

by a group of boys left Don Willie distrustful of most people. “The only, only friends I kept after that were my relatives.”⁴⁹²

Complaints were infrequent, as students had good reason not to report their abuse. Some feared that bullies would retaliate if they were reported. Others were ashamed of what had been done to them, and some did not fully understand what had been done to them. Many students feared they would not be believed—or would be blamed for somehow bringing the abuse upon themselves. Still others were further punished when they did tell. So, rather than report the abuse, many students chose to fight back; to seek admission into a receptive group, where violence could be fought with violence; or to endure the pain in silence. This victimization left many students feeling intensely betrayed, fearful, isolated, and bereft of home teachings and protection. The betrayal by fellow students has contributed significantly to the schools’ long-term legacy of continuing division and distrust within Aboriginal communities. The residential school system’s shameful inability to protect students from such victimization, even from among themselves, represents one of its most significant and least-understood failures.

Sports and culture: “It was a relief.”

Many students stated that sports helped them make it through residential school. Christina Kimball attended the Roman Catholic school near The Pas, where she experienced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. She believes that it was only through her involvement with sports that she survived. “I was very sports-oriented. I played baseball. Well, we play baseball, and even hockey. We had a hockey team. That has benefited, benefited me in a way ‘cause I loved playing sports. Well, that’s one way, too. I don’t know how I did it but I was pretty good in sports.”⁴⁹³ Noel Starblanket said that at the Qu’Appelle school, “I had some good moments, in particular in the sports side, ‘cause I really enjoyed sports. I was quite athletic, and basically that’s what kept me alive, that’s what kept me going was the sports.”⁴⁹⁴ At the Lestock school, Geraldine Shingoose took refuge in extra-curricular activities.

One of the good things that I would do to try and get out of just the abuse was try to, I would join track-meet, try and be, and I was quite athletic in boarding school. And I also joined the band, and I played a trombone. And, and that was something that took me away from the school, and just to, it was a relief.⁴⁹⁵

Paul Andrew spent seven years at Grollier Hall in Inuvik. One of his strongest and most positive memories related to school sports. “There were times when I felt dumb and stupid. But put me in a gym, there was not too many people better than I am.”⁴⁹⁶

Recreational activities were always underfunded and undersupplied at the schools. A national survey of Indian Affairs schools (both day and residential) in 1956 concluded: