GOLDSTREAM
GAZETTE

To whom it may concern,

We wanted our truth and reconciliation series to be more than just a print-based product as our online and print readers are very different audiences. But we also wanted to do our part in reconciliation. The entire project was led by our Goldstream Gazette publisher Cathy Webster, as her mother was a survivor of the Kamloops Residential School.

We accompanied the print series with a wrap on the paper after reaching out to Ay Lelum Good House of Design for the art that is on the front. This wrap serves as an education piece but also something readers can hang in their spaces or on their windows to honour survivors and victims. The front is a clan crest design by Joel Good with wolf, salmon, eagle and killer whale designs to represent the children lost at Residential Schools and to honour them. The Gazette published the wrap so readers could engage in the events throughout Greater Victoria to show their support for truth and reconciliation. A portion of the revenue is also donated back to the Indian Residential School Survivors' Society, which operates a 24-hour crisis line along with other vital supports.

Along with the wrap and five-story print series, which was picked up by other Black Press print publications in Greater Victoria and digitally across B.C., we ran four videos with the survivors sharing their stories. For survivors, these interviews are very traumatizing and while they wanted to share their stories – and thanked us for the platform we gave them so they could shed some light on this dark chapter and its lingering impacts – we wanted to make sure we did the least amount of emotional damage as possible. To accomplish this, we had a videography and a reporter sit with them at the same time. The reporter crafted the written story while Arnold Lim created all of the videos. While we felt the written portion captured their stories in a meaningful way, having survivors on camera, sharing the horrors of what they experienced in their own words, with their own emotions, is very powerful and added a vital element to the series.

All of the survivors, as well as the community, thanked us for providing this important coverage.

Thank you for your consideration of this feature.
-Katherine Engqvist, managing editor

Cover design is provided by Ay Lelum The Good House of Design.
Artwork by Joel Good

This design concept was created by the team at Ay Lelum with Joel Good's original artwork for their Orange Dress that was launched at New York Fashion Week in September 2021.

It was designed while Ay Lelum recorded their "hey'ewulh (Goodbye) Song", in response to the discovery of mass children's unmarked graves at the #Kamloops Indian Residential School and others, earlier in 2021.

EVERY CHILD MATTERS ORANGE SHIRT DAY

WEEK FULL OF VICTORIA ORANGE SHIRT DAY EVENTS PLANNED LEADING UP TO SEPT. 30

Co-founders Eddy Charlie and Kristin Spray will present at many of the events

Orange Shirt Day is fast approaching, and its Victoria founders Eddy Charlie and Kristin Spray will be participating in several events.

The B.C. Legislature will be hosting a Youth Art for Reconciliation launch event. The art display is on now in the Lower Rotunda until Oct.7.

A framed orange shirt has been on permanent display inside the legislature's Hall of Honour since October 2021.

On Sept. 29, Charlie will speak along with three other residential school survivors at UVic as part of their lighting of the Sacred Fire, which starts at 9 a.m. on the campus Quad. The fire will be lit until 3 p.m.

Also on Sept. 29, Charlie and Spray will participate in a feast and ceremony at Camosun College's Na'tsa'maht: The Gathering Place on the Lansdowne campus starting at 1 p.m., where they will be honoured for the work they started in 2015 at the school when they organized the first Orange Shirt Day on campus.

The event will also feature a presentation by the Quilters for Survivors, and will be emceed by Dr. Barney Williams, who is also a residential school survivor.

Of course, the flagship ceremony they are participating in and organizing will be the eighth annual City of Victoria National Truth and Reconciliation Day ceremony held Sept. 30 at Centennial Square from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

The ceremony will consist of the blessing of the land and welcome by Tsartlip Nation Elder May Sam, a land acknowledgement by Songhees Nation member Brianna Bear, and Indigenous performances by Westwind Intertribal Drum, spoken-word poet Shauntelle Dick-Charleson, and singers Nicole Mandryk and Adam Gauthier who will be accompanied by students from the Tree of Life Playschool.

It will also feature the annual raising of the Victoria Orange Shirt Day flag, a minute of silence, and presentations by residential school and intergenerational survivors.

Spray and Charlie first started work on a Victoria Orange Shirt Day chapter in 2014 when they were Indigenous studies classmates at Camosun. Spray, a non-Indigenous ally, started encouraging Charlie, a residential school survivor, to work with her on bringing the day created by survivor Phyllis Webstad to Victoria.

When Charlie overheard some students diminishing the experiences of residential school survivors one day, he finally agreed, realizing if he didn't do something his worst fear of the horrors of residential schools being forgotten by society would come true.

ORIGINAL ARTWORK FROM ORANGE DRESS INSPIRES COVER DESIGN

Photo by Charlotte Shenassa

The cover design on the front issue of today's Goldstream News Gazette is provided by Ay Lelum - the Good House of Design.

They are a multi-generational Artist family who collaborate in making Coast Salish Fashions from their Design House on Snuneymuxw First Nation in Nanaimo, B.C., Canada.

This design concept was created by the team at Ay Lelum with Joel Good's original artwork for their Orange Dress that was launched at NYFW in September 2021. The orange bottom of the design has their local region's clan crests representing all the children with a human figure. As they ascend to the heavens, the background changes to white tones representing their journey to the heavens now that they have been and continue to be found.

It was designed while Ay Lelum recorded their "hey'ewulh (Goodbye) Song", in response to the discovery of mass children's unmarked graves at the #Kamloops Indian Residential School and others, earlier in 2021. Their Orange Dress and the other orange pieces in the collection were created as a reflection of our times, documenting the past and the present while sharing to raise awareness in love, hope and healing.

Ay Lelum creates wearable art garments that embrace diversity, and are committed to sharing Traditional Coast Salish art and culture for all people to wear and enjoy. The clothing is designed with family artwork that is non-ceremonial and is all-inclusive for everyone.

Ay Lelum – The Good House of Design, along with three generations of their family, returned to New York Fashion Week this month where they debuted their 'Transformation' collection for the upcoming spring-summer season 2023. Ay Lelum showed through the Global Fashion Collective, a sister company to Vancouver Fashion Week, which produces runway shows with the object of expediting designers' global development and increasing their international visibility. They present at New York Fashion Week every September and February.

They emphasized the importance of involving younger generations in both the creative aspect and process to provide a sense of involvement in their culture and what the family does as a unit, while speaking with Nanaimo News Bulletin's, Mandy Moraes earlier this month.

They are passionate about being active in the documentation of their family artwork, music and historical information for the future generations and abide by strict cultural guidelines, protocols and Hul'q'umi'num' Law, as outlined by their father, Dr. William Good, a Storyteller and Master Coast Salish artist from Snuneymuxw First Nation. For more information visit www.aylelum.com.

THE LEGACY

The vast majority of the children in residential schools experienced neglect and suffering. The suffering included, physical, sexual and mental abuse, shame, and deprivation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission determined that more than 4,000 children died in the residential school system. The abuse continues to impact generations of survivors, their families and their communities today. It is estimated of the 150,000 survivors of residential schools, 80,000 are still alive today.

Remarkably, in the face of tremendous adversity and the horrific legacy that survivors had to live through, many of them managed to retain their language and cultural practices, and they continue to work towards healing and reconciliation.

We created this wrap as a small but urgent step on the journey to understanding truth and reconciliation.

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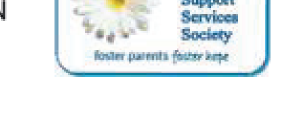

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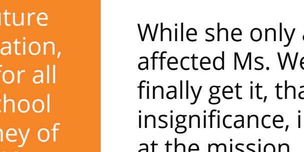
SEPTEMBER 30



The program on Orange Shirt Day (September 30) coincides with an anticipated future National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, which is seen to be an opportunity for all Canadians to honour Residential School Survivors and recommit to the journey of Truth and Reconciliation on an annual basis.

CRISIS LINES AVAILABLE
IRSSS Toll-Free Line: 1-800-721-0066
24-Hour National Crisis Line: 1-866-925-4419

Orange Shirt Day began in 2013 but in reality it began in 1973 when six year old Phyllis Webstad entered the St. Joseph Mission Residential School, outside of Williams Lake, BC. Young Phyllis was wearing a brand new orange shirt for her first day of school - but the Mission Oblates quickly stripped her of her new shirt and replaced it with the school's institutional uniform.

While she only attended for one year the impact affected Ms. Webstad's life for many years. "I finally get it, that feeling of worthlessness and insignificance, ingrained in me from my first day at the mission, affected the way I lived my life for many years."

GOLDSTREAM GAZETTE

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2022

SPECIAL SERIES
TRUTH
& Reconciliation

See page A3

Elder Victor Underwood near his home on the Saanich Peninsula. "Every time we talk about residential schools it always opens all the pains I've been carrying," he said. (Arnold Lim/Black Press Media)

Having teeth pulled just one of elder's painful memories of residential school

SPECIAL SERIES
TRUTH
& Reconciliation

Tsawout's Victor Underwood was a survivor of St. Mary's Indian Residential School

Bailey Moreton
News Staff

It's a still morning. The early sun is just beginning to warm up the air, but there's a coolness washing in from the ocean.

The water is like a mirror, frozen in time as if in a painting. The little cove is tucked into a sheltered part of Saanichton Bay, protected from the strength of the ocean by the Cordova Spit and then James Island. It's quiet apart from the occasional heron call or a lone motor boat cruising off in the distance. Everything is peaceful at his home on the Tsawout First Nation, as if the world is holding its breath and waiting to hear what Victor Underwood has to say.

Underwood is a quiet man. He speaks softly but deliberately. He's kept these stories inside for a long time, telling very few people about his experiences.

He speaks with a slight lisp, his lips pursed together slightly to protect his bare gums.

Underwood has no teeth. That's because when he was in residential school, Underwood was used for practice by a student dentist. With little to no anesthesia, the dentist ripped the teeth from his mouth.

"They said, '121 report to the gym,' – when I was there they called me 121, they didn't use our names – '121 go to the gym.' On Monday he pulled half of them and Tuesday I had to go back and he pulled the other half.

Black Press Media
Video online

"When I got home my mom was super mad, she took us to our regular dentist in Sidney and he exploded. He said you can sue these guys, I've got your son's dental records. Of course, my mom didn't know the word sue so we never did nothing."

Elder Victor Underwood near his home on the Saanich Peninsula. "We need to get people to listen to the stories that our people share – it's all we're asking. This way they'll have an understanding of why we are the way we are," he said. (Arnold Lim/Black Press Media)

Many children Underwood knew had their teeth pulled. He went to St. Mary's Indian Residential School in Mission, 150 miles from his Saanich Peninsula home. His two younger sisters went to Kuper Island, 70 miles away from their home. His older brother was sent to a residential school in Kamloops, 300 miles away.

"The older you got, the farther away they sent you," he said.

> "In residential school the kids who ran away, we thought they were lucky, that they made it maybe. But when they found those bodies … maybe they didn't, because some of them we never ever seen again.
>
> — **VICTOR UNDERWOOD**"

Throughout his time in residential school, Underwood suffered physical abuse. There were beatings and forced labour, with the "dirtiest work" being dolled out to students as punishment, which they often had to do without being given any cleaning supplies. To this day Underwood refuses to wear a tie because of the painful memories the tightness around his neck brings back – he was knocked unconscious twice in residential school by the teachers swinging him around by his tie and flinging him to the ground.

Some children were specifically targeted for punishment. As a student Underwood showed leadership qualities – he was also a star athlete, playing on a school soccer team that beat the provincial champions 7-0 – and as a result, was punished especially hard. Underwood was made an example of in front of the other students – one time he was beaten in front of all the other students in his class.

But he had to endure it all because there was no escape.

"If we ran away, they'd put our parents in jail. So that's why none of us ever ran away. We weren't allowed to speak, we weren't allowed to say anything, or we'd get punished. That was always the way.

"In residential school the kids who ran away, we thought they were lucky, that they made it maybe. But when they found those bodies … maybe they didn't, because some of them we never ever seen again."

Kamloops, where Underwood's brother attended, was the first site where evidence of a mass burial site at a residential school was found in Canada, triggering a nationwide shockwave that prompted the federal government to recognize Orange Shirt Day – now officially the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation – as a day of remembrance.

The Sto:lo Nation is working on an investigation to locate unmarked graves of Indigenous children who died at Fraser Valley residential schools. Surveying for the old site for St. Mary's Indian Residential School in Mission started last month on Aug. 24.

The radar work will take place over a period of time extending into next year, according to Mike Younie, Mission's chief administrative officer.

"It's going to take a long time," Younie said. "We're just trying to facilitate it as best we can for them, and they will take the time that they need to get it done."

The Sto:lo Nation Chiefs Council said they will not be providing information until a later date.

Continued on A11

Finding the courage to tell one's story, especially when it involves deep levels of pain, is one of the first steps in the healing process. In today's special issue marking the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, we share intensely personal survival stories about residential school experiences, living with intergenerational trauma, and its effects.

Our goal is to give readers the opportunity to take steps towards reconciliation by coming away with a better understanding of what our Indigenous neighbours, their families and similarly courageous people have endured. There are other ways of practising reconciliation, writes Bob Joseph, a hereditary chief of the Gwawaenuk Nation and the author of the illuminating book, 21 Things You May Not Know about the Indian Act.

We can also pledge to learn more about our local Nations and Indigenous Peoples in general, including seeking to dispel related myths and misconceptions, he says. We can avoid perpetuating stereotypes in our conversations or observations. And we can actively support and participate in activities surrounding Sept. 30 and National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21. After all, actions speak louder than words.

Articles in this series contain descriptions of abuse endured by children at residential schools that may be triggering to readers. Articles may mention suicide and violence against children including sexual, physical, mental and emotional abuse.

Support for survivors and their families is available. Call the Indian Residential School Survivors Society at 1-800-721-0066, or 1-866-925-4419 for the 24-7 crisis line.

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Authorized by Micky Fleming, Financial Agent, communityfirstlangford@gmail.com

Beaten, abused, and humiliated at a Duncan Indian day school

Elder May Sam never told her children or husband about her experiences

Bailey Moreton
News Staff

May Sam knew very little about what lay ahead as she stepped onto the school bus before her first day of Indian day school.

She was just six years old.

She didn’t speak English.

Sam was born in Mill Bay and never spoke English at home. So she spent the first few years lip-syncing God Save the Queen on the school steps every morning. She also didn’t know what nuns were. “I didn’t know if it was a man or woman because of the, well, how the nuns dressed. It was really strange for me to see that.”

But there was one fact Sam knew.

“My father, he says ‘you get up and you be ready for the bus and you get to school. If you don’t go to school, they’ll come and take you away.’ And back in those days – he called it the Indian agent – ‘the Indian agent will come and get you and take you away.’ He didn’t want that to happen to me and my sister. And so while my dad was at work, we had to do our chores and be ready for the school bus.”

When Sam got onto the school bus, leaving her home by the water of the Saanich Inlet, and headed to St. Catherine’s Indian Day School in Duncan for the first time, she didn’t know what was in store.

What she found was an alien, hostile and cold world.

“The nuns hated me,” Sam recalled. “There was no care, no love or no affection or nothing. They didn’t care. They did that to everybody.”

Sam’s struggles to learn English left her feeling isolated, even with her sister also at the school, because she couldn’t talk in her language for fear of being punished. The nun who taught Sam kept a bar of soap on her desk and would use it to scrub the tongue of any child who spoke another language. It happened to Sam multiple times. Other times she was whipped with a long canvas strap.

The worst instance of physical abuse left Sam with a scar on her leg that’s still visible today.

Part of Sam’s ‘education’ involved being forced to make hot chocolate for the hundreds of other students in a dank basement.

The work involved building a fire and pouring big cans of cocoa powder, powdered milk and molasses into a massive galvanized pot. She would stir and stir the pot for hours and then pour the mix into hundreds of cups for the other students.

Elder May Sam shares the abuse she endured as a child in an Indian day school. (Arnold Lim/Black Press Media)

She was in Grade 3.

Forced labour was commonplace in residential schools. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission said some schools that operated using the ‘half-day system’ – where students worked for half the day and learned for the other half – came close to turning schools into child labour camps.

One day, Sam was preparing the hot chocolate alone when a nun snuck up on her. One of the nun’s favourite punishments was to twirl her finger through Sam’s hair and jerk her head backwards. Distracted by breaking up kindling for the fire, Sam didn’t hear the nun come up behind her. The nun jerked her head backwards and Sam lost her balance, stumbling onto a broken bottle, the sharp edge of the glass cutting into her ankle.

> “Those that have passed away with the hurt and pain of losing their child and never coming home – you need to hear that.
>
> — **MAY SAM** ”

“It was so painful. I fell down. I looked and my ankle was honestly, it was pure white on one side, and I didn’t know it was my flesh – it was dark maroon like my flesh. But I really believe it went right through halfway in my ankle. That’s the scar I have on my leg.”

The nun dragged her to the nurse’s office, who dabbed the wound with some iodine, wrapped it in gauze and sent Sam on her way.

“It was so thick with blood. But I was hopping when I got off the bus and my sister helped me to get in the house. My father got home and he was so mad. He didn’t understand why they didn’t bring me to the hospital to get stitches because I needed stitches.”

Even while wading through painful memories, Sam brightens when she talks of her father. He raised Sam and her sister on his own after their mother walked out on them. The day Sam came back with her ankle bleeding, he cut down branches from a cherry tree and made crutches. When Sam was an infant he made a pacifier out of a horse clam.

“He was a great man. He was a wonderful man … it was just how creative he was and how he protected me and my sister.”

It’s clear that strength and protectiveness are some things he passed on to Sam.

She never told her children or her husband what she experienced, and her father never talked much about his own struggles. Sam heard stories from other family members and neighbours.

Black Press Media
Video online

She saw children go off to residential school and never saw them return and saw what that did to the family members who were left behind. But her own stories were something she kept inside. She’s unsure if this is her inherited protective nature of sheltering others, or because of the humiliation the nuns inflicted on her.

“The nuns made us so timid and ashamed. All my young life, I kept my hair over my eyes and I would never look up … They made us really, really timid – so ashamed of who we were. They told us not to talk about their abuse when we go home. ‘Don’t tell anybody. Don’t talk about it.’ It was hard. In all my lifetime, I never told my children. I never talked to my husband about it.”

Sam now lives in Tsartlip First Nation with her children all living nearby, one just down the road and the two others living in Tsawout First Nation, both on the Saanich Peninsula.

“I never told my children, I wish I did. Maybe they would have opened up and told me what happened with them in school, at the tribal school here. Maybe they would have told me – maybe it would have saved them – but I didn’t talk about it.”

Getting to the point of telling her story has been a struggle for Sam. A dichotomy exists within her. The urge to protect others and help battles against the shame that still scars Sam decades after the abuse she suffered in that Duncan day school.

“Those that have passed away with the hurt and pain of losing their child and never coming home – you need to hear that. Those that are still here are still drowning themselves with alcohol and have so much anger with their family at home, the hurt and pain is the anger from what they went through in school and now they just can’t let it go. They can’t stop being so angry because they have that shame and that hurt, those that were sexually abused – they have a real, deep anger.”

Protecting future generations is particularly important to Sam. Intergenerational trauma has hurt families – her own included – and spread the hurt to younger generations. Sam said she’ll always stand up for younger people to try and stem the spread of trauma and pain.

Part of that work is done by helping others navigate that shame and hurt. Sam works as an Elder in residence at the University of Victoria and Camosun College. Her late husband, Gabriel “Skip” Sam also worked at UVic.

“I talk to people and say that I love you. Complete strangers, I meet them and I talk to them and I say ‘I love you from my heart to your heart.’ This is what I truly mean.”

Sam’s warmth and loving nature are readily apparent, she’s quick to laugh or rest her head on the shoulder of Kristin Spray or Katie Manomie, who flanked her during the interview. The pair have sat rapt throughout Sam’s telling of her story.

With more people telling their stories and with the federal recognition that has finally come for Sept. 30 – “it’s about time they did that,” Sam added – some progress is starting to be made.

“It’s out in the open now. It’s out. It’s helping us to heal to have it out in the open.”

Breaking the cycle: How one woman's healing journey is being passed to her children

SPECIAL SERIES
TRUTH
& Reconciliation

Nicole Crescenzi
Contributor

The trauma from residential school experiences is intergenerational – passed from one generation to the next in different forms. It's not always physical.

For Janet Hanuse, one of the most harmful ways it presented itself was in a community's silence. "What was normal was concealing each others' secrets."

Hanuse grew up in Port Hardy, a descendant of the Gwa'sala-Nak'wax'da'xw and 'Wuikinukv Nations. Both of her parents went through residential school – her mother for three weeks and her father for 11 years. Both of them were left with scars –seen and unseen.

"My father never spoke of what happened," Hanuse recalled while sitting on a seaside bench on a warm, sunny day. Lined with strands of silver, her thick black hair framed her face. "He said, 'it was enough that I went through it. There's no sense putting you through it, too.'"

When Hanuse would later recount stories she'd read from residential school survivors to him, her father would simply nod and say, "it's true – all of it."

Hanuse said both of her parents were good people. Her father was a very smart, sensitive man. "I never once doubted there was love from my parents."

Janet Hanuse (left) with her youngest child Elleanna Hunt. Through her healing journey, Hanuse has recognized the impacts intergenerational trauma has had on her family. (Photo by Nicole Crescenzi)

But, they carried pain. Her mother was violent towards Hanuse and her four siblings. Her father was violent towards her mother, and both struggled with alcoholism.

Before she was seven, Hanuse said her mother was nothing but kind. She remembered learning to make and fry bread with her. After that, things changed, becoming violent and turbulent.

"I later realized that my mother went to residential school when she was seven, that's when violence started for her."

What Hanuse didn't discover until many years later was that despite the homelife violence, her parents were doing their best to shield their family.

"I didn't know it, but they were protecting us. My mother was protecting us from things that were so much worse happening in our community," Hanuse said. "If someone else was a threat to us, she would turn 10 feet tall and bulletproof … Her protection cultivated a fight in me."

The violence of intergenerational trauma was so prevalent in Port Hardy it was an unacknowledged, omnipresent norm.

"I never knew. Sometimes I'd be sitting, laughing, playing with classmates. Then they wouldn't come back after recess … I didn't know what was happening to them."

It was in adulthood that she spoke with her former classmates and learned the truth about what the community was experiencing.

"It was horrific – gut-wrenching. It was not a relief to know that I was not alone."

Hanuse learned about residential schools and was struck with a passion to know more. She studied residential schools, trauma, psychology and mental health in her post-secondary education.

She also sought out mentorship from other women who could teach her compassion, patience, strength and courage.

This, Hanuse said, was a pursuit of resilience.

It was through learning the truth that Hanuse could begin her own healing journey, part of which was coming to better understand and forgive her own parents.

When Hanuse was 25, she was pregnant with her fourth and youngest child.

"At that point, I had a total regression. I felt young and small and like I needed my mom – which I'd never felt before."

Before that point, Hanuse didn't realize everything her mother had experienced – from residential school to violence from the community. She had been resentful and unwilling to need her mother.

But then she called her, and they spoke openly of needing one another, and of past pain. During that call, Hanuse's mother apologized to her for how she'd been as a parent. It wasn't the first time she had apologized, but it was the first time Hanuse could forgive her.

"She cried," Hanuse recalled between tears of her own. "She finally felt that forgiveness."

But the healing journey isn't linear; it has ups and downs and twists.

When Hanuse had to leave Port Hardy to pursue her education, she left her children with their paternal grandparents and came back to discover that they had suffered from mental abuse while she was away, washing Hanuse with her own wave of parental guilt.

Hanuse's children were growing up and struggling with their own mental health, including anxiety and alcohol abuse. Hanuse herself had a brief reliance on alcohol and had gone through two turbulent romantic relationships.

It was when Hanuse's youngest child, Elleanna Hunt – who uses they/them pronouns – gave an ultimatum that Hanuse made a life-changing decision.

"I told her, 'you need to get us out of here. We need to leave. I need to go to Victoria, and if you don't come with me I will get there myself," Hunt said, chin high while sitting next to their mother.

After moving to Victoria it took six months before their guard came down.

"We didn't even know our guard had been up," Hanuse said. "When our guards came down … We were hit with a ton of bricks with all that trauma. We didn't realize we weren't processing it before."

Since then, there's been a huge effort within the family to talk about those feelings and to learn about mental health and healing together.

That has meant learning, making mistakes and growing together.

"We used to use a lot of blame," Hunt said. "'You made me feel this when you did that' … We do that less now. We apologize, give each other space, and talk about it later."

Hanuse said as a parent she's trying very hard to see her old patterns and name them – addiction, codependency, enabling and overcompensation. Most importantly, she wants to practise openness with her children, and with herself.

"It's my mission to kick butt and break the cycle," she said. "It's acknowledging what my contribution was to that. I need to understand it so I can change it and can break it."

For anyone just starting their own healing journeys, Hanuse said you need one thing – courage.

"It started out having the courage to speak up, to confront it and say no, this is not happening anymore," she said. "As a parent, it's having the courage to instil hope and commit to learning – about yourself and your children and your own survival, and to forgive yourself. Be kind and compassionate to yourself.

"Know that your parents did their best with their tools and teachings they have, and now you're doing the best with what you have."

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Notice

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The CRD accepts no liability for the inconvenience or damage caused by low pressure or discoloured water use during flushing.

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For more information visit:
www.crd.bc.ca/waterflushing

Next generation looks to take some of the burdens from residential school survivors

Austin Westphal
News staff

Sasha Perron ran 216 kilometres in just 18 days last year – one for each child found at the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, plus an extra one for all the children who weren't found. (Arnold Lim/Black Press Media)

Looking at Sasha Perron, it's nearly impossible to tell he's a survivor of intergenerational trauma.

He's warm, easy-going and charismatic. His smile radiates and his laugh is contagious. He's soft-spoken, and if you met him, you'd feel like you've already known him for a lifetime.

But he's just one generation removed from a residential school system that attempted to wipe away the traditions, cultural practices and languages of thousands of Indigenous youth.

Perron, the youngest of three children, was born in Quebec to a French Canadian father and Kwakwaka'wakw mother from the Da'naxda'xw First Nation. With his father in the military, the family of five moved around a bit before settling in Greater Victoria when Perron was in Grade 3.

In a lot of ways, his upbringing would feel familiar to a number of Canadians. He attended French immersion and spent much of his free time playing sports, especially soccer and hockey. He considers himself lucky for the opportunities he's had thus far in his life.

But from the very start, he was caught between two worlds, often finding it difficult to reconcile the conflicting nature of his ancestry.

"Growing up for me was conflicting because I knew, growing up, (about) residential school," he said. "I didn't really quite grasp the concept but I knew it was bad … I knew that the church had these schools and my mom went."

When his mother was just 12 years old, Perron's grandmother had a hard decision to make. She was a single mother raising four young girls and, in order to have a chance at providing her children with a better life, enrolled in school to become a nurse. Attending school full time, however, meant sending her daughters away to residential school.

Residential schools weren't often discussed by Perron's mother or aunts. "It was something they didn't want to talk about – their experiences being there," he said. "We just kind of knew that residential school was something that they had been through."

> "It's my turn to continue that story of strength and resilience."
> — SASHA PERRON

They weren't the only family members who attended.

Perron's late grandfather was taken from his home on Village Island, B.C. at the age of five and brought to St. Michael's Indian Residential School in Alert Bay, operated by the Anglican Church of Canada, where he remained until he was 18 years old.

Perron knows little beyond that because his grandfather never openly spoke about his experience in residential school. Like countless others, his grandfather's stories have been lost. Perron can only imagine what his grandfather may have endured at the hands of an institution designed as an instrument of genocide.

But last May when the remains of 215 children – some as young as three years old – were discovered at an unmarked burial site on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, the horrifying truth was in plain view for Perron – and the rest of Canada – to see.

It was a hard blow, he said, admitting that he had previously been oblivious to the egregious mistreatment and abuse that occurred during the more than 160-year history of residential schools in Canada.

"That's when I really started believing everything," he said. "It's actually shocking that I didn't realize what exactly happened before."

The discovery was overwhelming for many residential school survivors.

And for others, it was simply too much to handle. When the facts began to emerge, emotions came flooding back and generations were instantly re-traumatized.

For Perron, however, the discovery in Kamloops marked a major turning point. He said it was then that he knew it was time for him to take up some of the burdens that survivors have carried for so long.

Black Press Media Video online

And he said he wanted to do it in the most physical way he could – running.

Perron ran 216 kilometres in just 18 days – one for each child found at the Kamloops residential school, plus an extra one for all the children who weren't found.

"I wanted to show survivors that I was there. In a really physical way I wanted to support them," he said. "I think it's important to continue to share survivors' stories and share their strength and their wisdom because they suppressed their traumas for me to be here today and for me to be successful in this society."

Listening to survivors' stories, running with those stories, and sharing them not only eased some of the burden for his family but also sparked his own healing journey.

"I think it's important to continue to spread that knowledge that I've collected over the years so my peers and I can come together to build that strength and build that resilience in our generation."

There's still a long way to go and a lot of work to be done. But Perron, now 28, said his generation is ready to take up the challenge.

"It's my turn to continue that story of strength and resilience."

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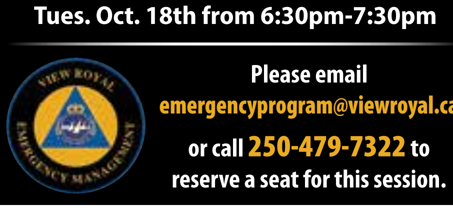

From residential school to prison, John Prevost has come a long way in his healing journey

Decades of addiction led Saanich artist to help others

Christine van Reeuwyk
News Staff

John Prevost uses art in his own healing journey and to help others. (Arnold Lim/Black Press Media)

When John Prevost sails into his hometown on Cormorant Island, a short trip from Port McNeill, a blank space in the streetscape where a four-storey brick building once loomed brings him joy.

"As soon as the ferry came into Alert Bay, there was the residential school and I'd always be angry inside."

Prevost, 62, is a survivor of St. Michael's Indian Residential School.

The facility was built by the federal government in 1929 and was run by the Anglican church until it closed in 1975. But it loomed over the bay for nearly a century, becoming a dark reminder of colonial relations with Canada's Aboriginal peoples.

When the Namgis Nation razed the building in 2015, demolition was marked with a healing ceremony and was attended by First Nations leaders, church leaders, politicians and former students.

Prevost was not there but he does remember the first time it didn't loom over his arrival. He'd brought a couple of friends up. "When we came around the corner I was crying my eyes out … 'look it's not there' … it made my heart lighter."

The space serves as a reminder, but much like that emptiness, his individual memories of the school and subsequent day schools, foster homes and group homes are shrouded in what he calls emotional blackout. Many memories are told to him. What he does remember is violence and alcohol abuse at home. Followed by abuse and violence at residential school, day school and foster care.

Prevost's Saanich studio apartment is now his nest and safe place, but Alert Bay is home.

What he knows of his family and childhood is learned second- and third-hand, sometimes from family in Alert Bay or family found over decades in the prison system.

He does remember being drunk at five, then the police came and took the five youngest boys, separating them into schools and foster homes.

"I was in St. Mike's on the fourth floor – just awful," Prevost recalled. It was two or three years of whipping, slapping and avoiding. A couple of his older brothers were there, and they looked after him as best they could. They advised him if someone said "come here" you run.

"I did a lot of running."

Two or three years later, he was moved to Vancouver, further removed from his roots, into a life of foster and group homes. It wasn't long after that he began his decades-long dance with incarceration.

By 11 or 12, Prevost recalled gathering the gumption to try and protect himself. For Prevost, foster home life included more slapping and being thrown down stairs. He reported the abuse to his social worker, telling the man they were beating him and not feeding him. The social worker believed the adults over the child.

> "That's when I burnt their house down. I threw all this newspaper they had on their pool table and I lit it. I walked away, went back to my room, and I was hoping somebody would wake up so I wouldn't die with them."
>
> — **JOHN PREVOST**

"As soon as he left, boom, down the stairs," Prevost said. "That's when I burnt their house down. I threw all this newspaper they had on their pool table and I lit it. I walked away, went back to my room, and I was hoping somebody would wake up so I wouldn't die with them."

No one died in the fire.

Prevost got six months in a juvenille detention centre. "Six months turned into a year. I became a part of the furniture in the prison system up to, I don't know, 10 years ago."

Prevost felt safe there. He discovered additional ways to numb the pain of his past – cocaine and heroin among them. "Anything to keep me from not looking at myself."

Despite the haze of his growing addiction, he remembers a comfort in being surrounded by people like him – people who felt anger and rage at the system. It's also where he met much of his family.

Removed from home at five he had to fight to return for his mother's funeral when he was 11. At 16, the system shifted Prevost to adult court and he wound up at Oakalla Prison (closed in 1979) on the Lower Mainland and surprisingly enough, that's where he ran into his brother Jeff. It's also where a guard remembered his dad, thrown in jail for speaking his own language, Prevost recalled.

While incarcerated he learned about Alcoholics Anonymous. The first time, Prevost was a teen looking to get out of his cell for a bit. "I went to a meeting and this old man was telling my story," he said. "We all have similar stories in our disease."

Meetings also helped him get out early. While he wasn't yet ready for healing, Prevost learned treatment existed and was an option – one he eventually pursued.

While he still bears the marks of intravenous drug use, it's been 20 years since his last overdose. "I shouldn't be alive with all the addiction I went through." Of 17 siblings (two sisters died at birth), four brothers remain. The others are dead of addiction, Prevost said, none of them would take treatment because of the associated stigma.

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He also turned to family about three decades ago when he started doing a lot of doodling. While in Alert Bay for treatment, and with a little trepidation, he showed the drawings to his cousins. They were impressed with his early attempts and offered him tips and gave him pieces of their own work with the advice of "copy ours until you find yours."

"So I did, for two or three years I was copying theirs and all of a sudden I started seeing my own art," Prevost said. Decades later it remains a tool for healing – taming triggers that lurk every day.

Now an artist and a healer himself, Prevost has become a mainstay in places designed to help lift others. He's an active volunteer at AVI Health and Community Services and Our Place Society, leading a healing circle and sharing his experience.

While his work adorns walls across the region, it's just one approach to wellness. What has proved most helpful, and he looks forward to participating again, is a retreat for residential school survivors.

"The first one I did was overwhelming," Prevost admitted. "Thirty-five of us in total, we all had our armour on when we first went there. They showed us this room where we're going to be doing our healing."

Three big buckets stood in the middle of the room. He learned later they were for the tissues for their tears.

"Right from the get-go, nonstop crying – nonstop cried our eyes out. It's a good feeling," he said. "It helped me go forward. "If I didn't do this treatment I'd be with my brothers or I'd be dead."

Happily settled into his Saanich nest for the last four years, Prevost's walls are covered in art – his and others' – and photos. One piece is a portrait created for him by a friend. Crafted of smaller images, residential school and other dark times dominate the bottom corner of the work, slowly lightening as it crosses the face stretching into brightness at the other far corner. It's an image he uses to help explain residential schools to those who don't understand. He started life in that dark corner and works every day to maintain the light.

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Talking about residential schools re-opens all the pains

From A3

"Every time we talk about residential schools it always opens all the pains I've been carrying," said Underwood. "Now it hurts – when they found those bodies, it hurt even more."

Talking about residential school experiences was not common when Underwood was younger. His grandfather, father and mother went to residential school – Underwood didn't know his parents were involved in the system at all for much of his life.

"Most of the people back then, or even our generation today, we will not talk about it or they won't talk about it. We're getting very few people that can talk about it right now. Almost all my classmates are gone now. So a lot of them did take their stories to the grave with them. Because it's really painful, too hurtful. Some of our people are so scared to talk because we're so scared to get punished."

Part of Underwood's reluctance is because he hasn't been believed in the past. When he was applying for compensation as part of then prime minister Stephen Harper's government's common experience program, Underwood was told he wouldn't be paid any money for his Grade 9 year in residential schools.

"I told him, I'd done Grade 9 and 10 in the same residential school. So how'd I get into Grade 10 without Grade 9 records? And they said (the record) said I went to six different schools and none of them are residential schools. When we checked it out, none of those schools existed in those days."

In an attempt to fight the decision, Underwood compiled records of his time in residential school during his Grade 9 year. He still has the binder, thick with stacks of records, 319 of them he said, that prove he attended residential school in Grade 9.

"I did everything they told me to but they still said no. The boys from our area, they all lost out. They didn't fight because it was too painful."

Since his retirement, Underwood has been working to help others through that pain as an elder-in-residence at Camosun College and later at the University of Victoria. Through his work, Underwood said he's seeing more Indigenous students graduating and more Indigenous elected representatives in government, which heartens him. He's lived on the piece of land overlooking Saanichton Bay since he was born, in a house that stands just feet away from the cabin where he was born. Though the water behind him seems calm and fixed, he said things are changing slowly.

"It took me many, many years before I could trust anybody. Our people don't trust and now we're learning how to trust again because that trust was never there. Ever.

"We need to get people to listen to the stories that our people share – it's all we're asking. This way they'll have an understanding of why we are the way we are. We share our stories. We're not asking you for special privileges. We're just asking to be treated fairly. When that happens, we can make it."

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