

Irene Vasquez

Dear Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition,

My name is Irene Vasquez, and I am the granddaughter of Peggy J. Shea (Beale), a boarding school survivor. Her parents were also sent to Indian Boarding Schools, Stewart Indian Mission, NV, and a boarding school in Oregon. This information is documented in the Yosemite National Park archives.

My grandma, Peggy is 90 years old and remembers the North Fork Indian Mission as a place that was not beneficial to her upbringing. Growing up, she told us the truth about the Indian Mission and how her brother, Fred Beale ran away. He was found and locked in a room at the Mission, fed bread and water for a week. She remembers the name of the boy's teacher, Mr. Hood, and how he was a very strict teacher for the boys. She also said the nuns were tough. Later I learned that my great-uncle, Fred Beale told his daughter, Laura Steinbach, that he remembered dreaming about a field of wildflowers when he was found as a young boy in the snow after running away from the mission. He almost died trying to go home to his parents. My grandma's memories about the mission include no windows on the buildings, only screens, and that it would get cold in the winter. She also remembers only being able to go home once a year and how a girl her age fell from a bunk bed and almost died.

My great-grandparents on my mother's side moved to Richmond, CA during WWII, as they had no ownership of land in Yosemite or El Portal, CA and there were jobs to help with the war effort and moved with their children as assimilation policies ended and WWII was starting. My grandma and her three brothers graduated from school and had few options and enlisted in the US armed forces. My grandma served in the Air Force for five years, and her brothers in the Army and Air Force, one as a paratrooper and another as a bomb deactivator.

As you know, there are many intergenerational effects of boarding school. Children raised in a non-loving environment without their parents didn't know how to raise their children. My grandma ended up raising my mom, Sandra, and uncle Victor as a single parent but with the help of her parents while she worked swing shifts at a glass factory. My grandma worked 33 years that way, earning a decent retirement. My grandma scolded my mom and uncle hard, and her brother Fred and Harold raised their children without discipline, I believe because of the amount of discipline they received while in boarding school.

My grandmother and our tribe, the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation are not yet federally recognized. We have many elders that have passed on, many were boarding school survivors and the trauma from those times still exists in my community. I am a first-generation college graduate from both sides of my family and the only one from my grandma's and her three brother's grandchildren who have attended and graduated from a

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university. Many of my grandmother's nephews and nieces have addiction issues, have served time in prison, have had children in prison, live in poverty, and one of her nieces passed from Covid-19 and homelessness in Los Angeles, CA last year. My brother, Paul has mental health issues including schizophrenia and bipolar issues. We live in a rural area, Mariposa, CA in our traditional ancestral territory with few resources for families who have family members with mental health issues.

It is great that there is some recognition about boarding schools and assimilation policies my grandma and generations experienced. Still, I feel as if non-recognized tribes are continually left out of the acknowledgment that these atrocities happened to American Indian people who are not federally recognized. I want justice for my grandmother, my muah, Peggy, and her brothers, Fred, Harold, and Richard Beale.

The link below is the Indian Mission where my grandmother and her siblings and many of my elders were sent in the early 1930s as young children. The Indian Mission in North Fork, CA still stands. We haven't visited it since I was little, but we do regularly attend the North Fork Indian Days and Pow wow. We also have our events and ceremonies that have come out of hiding. With or without recognition, we know who we are, and my grandma and her generation are still some of the toughest there ever was and will be.

Thank you for reading this statement.

Sincerely,

Irene Vasquez

Southern Sierra Miwuk and Mono Lake Paiute

School of the Presbyterian Mission, North Fork, California, MRL 10: G.E.E. Lindquist Papers, 38, 238, The Burke Library Archives (Columbia University Libraries) at Union Theological Seminary, New York. Can be viewed at http://lindquist.cul.columbia.edu:443/catalog/burke_lindq_038_0238. Web accessed 12 May 2022.

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Me Irene Vasquez, my grandma Peggy Shea and Mom, Sandra Vasquez at a relative's (Bill Tucker's 90th birthday) in Mariposa, CA 2019



My great-great-grandma Emma Beale, great-aunt, Rose Beale, great-uncle Richard Beale (76), my great-grandma Irene Beale (Harrison) and great-grandpa Lawrence Beale on a ferry in Richmond, CA. (1940s).