

I'm telling my story ... for the education of the Canadian general public ... [so that they] can understand what stolen identity is, you know, how it affects people, how it affects an individual, how it affects family, how it affects community.... I think the non-Aboriginal person, Canadian, has to understand that a First Nations person has a culture.... And I think that we, as Aboriginal people, have so much to share if you just let us regain that knowledge.... And I also take to heart what Elders talk about ... we have to heal ourselves. We have to heal each other. And for Canada to heal, they have to allow us to heal before we can contribute. That's what reconciliation means to me.¹⁹³

Survivors told the Commission that an important reason for breaking their silence was to educate their own children and grandchildren by publicly sharing their life stories with them. The effect of this on intergenerational Survivors was significant. At the Manitoba National Event, Desarae Eashappie said,

I have sat through this week having the honour of listening to the stories from Survivors. And I just feel—I just really want to acknowledge everybody in this room, you know, all of our Elders, all of our Survivors, all of our intergenerational Survivors.... We are all sitting here in solidarity right now ... and we are all on our own journey, and [yet we are] sitting here together ... with so much strength in this room, it really is phenomenal. And I just want to acknowledge that and thank everybody here. And to be given this experience, this opportunity, you know, to sit here ... and to listen to other people and listen to their stories and their experiences, you know, it has really humbled me as a person in such a way that is indescribable.... And I can take this home with me now and I can take it into my own home. Because my dad is a residential school Survivor, I have lived the traumas, but I have lived the history without the context.¹⁹⁴

Survivors' life stories are teachings rooted in personal experience; the human relationships of their childhoods were scarred by those who harmed them in the schools. Their stories teach us about what it means to lose family, culture, community, self-esteem, and human dignity. They also teach us about courage, resilience, and resistance to violence and oppression. An ethical response to Survivors' life stories requires the listener to respond in ways that recognize the teller's dignity and affirm that injustices were committed. Non-Indigenous witnesses must be willing to "risk interacting differently with Indigenous people—with vulnerability, humility, and a willingness to stay in the decolonizing struggle of our own discomfort ... [and] to embrace [residential school] stories as powerful teachings—disquieting moments [that] can change our beliefs, attitudes, and actions."¹⁹⁵

A number of former residential school staff came to the Commission to speak not only about their perspectives on the time they spent at the schools, but also about their struggles to come to terms with their own past. Florence Kaefer, a former teacher, spoke at the Manitoba National Event.