



FROM APOLOGY TO  
RECONCILIATION

Appendix 4:  
Transcript of Survivor Interviews from DVD



## APPENDIX 4: TRANSCRIPT OF SURVIVOR INTERVIEWS FROM DVD

### Part 1: The Past

**Mary Courchene:** I grew up in a home surrounded by love, and I received a lot of nurturing. I had my mom and dad, two older siblings, and a younger sibling. I had my *mishoom* and *kookom*, my grandparents. So that part of my life was extremely happy.

**Ann Callahan:** I was about four. My mother and my dad were coming from picking seneca root. (Seneca root was used by some First Nations to treat coughs and colds. Today, it is used in the preparation of commercial cough syrup and cough drops.) They had a team of horses and a democrat (a lightweight, horse-drawn wagon that usually had two seats). They put me down beside a little bush, not very high, a saskatoon bush, and they let me go around the bush to fill my belly with saskatoons. And I could hear them. They were still sitting on the buckboard (see “democrat” above), and they were talking Cree. They were saying, “Look at our little girl. Isn’t she beautiful? We just love her.” Those were really happy times—a very enjoyable part of my life.

**Ed McCorrister:** A way back, in my young day, I remember that everyone helped everybody, especially if they had work to do around the house. Say if a house had to be [built] ... In them days it was log houses, so there was a lot of mudding and whitewashing to build and make a house warm. And they would [organize] what they call a bee and a whole bunch of people would go there and help work that house and get it finished in one day, and the same with when there was any farming to do. A lot of our people had small fields and farms, and the threshing machine would come around and everybody would come there and they would all work to get that threshing done, and they would do that. They’d go to every farmer that had some kind of work to do with farming, and they would all finish it in one day, and there was no money passed on to the farmers, except they were given meals to eat, and that’s all they worked for in them days. We had a real good system of working together to make things go.

**Kathy Bird:** What I remember about growing up in Norway House as a small child is that we all lived on the reserve there, and it was still a very natural place. There were no roads—I guess [it was] what people would call isolated today. The mail plane came in once a week. And there were hardly any motorboats, outboard motors, or Skidoos, or vehicles of any type. We were still very much living off the land.

**Grace Zoldy:** I remember when we were growing up as Michif [Métis] people, there was no English. There was just Michif language and a Michif way of life. (Michif is a language made up of elements of French, Anishinaabe, and Cree spoken by many Métis people. Métis people may refer to themselves as Michif.)

**Mary Courchene:** The only reading material we had in the home were comic books and I loved those comic books, and I used to look at them for hours and hours. I used to wonder what those little bubbles said. So I used to make up stories about the characters in the books.

**Kathy Bird:** I started going to residential school when I went as a day student, but it was a residential school. And the residential school had about—maybe, I'm not quite sure—maybe a hundred to two hundred residents, and then we all went to the school that was there, but we stayed at home.

**Mary Courchene:** When my mother told us that we were going to go to school, it was a happy time. What she did not tell us, though, was that we were going to stay there.

**Dorothy Stranger:** And, of course, they told us, if you send your kids away to residential school, it would be better for them. They made me think that it was a good place to go.

**Percy Bird:** We were camped by the lake there, and a truck used to come and pick the kids up to go to residential schools. There used to be a competition [between the] Roman Catholic and the Anglican, and it was almost like chasing butterflies with a net: kids running around in the bush trying to get away.

**Kathy Bird:** In our family, we were born with light hair. You might not believe it, but I was blonde at one time when I was really young. They looked at you differently if you were fair and had light hair.

**Mary Courchene:** I remember walking to the school with my brother and my mom, walking up these big steps and my mother ringing the doorbell. And a strange woman answered the doorbell: strange because she dressed very differently. It was almost scary. She was dressed all in black and white with only her face showing.

**Kathy Bird:** They lined us all up and chopped our hair off and put that white powder in our hair—DDT, I guess. And they all lined us up to go in the shower together. That was kind of shocking!

**Mary Courchene:** What I recall, I believe probably it was the first day as well, being taken by the hand with this nun and walking in this immense building and going into this room, a large room with rows and rows and rows of beds, and that was our dorm. And she showed me a bed where I was going to be. On the bed were some clothes and [she] told me to put the clothes on.

**Flora Zaharia:** I turned seven in July, so September I packed my little bag along with my brother's. I was sort of excited at the beginning because it was something new. And my mother kept telling me, "Oh you're going to have a lot of girls to play with now." She was trying to make me feel better, I guess, about going to school.

**Grace Zoldy:** To me, the people that were teaching us were not teachers. I say they were just put there for the government to say that they had put teachers here to teach us. I'm a very strong Catholic, but what I'm saying here is we done too much of religious stuff in the school and we didn't do no educational stuff.

**Charlie Nelson:** I'm one of the fortunate ones that wasn't taken away at five or six years old. On the reservation [*Reservation* is a term normally used in the USA. In Canada, the usual term is *reserve*.], we had up to Grade 6. Then we went to town school in 1962 to '64. That's when I went to residential school at Assiniboia, 60 miles away. [It] wasn't too bad. I was able to get home every other week, or whenever my dad was in town, he'd pick me up. But the rest of the students that I went to school with, they stayed there pretty much year round.

**Dan Thomas:** There was a boy who was about six feet tall and maybe a couple of hundred pounds kicking another boy in the back who was trying to use the urinal. And I said, "Hey, stop that! Why don't you pick on somebody your own size?" And he turned around and said, "Like you?" And from that point, for the next three years, until he got kicked out of school, almost every day I fought with this guy.

**Charlie Nelson:** Our meals were pretty good. My mom made do with things. I was used to eating rabbits and fish and deer. Those were our foods. It was nice.

**Ann Callahan:** My dad came up from the barnyard and he says, "You better put your dress on," he said, "that pretty little dress you have." So anyway, I put it on. It was made out of flour bags. It had flowers on it. Oh, I was so happy! I think I'm going to be going somewhere special. So anyway, he put me on the buckboard beside him. We came out of this thicket of woods, and I saw this great big, red building. Anyway, so he tied up the horses on the post there. I was on the veranda and my dad went down the steps, down the gravel path to the horses. And it suddenly dawned on me that my dad was leaving me there. By that time, he had turned the horses around and was heading down the road. Instinctively I chased him down the road. He saw me, and he pulled up the reins and he got down. He had big tears in his eyes. He said, "My little girl, I can't keep you here. I can't take you home. You got to stay here," he said. And he said, "It's the law." He said, "The Indian Agent [Indian Agents were the government's representative on reserves. Their word was law.] says it's the law."

**Mary Courchene:** That day that I entered residential school began a very different life for me. Can you imagine a five-year-old taken away from a happy, nurturing household to a totally foreign environment where there was no nurturing of any kind, no love of any kind? And that began 10 years of extreme misery for me.

**Garry Robson:** My mom didn't cry. My grandma didn't cry. It wasn't until much later in my life that I started to realize in talking to those Elders that they said that the reason that the parents didn't cry is because we would have

started to cry. And if we would have started to cry, when would we ever have stopped? And this other old man that was telling me one time, he said, “We could walk down the roads of our community, and you could hear the sobs coming from the houses of children that had been taken away,”

**Ann Callahan:** It’s like as if the life had gone out of the community. I know it must have been very hurtful for them. But they didn’t let us see that hurt.

**Dorothy Stranger:** The nurse was good enough to phone to the hospital, because my husband worked at the hospital. So she phoned him and told him, “Mr. Stranger, I think you better come and see your son.” And he said, “Why?” She said, “Because he’s been in the hospital for quite awhile now. He broke his hip and he’s very lonely. He’s crying all the time. He won’t eat, and he can’t walk around. So somebody needs to come and see him.” My husband came home and he was very upset, very mad. And he said, “You get ready,” he said, “We’re going for Stuart, going to bring him home.” So then they didn’t have any ambulance or anything here to haul patients, so we took the old Ranch Wagon [a station wagon manufactured by Ford Motor Company from 1952–1977] and away we went. And you know that little guy, I don’t know how old he was, about eight, seven or eight, [it was] not long he was walking around with his cast on and everything. He was walking and he was eating and playing around. It made a really big difference. But I had a chance to tell that principal, “Do you think we’re people that don’t care about our children? Do you think that we just forget about them?” I said, “We do care and it really hurt when we found out he was in the hospital and you never told us.”

**Mary Courchene:** During the 11 years that I lived at that school, I was systematically stripped of dignity and pride, and I really hated myself for who I was, as an Indian. I remember going home when I was 11 years old, walking into my house, and there sat my mom and dad in the kitchen having a cup of tea. And my dad looks at me, and there was a look of joy on his face, and he says, [Speaking in Anishinaabe] which means, “My daughter is home.” And I remember looking at my parents and hating them with a hate that was so intense. And I looked at my dad and I said to him—I was 11 years old—I looked at my dad and I said, “From now on we speak only English in this house.” And my dad looked at my mom, and he had such a look of...of astonishment, of shock really, and he said to my mom, [Speaking in Anishinaabe], “Then I guess we’ll never speak to this little girl again.” I remember that summer though, every time I started to say something in English, my dad would always say to me, [Speaking in Anishinaabe] “Speak your own language.” And I thank him for instilling in me [the determination] to retain my language. Regrettably, that’s where it ended because, my children, [and] I have seven of them, I did not pass on any language or culture to them.

**Kathy Bird:** I learned my language in school actually, even though it was banned. And that’s a lot of the things we had to do, was break rules in order to survive in there. My mom is Dakota, so she didn’t speak Cree. She married a Cree from up north and the language in Norway House was Cree. And so, because my mom didn’t speak the language, she spoke English. So we learned

English and a mixture of Cree as we were growing, but the majority of my learning to be very fluent was in the schoolyard with the other children in school. And even though we weren't allowed to speak it, we still did. And I'm very grateful for that, because I learned it well.

**Ed McCorrister:** The biggest problem that they had in the residential schools is that they were never teaching the values that our people had at one time. One of the most important values is bringing up children. The family structure that we had in bringing up children many years ago is one of the teachings that we have lost through the residential school. And because of that, the generations of the people today don't know how to be parents like the way our ancestors did, and they don't know how to teach their children the values that our ancestors had at one time.

**Mary Courchene:** I used to have a little window. When we'd go up to the dorm, then I would run to that window to see. I could see my house from there. And if I saw smoke coming out, or if I saw my mom outside, or my dad outside, it would ease a little bit, the loneliness that I felt. So that emotion, that loneliness, has never left me in all of my years. And now I'm an Elder. I can still feel in my heart that loneliness that I felt.

**Garry Robson:** That our people are so afraid of looking at their own history, their culture, their identity, stems from that residential school experience.

**Kathy Bird:** Five generations of our people lost that. We're in the sad state that we are because of the loss, that those things were taken from us. As a young child, we never heard of the things we're hearing of today that our people are doing to each other: the murders, the child abuse, all those things. Those didn't happen until within the last maybe two, three generations.

**Garry Robson:** You can see how it devastates our communities even today. Even though our children have never set foot in residential school, [they] are still products of the residential school experience.

**Kathy Bird:** We didn't have a voice, the control, everything. And when I came out of there, I started to search out who we were: starting to learn our own creation stories, starting to learn about our societies. [Various First Nations had/have groups or societies, organizations within the tribe, band or community. They include military societies, such as the Dog Soldiers of the Crtetsrne, as well as the Grand Medicine Society on medewewin of the Anishinaabe.] We had all that and residential school destroyed a lot of those things, took the language away, our spirituality, the different societies we had in our communities, the roles, the roles of grandparents, the roles of aunts and uncles. I began to listen to the Elders that were still living back then, and they started to share the traditional knowledge with a lot of us young people. That's what gave us strength. That's what gave us direction. That's what grounded us.

## Part 2: The Present

Onscreen: CBC News Clip: Moose Factory Indian Residential School

**Dan Thomas:** In the treaty areas here in western Canada, the Prairie, people specifically wanted schools in their communities and that was a request put into the treaties, but somehow that translated into church-run, government-funded boarding schools [schools funded by the province as opposed to federally funded residential schools, but used here as a synonym for residential schools] run all across the country. So, it wasn't really a wish of our people that boarding schools were there.

**Ed McCorrister:** To me, it's very important that all the people of Canada, Canadians, know that the government has mistreated us and has never honoured any of the treaties that our people have signed with them.

**Garry Robson:** With the treaties, we also still had a way of life, but what affected our people's lives is the *Indian Act* and Indian Affairs. If you go back and look at that, you'll see that Indian Affairs believed that they had the right to educate Aboriginal children. Within the *Indian Act*, it says that our people could not miss three consecutive days of school, and if we did, they could put our parents in jail.

**Dan Thomas:** Boarding schools were a political decision to impose one kind of power on a people.

**Ann Callahan:** I think it doesn't take one too long to look at what the aim was—the process of assimilation and it has its roots in colonization. So we were not to speak our language. We were not to talk about the ceremonies, let alone burn sweetgrass or anything like that.

**Percy Bird:** I started when I was three years old and I didn't come out until I was 18, so it's 15 years. So therefore, I really didn't have any culture.

**Garry Robson:** So the idea was not so much education, but it was the idea of taking the children away from the parents so that they'd become something different than what their parents were.

**Percy Bird:** That was the sole purpose of the school, was to drive the Indian out of you, but what was left was a shell and a loss of identity.

**Grace Zoldy:** The belittling we went through when there's other people around. [They'd] just grab us by the hair and say there's no such thing as Michif language. That's nothing. It's nothing at all.

**Percy Bird:** If you were caught talking your language, you were punished for it. If you practised any of the stuff that Native people did on the reserve, [of] any religious significance, you were completely ostracized while you were being brainwashed, and told that these were evil things.

**Kathy Bird:** We started talking about residential school. I was expressing my views on what it did to me. When I was done, this woman with two kids, she says to me, “Well, what about your education? You’re a community health nurse. You have a good job. You graduated. Wasn’t that good?” I looked at her and my response to her was, “Are these your children? When you leave here, you’re going to leave your children with me.” And I said, “They’re going to speak a different language. They’re going to learn my language. They’re going to dress like me. And I will decide everything for them. Then you can have them back. Then you can do whatever you want with them after that.” She just looked at me kind of shocked. I said, “Will you let me do that?” She said, “No.” I said, “Well, that’s what happened to us.”

**Garry Robson:** I don’t really believe that the residential schools were set up to educate us. So if some of our people got educated, it was in spite of the residential school system.

**Dan Thomas:** Motivation was stifled. If you were a tape recorder, you would be a perfect student. Because you would replay back to whomever all the things they wanted you to say, and if you could do that a hundred percent of the time, you would have been an “A” student. If you ever asked a question about anything about the world around you or the experience around you, you were deemed a troublemaker by asking. And to me, that’s the exact opposite of what education is supposed to be.

**Flora Zaharia:** One of the things that was most difficult was the fact that our supervisors and even some of the teachers were of French origin and they spoke French all the time, so we came out speaking a broken English. That’s why we spoke that way, because of our teachers. We were modelling ourselves after them.

**Garry Robson:** They would put our people in school for half a day. Half a day you’d be in school; the other half you’d be working: for the girls, in the laundry and all those kinds of things, and for the boys, in the barns and in the fields.

**Ann Callahan:** We did the laundry, scrubbing the floors, baking the bread, and digging potatoes in the fields, peeling vegetables, washing the dishes. So my education from Grade 1 to 8 wasn’t very good.

**Garry Robson:** So you could keep those [students] in school for eight years to teach them Grade 4, and then after that all you did was, you become a worker inside there.

Onscreen: Excerpt of Apology by Prime Minister Harper—see transcript of apology.

**Grace Zoldy:** The way they done things: six- or seven-year-old little boys going someplace with brothers and priests and things like that. They continually done things. When is that going to be forgiven? When is that going to be forgotten on the person that it happened to? You know, it’s going to be a long, long time.

**Ann Callahan:** It was so quiet for such a long time until Grand Chief Phil Fontaine divulged his experience in Indian residential school, and then the floodgates were open.

(Onscreen: CBC clip, Oct 30, 1990: Phil Fontaine reveals sexual, physical, psychological abuse at residential school)

**Reporter:** Phil Fontaine, the head of Manitoba's Assembly of Indian Chiefs, called in representatives from the Catholic Church today to demand an investigation. He says he was abused by school staff, so were others.

**Phil Fontaine:** Sexual abuse did occur. We were aware of it. We have experience, collective experience. Physical abuse took place, psychological abuse, deprivation, all of the other things.

**Reporter:** Fontaine says he was sexually abused on the Fort Alexander Reserve [Sagkeeng First Nation], north of Winnipeg.

**Shaneen Robinson:** The next day [after the federal apology], my dad [Honourable Eric Robinson, then Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism] is a member of the provincial government. He wanted to make an official statement on behalf of the residential school survivors, so he stood up in the Manitoba Legislature that day, and told everybody something I never thought he would be able to do, and he talked about his sexual abuse and the abuse that he went through, and talked about his dysfunctional behaviour and the reasons why.

(Onscreen: Clip from Manitoba Legislature: Minister Eric Robinson reveals that he was sexually abused in residential school)

**Eric Robinson:** Other memories are more difficult to relive. Being molested at a young age by a priest has brought me a lifetime of pain and anguish. Being told it was my fault, and later learning to blame everyone around me, has taken a toll on my personal relationships.

**Dan Thomas:** I remember talking with Elders about how they were treated in boarding school, and they would talk about things like having your mouth filled with thread spools until your jaw almost broke for speaking your language; others who had needles put through their tongues; many things that were done in the name of education and also in the name of Christianity, that I think have nothing to do with either.

**Grace Zoldy:** I remember young girls when they were menstruating, the nuns used to make them sit there. They were all wet like that, and made them stand up so the kids could see them and the dirty floor.

**Percy Bird:** And I'm wanting to go to the washroom and there's no way to communicate because the supervisor's inside and I can't talk to the guys, and I used to dirty myself eventually, and, boy, I use to get punished for that! She'd come out there and march me in, punishing me all the way through—make me ashamed as I went to the basement playroom and into the washroom. She'd fill

up that tub and make me strip down, and in that tub, just hot water steaming. And here I am, hanging on to both sides of the tub there, and she's trying to push me in there, just to show me what I did was bad. It didn't happen just the once. It happened over and over and over again.

**Grace Zoldy:** My grandmother told me when I got home, "You have to go to the store." So I had to go to the store, and I have to run by the school. I was running by the school there and I seen her coming out with this guy, and then, all of a sudden, I hear someone running behind me, and I look back and here it's Roger, that's the guy she had there. "Sister—wants you." "What for? It's after school." And so he took me back there. She just grabbed me. She just grabbed me by the neck here somehow. She was a strong...I was just nine years old, and she threw me against a bunch of boxes that were piled up on there. She went to the cupboard there, and she pulled one of those drawers, and she took a big strap from there. She just beat me and beat me and beat me, and she hit me here. She pulled me by the hair and I was just begging her. I was just begging for my life, I guess. And she just took me by the hair, and she just threw me to the classroom from the storeroom, and she gave me some kind of a thing there to wipe my eyes, but I wasn't ready to wipe my eyes. I was just hurt, so I went home crying. I couldn't go to the store; I had to go home crying. So when I got home and I told my grandmother of what happened, she said, "You must have done something. That nun would never beat you for nothing."

**Ann Callahan:** When I was 12 years old, I decided that I didn't like Indian residential school. So my friend and I decided that when the sun went down, we'd crawl under the fence and take off—which we did. And we knew enough to stay off the road. So we travelled in the wild bush and we got all scratched up and we slept in a hollow log that night. We could hear them on the road, calling our names, the RCMP and the principal, the senior boys. Anyway, we got to Mom and Dad's house that morning, early morning. So my dad was chopping wood; he could hear us in the bush. "You better come out, you girls," he says. And we went inside. Mom had hot rabbit stew for us and hot bannock. Oh, we were hungry. "You better hurry up", he said, "They'll be here." Sure enough, they came back. My dad said, "You have to go back. They'll put us in jail. We can't keep you home." Away we went. When we got back to the school, the principal took us in his office and, both hands, he took that big leather strap that always hung on the wall, strapped us from here to here, on both sides, so much so that we couldn't even bend our arms like this, we were so swollen. And the punishment didn't stop there. That old matron of ours—oh, she was a mean woman—took us in the dispensary and we had our heads shaved bald. Then we had to walk around with signs on our back [that said] "I will not run away."

**Dan Thomas:** In our school, they funded space for 40 treaty students. The rest of the students were either Métis or non-Aboriginal students. One of my cousins was number 41, and so [when] his community sent him to the school, the school said, "We don't have space for you." They sent him back. He got home; there was no school there. They said, "You have to go to school." They sent him back to school. He went back and forth a number of times and then,

finally, jumped ship from his transportation. But he ended up in jail, and he wrote to me from being in jail and he said, “Dan, I’d like you to try to get in here with me.” He said, “Do you know we get three meals a day and we get dessert.” He said, “We have colour TV we can watch, and they pay you to do chores so you can buy smokes, and we have an exercise room.” He says, “This is the best life I’ve ever had. Try and get in here. You’ll enjoy it too.”

**Jesse Green:** The people that gave up and those are the people you see in the jails and on the streets.

**Grace Zoldy:** We had to take religious studies. Honest, that priest just got up, just got up from where he was. He used to sit in front of us like that. He just got up and went and he got this—Robert was his name. He got up and he brought him to him there, and he put him here—just his butt sticking out. He had his head under the chair like that. And he pulled from under the table a plank about this wide, and he hit that little guy with that a few times. And he didn’t cry. He threw that plank and he pulled him out of there. You wouldn’t believe the blood! He could have killed that guy!

**Garry Robson:** I seen people lose their life there, where a boy had cancer and he would go up in the dorm and he would lay in bed there after breakfast until school. They called him a lazy Indian. They passed a rule: nobody could be in the dormitories in between when we left in the morning until in the evening after supper. That was because of him. So he used to sleep on the tables, the wooden tables, the wooden benches. He would try and sleep there and they still wouldn’t allow that. So in the fall, what we used to do is, we used to take our jean jackets and, underneath the stairs, we would put our coats there and we would let him sleep on our coats while we went and played outside in the fall with no jackets, to help him out. He became so sick that they finally took him to the hospital and he never returned. He died.

**Ann Callahan:** When I did my interviews, when I was doing my Master’s [degree program] with the Elders, they told me about four young children that passed away in that school. One hung himself and one drowned and one they say was whipped to death in the barn and died in the fetal position. But I can attest to the fourth one, because I was in school when Ronnie S died. From September to the end of October, we used to hear him cry on the other side, on the boys’ side, from our side. Every night, we’d hear him crying. I guess the other boys would try and give him some relief, put cold rags on his head. But one morning we didn’t hear no sound. We looked at each other and wondered why. Next morning we learned that he had died during the night. But this young child did not receive any medical attention. No doctor, no nurse attended that little boy. There was no investigation. When I went to look for those records in the federal government’s records, I could not find a record of that little boy’s demise. Maybe the records were cleaned up. But I was there and several of my peer group can say, yes, we were there when little Ronnie S died. The parents today are looking for that little boy’s....They know where he is *atawiya* (a Cree expression meaning “at least”), in the cemetery, but what location? Not even a headstone!

**Percy Bird:** This is my home. This is my refuge. This is my security, here, and I have to learn to survive, to cope, in this environment.

**Ann Callahan:** That was the things that we learned. We were connivers to survive. We were hungry all the time. We used to eat dandelions and caragana blossoms to feed our hunger.

**Garry Robson:** I learned how to lie. I learned how to cheat. I learned how to steal in that residential school. I became such a good liar that—because you were beaten until you cried. And so, when they were raising their hands like this with that whip, I had tears already coming down my eyes. As soon as I got hit, all I had to do was yell, like I was crying. That's how good of a liar I became. I used to run to the farmers' fields over there and steal grain from the grain elevators. We'd run across the road over that way to the experimental farm and steal from the experimental farm. We went down into the gardens and stole turnips and potatoes because we were hungry. We went in the back and stole some rock salt from the cows and rubbed that on the potatoes and turnips to give it a little bit of flavour.

**Percy Bird:** I remember, the old minister, on Sundays, leaning over the pulpit, "You Indians, you'll never amount to anything. You're a failure." And you'd just about make up your mind, if that's the way it's going to be, that's the way I'm going to live.

**Garry Robson:** The abuse started to come from inside the boys themselves. This one guy used to get me to steal bread for him from residential school. And he used to slap me in the face like this. And he said, "Did you bring it? Did you bring it?" That second year when my mom didn't tell me not to fight, he asked me to bring out some bread for him again. So I brought it. When I came into the playroom, he come over to me and started slapping me. He said, "Did you bring it? Did you bring it? Did you bring it?" I slapped him. I slapped him back really hard, and from there I started fighting. I didn't know how much stuff affected me from that residential school. But me and my cousin Gary, he had a girlfriend, she was sitting in the middle of us, and we were sitting on the banks of the Red River down south there, waiting for fireworks, and Gary said, "Let's tickle her." I said, "Okay." So I grabbed one arm and he grabbed the other arm and we started tickling. Then he said, "They're starting," and he let her go. And she turned around and she slapped me. Next thing I knew, I was on top of her and I told her, "If you ever hit me again, I'll break your neck." All of a sudden, I came to and that really, really scared me. What she almost got hurt for was because of what happened to me inside that residential school.

**Dan Thomas:** We're no longer in school and we haven't been for decades, but the motivation just isn't there to do the things that need to get done. It's like this great big, heavy hand is sitting upon people, holding them from doing the things that are necessary to do in order to live a good life.

**Percy Bird:** You tend to behave the way you yourself were treated. I knew there was something wrong. And I had my belt—never mind just a hand—and

I slammed it down on his bare bum. And I was going to do it again and my wife stopped me. She says, "That's too harsh." I didn't see any other family punish their kids the way I did at that time. But yet I believed I was doing the right thing. So I let go of my hand, let go of my kid, hugged him, and let him go. But from that point on, I let drop all my responsibility in terms of discipline. I was afraid that I would continue to abuse my kids that way, the way I was abused.

**Garry Robson:** And it was those old people as I was travelling down this dead-end road, took me back and started to show me this other life. They talked about that history of our people, the culture, the identity, of who we are and what we are. And the more that they told me, the more proud I became of who I am and what I am.

**Kathy Bird:** I began to listen to the Elders and they started to share that traditional knowledge with a lot of us young people. That's what gave us strength. That's what gave us direction. That's what grounded us.

**Garry Robson:** "You know, we're not always going to be here." Those old people used to tell us that all the time. They said, "Listen to what I'm telling you. Someday you're going to have to talk about this." And so when you start to see those Elders passing, then you start to realize how much of what they said is so important for our lives. To me, I think this [the DVD] is just as important. People some day will say, "Is that really true? Did this really happen?" And we'll say, "Yeah, look at this." We didn't lose our language, our culture, our identity because we wanted to. It was this residential schools that was put in place—a place to make us forget. But after all this time, there were people that still held on to those stories and those people passed them on to us. And our job and our role and our responsibility is to try and pass it on to them, those ones that are still coming. And to me, that's what I would like to be able to teach our children, to be able to see that good part so that they can become that, instead of all that negative garbage that they're learning about themselves.

**Jesse Green:** Natives aren't out there to get everything for free. We're just here to try and survive in a land that once we survived on without any assistance.

**Percy Bird:** If we hadn't been detained by a hundred years of subjection, how far would we have been if we had been treated as equals?

## Part 3: The Future

**Shaneen Robinson:** Watching on TV, the apology from the prime minister, and at that moment, he kind of opened up to all of us. That was the first time I think I'd ever seen my dad emotional and talking about what happened to him.

**Ann Callahan:** It was a very moving experience. I couldn't believe it until I seen him sign that paper. I said to my friend, "He's actually signing that paper." Because it was so long in coming. The churches—United Church, Presbyterian, Anglican Church—apologized to the people, and finally the federal government apologized.

**Flora Zaharia:** The government has realized and accepted their mistake. They have seen the harm it has done to all of us. Apology meant they have taken the responsibility. Because of all that, I think we have to forgive also.

**Anna Parenteau:** I think for a lot of residential school survivors, they needed that to know that somebody acknowledged the pain that they went through.

**Percy Bird:** I know that it affected some very positively, some negatively. I don't know how sincere it is, or is it just a procedure?

**Rebecca Chartrand:** It is a step in the right direction in the sense that it's bringing awareness and recognition to the fact that, yes, this did happen.

**Grace Zoldy:** We're [Métis survivors] not entitled to anything. I'd like to know how they made that decision that we're not entitled, when First Nations were entitled. I'm not jealous of First Nations. They got what's coming to them. But what about Métis people? There's lack of trust. So much things has happened. How many years have we been lied to? How many years? Reconciliation? We have to see something positive first. We haven't seen it yet.

**Dan Thomas:** The boarding school that I went to was a provincial boarding school, and that school is still in operation, although it doesn't operate the way it did when I went in school. Because the two provincial schools that are in Manitoba—one in Cranberry Portage and one in Teulon—weren't included in the court case about residential school compensation, to me, the apology is just words because it has no impact upon me other than somebody spoke some words. They said, "I'm sorry, but I'm continuing business as usual." So I haven't seen any changes come about in the lives of our people, and certainly none that I've experienced personally. The housing budget hasn't changed. The health budget hasn't changed. Nobody's putting in the roads that people need. Nobody seems to be addressing the high rate of suicide that we have in our communities. Educational budgets haven't changed. What's the difference after the apology? To me, it was just words if it's not followed up by action.

**Garry Robson:** Apology really means nothing. How can you apologize for people that died inside those residential schools, the sexual, physical, emotional abuse of all of the kids that went through that residential school

system, the loss of language, the history, the culture, the identity, the loss of family, of how to raise children? How do you apologize for that? What was important was for me to forgive myself: to be able to forgive my family, because they also went through that residential school system. To be able to forgive all the non-Aboriginal people, to realize that they had nothing to do with me being inside that residential school. It was important for me to forgive myself more than him to read that apology to me.

**Jesse Green:** The damage is already done. You can't reverse hundreds of years of damage and generations of damage. To me, it really means nothing.

**Kathy Bird:** To finally hear them say "we're sorry." It's an admission.

**Nichola Batzel:** I think it meant probably the most to me through my birth mother, because she said it really helped her. The whole reason why I was given away was because of that residential school system. To hear her say that that really helped her is enlightening.

**David Thomas:** I wish my mom was alive to hear that. It would bring healing, and I think it has to a lot of people. It's not going to change the world. It's not going to change Canada, but I think that just to hear those words it acknowledged that there was an injustice to us. I think just that alone gives us the courage to move forward and accept that there has been impacts in our life that maybe we were afraid to acknowledge before, but it's okay to say, okay, well, this happened to us. And the awareness that it may bring to non-Aboriginal people that something had taken place... I think that, of course, it's a small step, but it's an important step.

**Mary Courchene:** What did I feel about the apology? I thought, well, is this another door that's opened to us? Can we now reconcile our past? And, for me, the reconciliation is with our children, our grandchildren, our great grandchildren. We are the ones that have to pass on those traditional teachings to our young people, and to revitalize our languages and renew our languages.

**Garry Robson:** An awful lot of our people are still stuck in residential school, are still survivors of the residential schools, are still running from the residential school experience. They don't want to listen to it; they don't want to hear it. It was just too painful, and so they run. But the unfortunate part about it is that their children have never set foot in a residential school, their grandchildren have never set foot in a residential school, but are going through the residential school experience because of them.

**Mary Courchene:** There is a whole legacy of pain that our young people have experienced because of the residential school system. We were taught to believe that we were not good enough, that we would never be good enough. We thought it was unimportant to pass on any language, any culture to our children, and that's what we are still reeling from today, in today's society. That assimilation policy was warfare on our communities, on our culture. And it was in black and white, where it said we have to take the children away from their parents. We have to kill the Indian in the children. And that was

the assimilation policy that the government had devised. So it was deliberate, it was deliberate to do cultural genocide on our people, on a whole cultural group.

**Jesse Green:** Well, he [Jesse's father] told me that he got taken away when he was really young, and he never went back home until he was 16 or 17, except for summer. They'd get to go home for two months a year. And he said it would just never be the same. How would you even know who your parents were if you're only there two months of the year? And then, when you're in your late teens, go home and expect to live a normal life.

**Dan Thomas:** The trauma doesn't leave you. It's like you're in this major trauma. You're always reacting to what happened to you when you were young. And so you never get to really experience life in the present as it is. You're always experiencing your past.

**Nichola Batzel:** When I was in high school, I was walking down the hall and I think I was not in my best of moods. Someone tapped me on the shoulder and said, "What's your background?" And I just said, "I'm Eskimo!" And I looked at her, and she goes, "You're not an Eskimo. You're an Inuk." And I said, "Pardon me? You know who the Inuit people are?" And she goes, "Yeah, I'm Inuit as well." So I was in Grade 11, and I had to go from birth virtually all the way up to Grade 11 without meeting another Inuit person.

**Anna Parenteau:** It didn't stop just at the residential school survivors' generation. That suffering and that pain was carried forward to our generation. If we don't get help for that, it's going to continue. There was a lot of suffering and they passed it on. I think that we're stronger for it.

**Jesse Green:** It's definitely affected me in a psychological manner. He didn't abuse me like physical abuse or anything, but it's kind of psychological abuse: just a bunch of negative things that alcohol leads to in a family setting. Unfortunately, it has become a normal thing among people of my generation.

**Dan Thomas:** People who are my age and older have children and grandchildren. Those ones also pick up the behaviours, the thought patterns of the people who have raised them. So you end up having multiple generations who aren't actually in boarding school but are being affected by it. When we look at Aboriginal gangs, domestic violence, poverty, disease, we see the results of boarding school. If we look at all of these different things, we can see what it is that we need to deal with.

**Mary Courchene:** That whole idea totally disintegrated our family unit. You see now what it has reaped. We have the child welfare system—that's part of the legacy of the residential school. The most devastating act was to take children away from families, and place them where they could systematically be stripped of any dignity, of any pride, of any language, of any culture.

**Nichola Batzel:** There was a continuation after residential schools in the effort to assimilate through the sixties scoop [the practice of child welfare agencies across Canada to take First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children into custody and

give them over for adoption to non-Aboriginal parents—thousands of children were taken from their communities during the 60s, 70s, and early 80s]. My birth family lived up in Nunavut. I wasn't quite born in the sixties, but I'm sure that the social worker had assimilation on her mind when she was going to put me in a home in Winnipeg.

**Anna Parenteau:** Growing up on a reserve, I'd seen a lot of people abuse alcohol, a lot of domestic violence. I didn't really understand how that came to be in our community. A lot of people feel ashamed about being Aboriginal, being Native. How they deal with that is through alcoholism or drug abuse, in dealing with that abuse that they suffered themselves. And it doesn't just stop at that one generation. They passed that on to the next generation, my generation.

**Mary Courchene:** Their parents, their grandparents were raised in residential school. Therefore they didn't have the communal way of child rearing. That was taken away. So because it was taken away, our children, our grandchildren don't have that. They don't know how to parent.

**Flora Zaharia:** Some of the parents that I had to work with, they were from residential schools. The way they were bringing up their children was not the same, because the residential school was bringing up their children and they did not have the practice or the know-how to raise their children. And also in the area of discipline, I saw some parents that had been to residential schools punish their children in a way that was not acceptable to our Native people. They followed the way the residential school did. You know, the residential schools hit us and strapped us and so on, and some parents were following in that they were abusing their children in that way.

**Mary Courchene:** There are over a hundred years of a people that were systematically almost destroyed: their roots, culture, history, and their languages taken away. So we have a big job to do with our young people. We have to tell our stories so that we know who we are and that we know why we are the way we are today.

**Shaneen Robinson:** There's a whole weight on our people's shoulders: on all generations afflicted by this terrible piece of history in our country. I had that weight on my shoulders and in my heart for a long time. Now that I know, I'm able to heal. With the residential school apology from the Government of Canada, also from the Catholic Church, our residential school survivors now have a responsibility to move forward from that. The one thing that I would hope for our residential school survivors is to be honest. In order for us to get past those things, we have to be honest and truthful with our children and our grandchildren. Because once you say it, it's out of you, and if you keep that inside and not talk about what happened, then it's just giving it more power.

**David Thomas:** The path that I've been on: our real sense of our strength in who we are, a strength that my parents had to go forward and meet challenges. One of my projects was a student centre at the University of Manitoba. And be a part of creating these homes, where before I look back at

my parents' experience at residential school and how we've actually come that far in one generation.

**Ann Callahan:** I have hope for the younger generation. They'll learn about the legacy of Indian residential schools. They will understand their parents, grandparents, and their community. When I give a talk, I say to these young people, "If you get knocked down, don't stay down. Get up and move beyond." And I always say, "Don't let the past define you."

**Shaneen Robinson:** I didn't really understand the full idea of it, because I had went to private school so I just thought it was a Catholic school. You go. You learn. I didn't really realize the extent of residential schools until my first year of university. I started reading about it and tried to ask my dad about it. He didn't really like to talk about it too much. It seems like a lot of our people were kind of closed off about it, and it wasn't until a few years later when we started hearing more about our survivors and their stories. And just in the last few years, it's opened up a lot more.

**Garry Robson:** They don't know how to love. How do we put that back within our communities today? They have to go back and look at that original law of our people—the love, all these kinds of things that our people knew so much about: the raising of children, all these kinds of things.

**Rebecca Chartrand:** When you look at the statistics, the suicide rates in Aboriginal communities, it's really important to put a human face to that.

**Garry Robson:** Our parents, our grandparents, our aunts, and our uncles never talked about it. It's a hidden part of history, amongst our people, amongst the non-Aboriginal people. So the children are growing up not understanding why their parents can't hug them. It wasn't done.

**Anna Parenteau:** My dad didn't really talk about it that much. As I understand it now, how he disciplined us and how he raised us was definitely something that came from residential school. He was very strict.

**Rebecca Chartrand:** I think it's really important to understand how residential schools continue to affect Aboriginal people, because there are still a lot of unresolved issues that have a direct relation to residential schools and to colonialism.

**Flora Zaharia:** I taught in a residential school my first four years. It was most difficult to watch the children in the residence being treated the way I was treated. It was very hard to intervene, because you were helpless.

**Nichola Batzel:** The parents, sometimes when they get nervous coming into the school system probably stems from their own experience.

**Rebecca Chartrand:** There's a lot of challenges that occur in the schools, and we're still trying to make sense of what those challenges are. A lot of the challenges that exist in the school are a result of the unresolved historical issues.

**Nichola Batzel:** Often, when kids start learning about the residential school system, it's a very sensitive topic, and sometimes they go home and start talking to their families, and they didn't even realize that they had family members that were in residential schools. And that could be the first time they start talking about it.

**Rebecca Chartrand:** We still have people questioning what residential school has to do with Aboriginal education and what we're trying to do now.

**David Thomas:** I think that when my kids were small and the first time they were in school, I became aware of how vulnerable I was to them being gone and the loss. If they're gone for a day in school, that seems like a long time when they're small, but imagine them being gone for a year.

**Nichola Batzel:** My birth family live up in Nunavut and I live in Winnipeg. Sometimes I wonder who was that social worker who sat down with my birth mother, and what did she say to her, and what made her decide to send me to Winnipeg? I don't think that anyone should have to go 17 years without meeting another person from their own background.

**David Thomas:** Being aware of the things that my parents have gone through has made me feel how blessed I am to be able to go to high school, go to college, go to university, complete my degrees, to be able to see both my kids go to university. When they're old enough and mature enough, they can understand the context, and they can move forward and appreciate all the more that their parents are survivors, their grandparents are survivors, and they are too.

**Grace Zoldy:** My hopes are that we'll be able to get the healing that we need. That's all I want to say.