Related to the United States' Indian Industrial/Boarding School Policy. I felt honored that my team's research findings were cited twice in this publication (see 85 p. 22 and 102 p.26). I'm pretty sure that the NABS was not aware of such; nonetheless, I was pleased to have been provided a copy. I share this as the NABS intent was for this gift to serve as a small token toward the healing process.

After the graves of the Indian children were discovered in a Boarding School in Canada, the awareness of the atrocities committed at these boarding schools became like a deep wound being re-opened. When Deb Haaland made her declaration in June 2022 to have the Indian Boarding Schools investigated, many Native Americans were overcome with feelings of grief that had been held within for generations.

Within a month, I was one of a few that was asked to present the history, and impact of the boarding schools. Our presentation took place virtually on January 6, 2022 at the National Multi-cultural Conference and Summit.

Since that time, our panel has been requested to present at the Society of Indian Psychologists annual conference which will be held in June 2022. We have also been accepted to present at the American Psychological Association's National Conference being held in Minnesota in August 2022. I share this information to inform that I am one of the voices now speaking out on behalf of our ancestors.

Since the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NNABS) shared their report on May 11, 2022, I have been contacted for an interview with an AP journalist. I have also made contact with one of my colleagues who conducted research with me in 2003-2004. This colleague had written a letter to Senator Elizabeth Warren earlier in the year and has yet to receive a response.

I shared with the journalist that within the past two months, I had conducted research via the NNABS webpage. I discovered the records for my paternal grandfather who had attended Carlisle Indian Boarding School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. This is the boarding school made famous by Captain Richard Pratt of the U.S. Army whose motto for the government's assimilation policy was "Kill the Indian in him, save the man." Quite a disgusting motto.

According to the records, my grandfather was 13-years-old when he was enrolled in Carlisle in October 1914. Prior to attending Carlisle, he had been enrolled at the Euchee Boarding School from 1911-1912. When he aged out, he was sent to the Dwight Mission boarding school where he attended in 1913. Both these schools were located in Oklahoma and located many miles from his home.

I learned, for the first time in my entire life, the name of my paternal great-grandfather and my paternal great-grandmother. I also learned that my grandfather was an only child and his mother (my great-grandmother) died when he was 7 years of age. My grandfather inherited his mother's 160-acre allotment but had a governmental guardian assigned to oversee his affairs until he was of legal age (18).

I learned that his father was living but my grandfather's grandmother was reported as his caretaker. The records do not indicate if this was his paternal or maternal grandmother.

I learned that my grandfather performed well academically. Apparently, this is where he learned his farming skills. He was quite an advocate for himself as there are several letters in the records indicating his request for funds that had been set aside for his use.

I felt perturbed to read in a letter dated June 21, 1918 that my grandfather had requested \$75 to be used for the purpose of his return home for summer vacation. I was overcome with feelings of anger when I read "In response you are advised that at this time so many boy pupils have been granted permission to return to their hoe for the vacation period that at the present time we have only enough boys here **TO KEEP THE PLANT RUNNING DURING THE HARVEST SEASON, FOR WHICH REASON I MUST NOW REFUSE FURTHER LEAVES OF ABSENCE** (the capitalization and bold type are my emphasis). Signed Sincerely Yours, Superintendent (no name given).

My grandfather was, basically, utilized as slave labor. Where was the school's paid staff? My grandfather just wanted to go home to visit. Now, I have a better understanding as to the background connected to the story told to me by my elder client which I shared earlier in this testimony. Not only was my grandfather made to leave his home in Oklahoma to attend a school far, far away, he was made to wear military-style clothing, adhere to a regimented way of daily living, learn English, he was made to perform slave labor. Based on what we now know, I can only imagine under what conditions.

I now arrive to my testimony which is difficult to share. As a child, on more than one occasion, like when we were wearing swim trunks at family outings, I noticed a huge scar on one of my father's thighs. The scar was approximately two inches in circumference. One day, I asked my dad how he got that scar. He shared that when he was a boy, his father became angry about something. Dad said he never knew what his father's anger was about. Anyway, my grandfather took his belt and started beating my father with the belt. He swung so hard at one point that he landed the buckle of the belt on that spot. Once the wound healed, it left a huge scar. Dad shared that he vowed that if he ever had children, he would never spank them out of fear he might do the same. He kept his vow. He never spanked his children. He left the spanking responsibilities to my mother.

The records from Carlisle do not document any abuse but, then, why would they. Now that I know more of my grandfather's history, I believe he had no good role models as to how to properly parent his children. Based on what we now know, I have no doubt my grandfather suffered similar punishment as he delivered to my father. I'm sure, at times, thoughts of what he may have experienced at the boarding schools haunted him and his response was to lash out in rage toward the very people he loved.

I repeat, ONCE THE WOUND HEALED, IT LEFT A HUGE SCAR. I believe that the Truth and Healing Commission modeled after the Canadian Truth and Healing Commission is absolutely necessary to assist in the healing process for survivors of the U.S. Federal Indian Boarding School survivors and their descendants.