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Beginning Monday, July 12, The Press office (6 Parkview Road, Hagersville) will be open Mondays to Thursdays.

NEW OFFICE HOURS

Monday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
 Tuesday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
 Wednesday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
 Thursday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
 Friday-Sunday Closed

THE HALDIMAND PRESS
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Geronimo's Dream: Mohawk Institute Residential School survivor shares his story, building memorial

By Mike Renzella
 The Haldimand Press

OSHWOKEN — Geronimo Henry was five years old when he was dropped off on the front steps of the Mohawk Institute Residential School in Brantford. The year was 1942, and although he did not realize it at the time, it would be the last time he would see his mother for 11 years.

Following his parent's separation, Geronimo's mother requested that the Indian Affairs office admit Geronimo, as well as his older brother and two older sisters, to the residential school.

He explained, "There was no other place to go. There was no welfare back in those days. It was either that, or we would have starved to death."

The day they were brought to the school, he said, "We all started crying, asking, 'Where are we going?' Kids kind of sense when they're being left."

Once inside, Geronimo was taken into a room where his hair was cut off and he was issued a number, which were used by school staff instead of names to address the children living there: "They said to my brother, 'Charlie your number is 36 and Geronimo's number is 48.'"

Geronimo's usual morning saw them line up to call out their numbers: "If there were five numbers that weren't called out in the roll call, they knew that five kids had run away in the night. Then, the supervisor would call out a bunch of numbers, and instead of going to school, you would report to the farm boss."

Despite being called a residential school, Geronimo said education was far from the priority as time was focused on running the approximately 250-acre farm.

"There were 1,000 chickens, 30 milking cows, 40 pigs. I don't know why we were always hungry," reminisced Geronimo, who recalls eating the same overcooked oatmeal every morning that would garner the school's nickname of the Mush Hole. "There were always kids working.... The kids did all that work; the farmers were like supervisors telling us what to do."

He continued, "On the girls' side, they were taken out of school to prepare all the meals. They had to make the beds, change the sheets, polish the floors, cook for the staff, and clean their rooms out."

Geronimo remembers a room down in the cellar that was known as a so-called 'playroom' for the students: "They used to make a boxing ring.... Supervisors would make us box with them, and sometimes we'd have to box with each other. We were always fighting because nobody wanted to be there. We all wanted to be at home with our parents."

Kids at the school came from far and wide, with Geronimo remembering children from Quebec, Sault Saint Marie, Sudbury, and Kingston. Closer to the school's closing in 1970, children were being sent from as far away as the Northwest Territories. Regardless of where they came from, the children were not allowed to speak their native languages.

While many children



Geronimo Henry attended Mohawk Institute Residential School between 1942 and 1953. He is shown above in front of the steps to that building after they were filled with toys, clothes, and more to recognize survivors following the discovery of graves at similar institutes across Canada. Geronimo is nearing his \$50,000 goal to build a permanent memorial at the school, which will go hand-in-hand with other work being done at the site.

were brought home for summer months by their families, Geronimo did not leave or see his mother again until July of 1953 when he left the school permanently after 11 years.

"My sister got out of the car ... (and) she hollered in, 'Hey ma, we got Geronimo out of the residential school. Come on out and say hi.' (My mother) just come out to the door; I was standing by the car. She just said 'hi' and went back in the house, and we got back in the car."

While Geronimo did not have a significant reunion with his mother, he has found solace in connecting with other survivors.

He ran a healing reunion in the early 2000s on the former grounds of the school, which now houses a museum called the Woodland Cultural Centre, with people coming from as far as Arizona, British Columbia, and Arkansas.

That day, former residents spoke to each other about their experiences.

"If you're carrying around all this trauma, anxiety, and hate, it can cause your body to get sick. You have to heal and tell your story," said Geronimo.

One event that day had survivors write "something that they wanted to get rid of" on a strip of paper that was tied to a helium balloon and released as a group: "Whatever you put on there - 'I want to be healed from being sexually abused, or getting beat up, I lost my language, my culture' ... the balloons would go up in the air and the message would get to God or to the Creator. We watched them 'til they went right out of sight. It was a psychological effect on us; 'I'm not holding that anymore, I'm not carrying that around in my body anymore.'"

He recounted one particular woman's story from that day: "Every time you went to the bathroom to take a shower or bath you had to go to the supervisor to make sure your body was clean, but they always sent her back because she was darker than the rest of us ... saying, 'You're not clean; you're not white'. That bothered her. After she got out, she would take maybe eight to 10 showers a day to get rid of that brown skin."

He said that to this day, survivors come to the school, sometimes on weekends when the site is closed, and just sit on the steps and cry:

"Crying is a good thing; you let out all that anger in your tears.... You're healing yourself when you do that."

Geronimo said the disappointment, anxiety, stress, and trauma faced in the school became unmanageable with time: "Eventually it turned into hate. I hated my mom for not coming to see me. I carried that around for a long time after that."

Geronimo battled with alcohol dependency as he tried to process his trauma and attempted traditional therapy. However, it took speaking with the elders of his community to finally begin finding peace and healing from the stripping of his cultural identity.

"(The school) used to take us to the show once or twice a year.... All they would show us were these cowboy and Indian movies. We didn't realize it, but it was a kind of brainwashing technique," recalled Geronimo. "The natives always lost.... It taught us you don't want to be a native or an Indian when you grow up. You want to be like the cowboys - the winners."

Geronimo noted how this impacted survivors even after they left, with many moving to towns and cities across the country instead of returning home to the reserve: "That's what the government wanted us to do."

While many people have only recently become aware of the large cemeteries of deceased children currently being exposed at various residential schools, Geronimo said, "We've always been after the government ... to investigate these graves. They knew there were graves around these schools, but they wouldn't do it for some reason."

He touched on how the land rights issues that are so prevalent in Haldimand County currently are nothing new either: "Even when I got out in '53, I was protesting too, to try and keep our reserves and keep our land.... I think we're always going to be fighting for our lands."

Geronimo spends a large amount of time these days at the site of the former school, where he is happy to speak with visitors and share his experiences. That spirit of education is the driving force behind a dream that Geronimo has had for many years to see a memorial on the site that includes the names of all the students who attended. He believes such a memorial

If you're carrying around all this trauma, anxiety, and hate, it can cause your body to get sick. You have to heal and tell your story.

Geronimo Henry,
 Mohawk Institute
 Residential School Survivor

is important for families of a former resident to view their relative's name, engraved on a marker for everyone to see.

"It's got to be black. The black represents all the evil we suffered at the school," said Geronimo, saying that the children's names on the memorial will be white. "The children were innocent."

There is a GoFundMe fundraiser that is close to reaching its \$50,000 goal. Organizer Jodie Williams provided an update on July 1, saying a spot is being chosen for the memorial along with a company to create the monument.

The memorial is in addition to other plans in the works on the grounds, which include a memorial park and turning the school itself into an interactive educational site.

In order to raise further funds for the ongoing rehabilitation of the site, the Woodland Cultural Centre is offering virtual tours. The tours can be booked at woodlandculturalcentre.ca.

For those interested in hearing more from Geronimo or making a donation to the memorial, visit his website at geronimosdream.weebly.com.

Alternatively, consider paying a visit to the Woodland Cultural Centre and you may just find him there, waiting to tell his story to those who came after him and doing his part to ensure something like this is never allowed to happen again.

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Caring for Kids

THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF HALDIMAND AND NORFOLK (the "Corporation")

NOTICE OF SPECIAL MEMBERS' MEETING
 July 22, 2021
 6:30 p.m.

Held electronically via Zoom videoconference

PURPOSE
 All current members of the Corporation are invited and encouraged to attend a special meeting to approve the proposed amalgamation of the Corporation with The Children's Aid Society of Brant operating as Brant Family & Children's Services.

Voting information for members

- Members planning to attend should RSVP by July 20, 2021 to Shari Gardener, Executive Assistant for Susie Dyck, Board Secretary, to receive the Zoom link.
- Members who cannot attend in person may vote by proxy.
- Members may also request to review the proposed amalgamation agreement in advance.
- Please contact Shari.Gardener@cashn.on.ca or call 519-587-5437, ext 235 to RSVP, request a proxy form or to review the proposed agreement.

Notice given on this 8th day of July, 2021, by:
 Susie Dyck
 Secretary of the Board
 The Children's Aid Society of Haldimand and Norfolk