

The Commission's mandate also instructed that there be a "ceremonial transfer of knowledge" at the National Events. Coast Salish artist Luke Marston was commissioned by the TRC to design and carve a Bentwood Box as a symbol of this transfer. The box was steamed and bent in the traditional way from a single piece of west-coast red cedar. Its intricately carved and beautifully painted wood panels represent First Nations, Inuit, and Métis cultures. The Bentwood Box is a lasting tribute to all residential school Survivors and their families, both those who are living and those who have passed on, including the artist's grandmother, who attended Kuper Island residential school. This ceremonial box travelled with the Commission to every one of its seven National Events, where offerings—public expressions of reconciliation—were made by governments, churches and other faith communities, educational institutions, the business sector, municipalities, youth groups, and various other groups and organizations. The Truth and Reconciliation Bentwood Box, along with the many other sacred items the TRC received, will be housed permanently in the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg.¹⁸⁸

Life stories, testimonies, and witnessing as teachings

Reconciliation is not possible without knowing the truth. In order to determine the truth and be able to tell the full and complete story of residential schools in this country, it was fundamentally important to the Commission's work to be able to hear the stories of Survivors and their families. It was also important to hear the stories of those who worked in the schools—the teachers, the administrators, the cooks, the janitors—as well as their family members. Canada's national history must reflect this complex truth so that 50 or 100 years from now, our children's children and their children will know what happened. They will inherit the responsibility of ensuring that it never happens again.

Regardless of the different individual experiences that children had as students in the schools, they shared the common experience of being exploited. They were victims of a system intent on destroying intergenerational links of memory to their families, communities, and nations. The process of assimilation also profoundly disrespected parents, grandparents, and Elders in their rightful roles as the carriers of memory, through which culture, language, and identity are transmitted from one generation to the next.¹⁸⁹

In providing their testimonies to the TRC, Survivors reclaimed their rightful place as members of intergenerational communities of memory. They remembered so that their families could understand what happened. They remembered so that their cultures, histories, laws, and nations can once again thrive for the benefit of future generations. They remembered so that Canada will know the truth and never forget.

The residential school story is complicated. Stories of abuse stand in sharp contradiction to the happier memories of some Survivors. The statements of former residential school