

Journey to Reconciliation
Chandra Wassill
University of Regina

“Did your school have a graveyard?” This question was posed in the “Witness Blanket Documentary Trailer” and was the perfect conclusion to the thematic idea I had been formulating for my aesthetic piece. I began by exploring Project for Heart and reading the blog post "Heritage Status for Regina Indian Industrial School Cemetery." Learning about the number of unmarked graves and that the amount of bodies buried there is unknown deeply affected me. It is incredibly difficult to picture unidentified children buried in mass graves. The number of unrecorded deaths made me think of *Muffins for Granny* and the stories the Elders shared of having their names stripped away and replaced by a number. The contradiction between many students being numbered, and there being an unknown amount of student deaths stood out to me.

As I continued to explore, I realized that I wanted to create something that represented the unrecorded deaths and the unknown amount of lives forever ruined by residential schools. I decided to create a piece that uses numbers to outline a child. The white space that creates the child's silhouette represents the children who disappear, sometimes without their parents ever knowing what happened to them. It also represents the blank spaces in history caused by unrecorded deaths. I chose to use numbers that are significant to the history of residential schools. The numbers I used include the number of students who attended residential school, significant years, and the amount of recorded and estimated deaths. While creating my piece, I decided to erase a line through the numbers of recorded and estimated deaths to emphasize that these lives have been taken away. I modelled the silhouette of the child after the famous before photo of Thomas Moore. The silhouette of the child does not only represent the lives lost but the culture and identity that was lost as well. This aspect of the piece was inspired by Garnet's story, and how he felt he had an identity crisis after attending residential school because he lost a part of himself. It was also inspired by the children who were taught to be ashamed of their culture

and their parents. I wanted my piece to represent the destructive effect residential schools had on cultures and families.

After learning more about residential schools, the it became painful and frustrating that many people believed it was all fabricated. The *Alberta Report* from 1998 that claimed there that what occurred at residential schools was a myth reminded me of the ignorance and denial which I've grown up around. I know many people, including members of my family, who are uneducated and are disrespectful to the pain of Indigenous peoples. I have always been against these attitudes but found difficulty speaking out. I believed that as a younger person I wouldn't be listened to and that it would create an uncomfortable conflict that I would rather avoid. Seeing all of these numbers and stories showed me that it is irresponsible and damaging to remain silent on these issues. In the video of Charlene Bearhead shared in lecture, she discussed how reconciliation exists between families as well. This pushed me to realize that I have do more to challenge ignorance and hate when I see it because my discomfort is minimal to the history of pain Indigenous people have been subjected too.

Going forward, I intend to take many of the messages from Charlene Bearhead's video with me. As an educator, I want to open discussions and mind and bring authentic Indigenous voices to class. This reminded me of when my grade eight math teacher brought in an Elder to teach us birch bark biting as part of our symmetry unit. I had forgotten about this until the video mentioned bringing in authentic Indigenous voices, and I realized how easy and necessary it is. I want to find ways to bring in authentic Indigenous voices to my future classes and will try to do so through activities such as the birch bark biting demonstration. After this exploration, I feel now more than ever that it is my responsibility as an educator to work to enlighten and open minds both in and out of the classroom.

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