

July 24, 2007

Horrors and Healing

We are going to continue our discussion on the damage done by the ordeal of mandated Residential/Boarding Schools for Indians as an extension of the genocide, the slo-mo holocaust of their existence. This is not "old news" my friends, this is current history as the survivors and those who survived them, are walking among us, invisible as they may feel or be, on this very day.

Until we, as a nation, and I include Canada and Mexico in this, until we all recognize what was done, and the true intention behind it, and the wreckage it left behind, until we come together and see this whole picture as it unfolds like a quilt of painful pictures and understand the dynamic at work then and now, when we can do that together, we can all begin to heal from the inside out.

We are powerful beings laid low by lies masquerading as history and True History remaining the silent story stirring in each of us, to come out. Our discomfort is in our knowing that what we have been told does not make sense and the picture is not complete nor true until we get to what it is that we don't want to know.

In the previous blog we talked about how the Reservations were euphemisms for 'Concentration Camps'. Denial of our holocaust means we allow it to continue to fester in the dark places that started it, and it is allowed to continue the damaging effects on all of us: Those who went through it and those who failed to see what has been done to cause the human wreckage of an entire people, who somehow manage, to this day, to continue living, despite the hundreds of years of legislated extermination and extermination by assimilation.

Assimilation is the biggest lie. You cannot change the color of your skin by speaking the language of the oppressor. You cannot change your history and your culture by behaving as if you never owned it. You can destroy your culture by ignoring it, not teaching it, and by adding in behaviors such as addictions and sexual deviancy, laziness and fearfulness. What you practice becomes your culture.

Culture is what defines us as civilized or savage. The true 'savages', from my point of view, were the cruel, untruthful, the bullies and the total lack of honor and respect that was carried throughout the land by force, by a government that so quickly changed from the ideals of freedom and free-thinking, to control, oppression and exploitation of people and resources. Those men, despite their uniforms, their fine clothes and their clean faces, were the true savage beasts of the land.

Ahh! I digress.

Let us go now into the visions and dreams of those who have sought to bring healing to their people, and in some small way, find peace for themselves.

They Were All Children

Often, after a Yuwipi Ceremony was performed up here in my province, by Melvin Grey Bear, I would hear from people who were friends of friends, of friends who were told to contact me and tell me what they saw or heard or felt so I could help them to understand.

One woman, gentle in her voice, who had recently begun the process of getting training to help deal with the survivors of Residential/Boarding Schools, most of whom were Elders in her community and others who were Elders and youngsters from other communities.

The training was rigorous and it took a lot of courage, passion and will to complete the course to gain her certificate so that she could be one of the people who could run the programs to help the healing begin.

In her vision at the ceremony, she saw herself walking down the aisle of the rec center, which doubled as a meeting hall in her village. As she passed by the rows, on her way to the podium, she could see all the old faces of those seeking to begin the healing, as they turned towards her in expectation.

"I said a little prayer as I walked to the stage," she said. "I asked that I would be able to help them to heal that which hurts them the most."

She continued to describe her vision as hearing a humming sound, as if a beehive was being stirred, and as she reached the podium, it had become a sorrowful song and sobbing was heart-wrenching. "But when I looked up," she said to me, "the sound suddenly went silent. I looked around the hall and all I could see, in all of the seats, were very little children."

"They were ALL children!" she said to me, her voice catching in her throat.

"Now you know, " I told her, "who was hurt the most."

Remembering

I am hearing from Indian People all across the land on this one. I have put a link on the LINKS page that came from one person who encourages anyone interested in learning more, to view the 'hidden from history' site. There, they discuss among other horrors, that there are more than 50,000 little children who were murdered at these institutions and their bodies left where no one could find them; unmarked graves most of them, and some just dumped in the rivers at night.

Imagine, if you can, being so young, so far from home or help, and living under that constant terror. What shape would it bend you into and would you become one of them to survive? Or would you go silent and let the rage and fear consume you?

We know that soldiers that come back from the wars after a few months of trauma are seriously damaged, unable to cope, addicted, suicidal, and have rages and nightmares that destroy their family bonds, their ability to understand or cope with life in general.

Understand that is all real. That is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Where the brain cannot reconcile and the mind cannot cope with the horrors, the contradictions of Right and Wrong, Truth and Lies, Moral and Immoral behaviors, and a person collapses internally, and turns to self-medication of addictions to 'shut it out', temporarily. But it always comes back.

Remember now, the horrors of Residential/Boarding Schools were inflicted for years and years upon each young child, and to their parents and grandparents, for seven generations. What life was on the rez was also unhealthy as the design of the Reservations and the Indian Act was to exterminate the First Nations Peoples entirely. Any wonder there is the disease of dysfunction, addiction and gross indignities as daily fare in those places?

People who survived the Schools had nowhere to go with their traumas and nightmares. They could not share among themselves for there was so much shame put on them they thought they were worthless. They did not wish to burden their relatives with the nightmares because they could not bring themselves to talk about them. They wanted to forget it.

So today, we have people who are just now, after decades, finding these memories resurfacing at the root of their addictions and profoundly low self-esteem. They are just now finding support groups to share and heal with.

But even those are not yet safe havens, as there are among them the unscrupulous who breach confidentiality, and thwart the healing for the sake of holding power and position. I was so appalled when I found that the person who was running the clinic on the SLN Rez was allowing and encouraging a very close friend of theirs to invade the private files of counselors in order to glean any sort of leverage over those who had come in for healing.

The nightmare continues.

But I understand why people do these things. They themselves, as part of their upbringing by those who barely survived the Residential Schools, do not know or understand the importance of boundaries. Neither their own, nor anyone else's. To them, exploitation of painful secrets is merely a way to insure they can keep their job and have something to offer to the evil that may someday look at them as a meal.

Offering up the secrets of those who are most vulnerable as an alternate morsel, to them, is a survival tool. Who knows how badly they suffered from improper upbringing that they would do these things to the most vulnerable in their trust?

When survivors came home, they tried to forget that which they could not cope with nor reconcile in their shattered minds and wounded spirits. Because they did not discuss this, and truly, there was no way to discuss this, their children did not understand what they saw as unreasonable or destructive behavior in their parents and relatives.

It just was not talked about. People just did not want to remember, knew they could not cope with the impact of reliving it, and did not want to scar their loved ones with that pain.

But it never went away. It never healed.

And now it is surfacing, breaking through the dark waters into the stabbing painful light of remembrance. There it rises, to be seen, dealt with and healed.

We must tell the stories of what happened so that more of these memories can be understood and more of these survivors can see that they were not alone, it was NOT their fault and learn to give themselves credit for surviving.

Indians, from what I have seen, are hard to kill. The walking wounded, however, abound.

Knowing Allows Changes

We must all face the horrors and understand the damage. We must all know that this is what was done to them, and they did nothing to deserve it.

We also must know that it has created, along with Indians being deprived of Civil Rights, an environment that is rife with corruption, abuses and it is up to all of us to make this change. We must all petition for Indians to be allowed the same Civil Rights as any other citizens, and we must do it now, while we all have some remnant of our Civil Rights to offer up!

It takes nothing away from any of us to allow other Human Beings the rights that were the foundation of our beginnings as a nation. In fact, it will strengthen all of us and our rights, because we can take a close and active look at what is left of them and what we need to do to protect ourselves from further erosion as we also find we must struggle to regain what has been siphoned off from all of us, and maintain vigilance for one and all so that it never erodes again.

Indian People need to find a way to come together, as brothers and sisters, neighbors and Nations to strengthen themselves, and reinvigorate their passion for life, spiritual questing and personal achievement.

We are powerful people laid low by the lies and the cover-ups but we are capable of redeeming ourselves and standing together, Red, White, Yellow and Black, as Human Beings.

Indians must start their healing from the inside as no one from the outside is yet willing to step in and help. All they are willing to do at the present is throw more money at fake programs that allow the thugs and their corruption to further exploit the pain and thwart the recovery.

I tell you all, to begin to remember, and do not be afraid. Remember that you survived. Allow yourself to weep for those who were lost and for the sorrows heaped upon you. But then you must put aside the tears and the weeping and begin to build again, the powerful person you were born to be.

I will end with a story I received regarding St. Joseph's residential School.

Prey

I was going to tell you, when you arrived at the St Joseph's, the first thing they did was take away everything you brought with you.

The Matron that was in charge of the boys dorm would say, " Take off those buggy clothes".

We would have to strip and stand in line, naked, and they would spray our bodies and hair with some kind of foul smelling spray, and would say, " this will kill all the lice you brought with you."

They would take our clothes and put them in a community room and when you got up in the morning, they would give you clothes to wear, whether they were yours or not, and most of the time, they didn't fit. The other thing they would do was take any money you brought with you and put it in your account, but I don't remember if we ever saw it again, I don't think so because I can't remember ever buying anything.

The other thing they would do is put a form letter on the black board and tell us to copy it and sign it, so they could send it to our homes. This I refused to do, so I got a beating for not doing it. When I wouldn't copy the letter, they had someone else copy it and put my name on it. My Grandparents knew I did not write those letters and it got them worried.

I saw a lot of abuse there. Even the priests that would sexually abuse the boys, they would single out one boy, and the rest of us knew what was going on and would feel sorry for the one that got singled out.

I know a couple of them who later on in life, sexually abused others and more than one committed suicide when we were teenagers, 15-16 years old. The boys they singled out were usually under the care of social services, or foster care. This abuse was by some of the teachers as well, so it was dangerous when a teacher started paying attention to you, as a consequence we did everything we could to make the teachers dislike us, so we would not be considered for the next victim.

It was the same way on the girls side, different Nuns would single out their victims based on who they had as family, and if there was no one they knew that the Nuns would come after them, so they would tell the new girls to make up stories about their families, but the Nuns knew, like the priests, the history of the kids before they even got there so it didn't help.

I have not thought about these things for many years, there were some good teachers and priests who did not do these things but they were in positions where they could not protect the children, I wonder what would have happened if they would have intervened?

I know that some of these teachers and priests and the nuns were afraid, and some of them left and did not want to be witness to these things, but they left us to deal with all this mess.

Those of you who live in Indian Country, you know now more about why your parents were so fearful or so lost. Those of you who had decent upbringing and were nurtured and well-taken care of, you can better appreciate the trials your parents had to overcome to be able to do that much for you.

I tell you this so that you can let go of some of your anger and rage, and find a way to understand your parents and yourselves better now. I pray that you can see the value in surviving, not for the sake of the abuses to continue, but so that the suffering you endured and that those who raised you endured, will not be in vain.

That we will all find a way to stand together to oust the corrupt from their power seats and retake control over our own lives and destiny and allow the children who have survived us thus far, to be able to walk in the light of a better day tomorrow. We owe it to them and we owe it to ourselves.

It is my prayer that we all can see ourselves again, in a clearer light and find a way to come together as Brothers and Sisters, Neighbors and Nations, before it is too late for all of us.

You know where to find me.

~Cat