

IF YOU ARE NOT CONTRIBUTING TO RECONCILIATION, THEN GET OUT OF THE WAY

6 THE REVIEW TUESDAY, JUNE 22, 2021

Let's leave residential school tragedies in the past

BRIAN GIESBRECHT

Commentary

The discovery of human remains at a former residential school site has set off a firestorm that has already resulted in demands for another national inquiry and massively expensive forensic and excavation projects. But maybe we should pause and ask some questions.

The Kamloops Indian Residential School operated as a residential school from 1890 to 1969. Its peak enrolment was around 500 in the 1950s. Although there has understandably been an outpouring of sympathy, it's not clear how many of the bodies affected were residential students. It's also not clear that there was even anything sinister about the discovery.

In fact, it's shocking that people seem quite willing to accept slanderous conspiracy theories about teachers and priests murdering and secretly burying hundreds of children.

There are many forgotten cemeteries in Canada. It's far more likely that the deaths simply reflected the sad reality of life then. We should take a look at the history.

Tuberculosis was a major killer, and it didn't spare children. From 1890 to the 1950s, it was responsible for many child deaths.

Influenza was also a particularly deadly disease for Indigenous people. The 1918 Spanish flu killed a disproportionate number of Indigenous people, but even ordinary influenza was particularly deadly for them.

Other diseases that have all but disappeared, like whooping cough, meningitis and measles, routinely took yesterday's children.

Disease took many from every demographic – but Indigenous people suffered most. They died mainly in their home communities, where the Grim Reaper was always close by. Infected children entered residential schools and infected others. Many died.

In our comfortable times we forget how hard life was 100 and more years ago – Dickens' world of chimney sweeps and the poor house.

Stories are being written about Canada's "Home Children," for example. These were mainly English orphans and children from poor homes taken from their parents and sent by themselves to Canada. Little children – some as young as seven – arrived with cardboard signs around their necks advertising their free labour.

Boys would be taken by farmers and used as labour in return for their keep. Girls would be used as domestic workers. Some received good treatment; some were treated very badly. Many died alone and forgotten. It's a coincidence that the number of Home Children roughly equalled the total number of children who attended residential schools – 150,000.

The Home Children are just one example of the sadness that was part of the lives of all poor children who had the misfortune to be born in those times. Indigenous children suffered more than most.

This article was published in The Roblin Review on June 22nd, 2021. In the middle of Indigenous History month. A town only 45 minutes away from where I live. It was written by retired Judge, Brian Giesbrecht, who retired from the Provincial Court of Manitoba in 2008. He would have handed down thousands of sentences in Provincial Court to Indigenous offenders. Judges are not permitted to speak out publicly. He now uses his ill-informed opinion, with impunity.



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SUMMER RIDDLES

- 1) What gets wetter the more it dries?
- 2) What lives in winter, dies in summer, and grows with its roots upward.
- 3) What travels all the way around the world but always stays in one spot?
- 4) I have no eyes, no ears, and legs, and yet I help move the earth. What am I?



5) A man was walking in the middle of nowhere and it started to rain. He had no umbrella and no hat, but not a single hair on his head got wet. How can this be?

- 6) What question can never have an (honest!) answer to?
- 7) Why do bananas use sun cream?
- 8) What is full of lots of holes, but can still hold water?
- 9) What do you call a dog on the beach in summer?

10) I am made of cloth. I am used by campers. A person can sleep in me. I am not a tent. What am I?

11) I bring music wherever I go. I keep things very cold. I have wheels. People give my driver money and he gives them treats. What am I?

12) I am a frozen treat. I am not in a cone. I do not have a stick. Part of my name sounds like a day of the week. What am I?

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I'd take cover if I were you, pal.



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PHYLLIS WEBSTAD'S STORY - THE ORIGIN OF ORANGE SHIRT DAY



I went to the Mission for one school year in 1973/1974. I had just turned 6 years old. I lived with my grandmother on the Dog Creek reserve. We never had very much money, but somehow my granny managed to buy me a new outfit to go to the Mission school. I remember going to Robinson's store and picking out a shiny orange shirt. It had string laced up in front, and was so bright and exciting – just like I felt to be going to school!

When I got to the Mission, they stripped me, and took away my clothes, including the orange shirt! I never wore it again. I didn't understand why they wouldn't give it back to me, it was mine! The color orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared.

I was 13.8 years old and in grade 8 when my son Jeremy was born. Because my grandmother and mother both attended residential school for 10 years each, I never knew what a parent was supposed to be like. With the help of my aunt, Agness Jack, I was able to raise my son and have him know me as his mother.



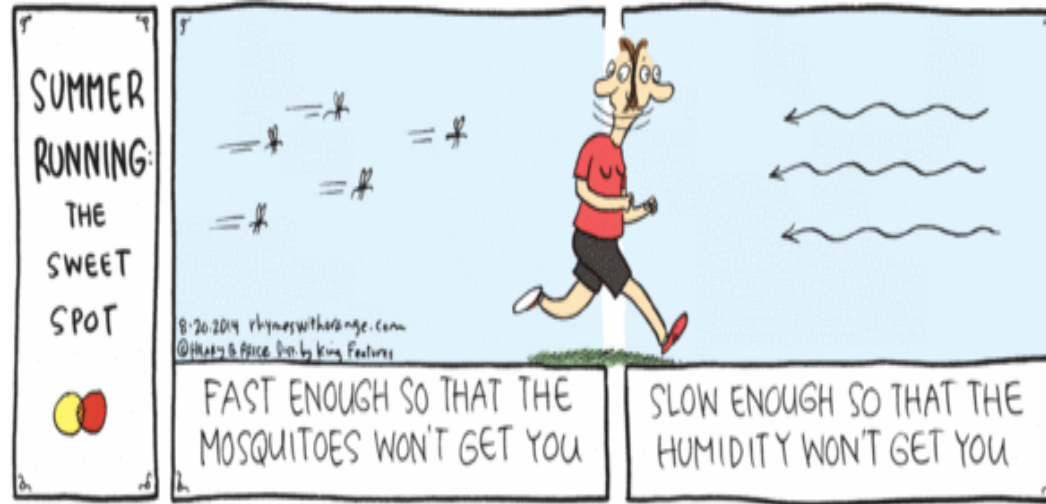
I went to a treatment centre for healing when I was 27 and have been on this healing journey since then. I finally get it, that the feeling of worthlessness and insignificance, ingrained in me from my first day at the mission, affected the way I lived my life for many years. Even now, when I know nothing could be further than the truth, I still sometimes feel that I don't matter. Even with all the work I've done! I am honored to be able to tell my story so that others may benefit and understand, and maybe other survivors will feel comfortable enough to share their stories.

Today...



Phyllis Webstad is Northern Secwepemc (Shuswap) from the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation (Canoe Creek Indian Band). She comes from mixed Secwepemc and Irish/French heritage, was born in Dog Creek, and lives in Williams Lake, BC. Today, Phyllis is married, has one son, a step-son and five grandchildren. She is the Executive Director of the Orange Shirt Society, and tours the country telling her story and raising awareness about the impacts of the residential school system. She has now published two books, the "Orange Shirt Story" and "Phyllis's Orange Shirt" for younger children.

She earned diplomas in Business Administration from the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology; and in Accounting from Thompson Rivers University. Phyllis received the 2017 TRU Distinguished Alumni Award for her unprecedented impact on local, provincial, national and international communities through the sharing of her orange shirt story. Support the campaign and learn more here: <https://www.orangeshirtday.org/>

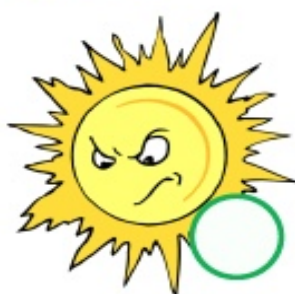


SUMMER VOCABULARY WORD SEARCH PUZZLE

Find and circle the words in the word search puzzle and number the pictures

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1. beach
2. sunny
3. swimming
4. hot
5. sunburn
6. ice cream
7. sandcastle
8. holiday
9. shorts
10. t-shirt
11. swimsuit
12. picnic
13. sunglasses
14. sunscreen
15. camping
16. surfing



You Never Know Until You Try



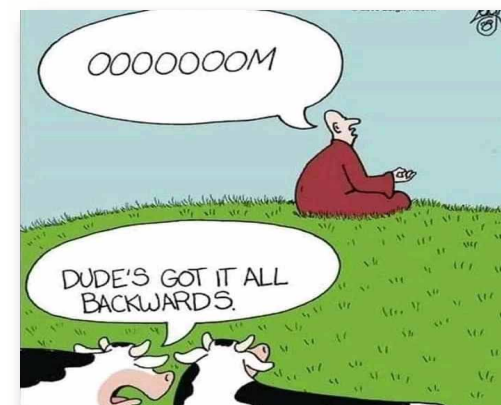
It is often said that at the end of our lives, we are more likely to regret the things we did not do than the things we did.

When contemplating whether to do something or not, a plucky voice in our heads may say, "You never know until you try." This is time-honored wisdom that encourages us to be game rather than to hold back. It reminds us that it is only through experience that we learn about this world and ourselves. Even if we regret the outcome, we have learned something, and the newfound knowledge is almost

always worth it.

This wisdom can be applied to situations both large and small. From crossing the Atlantic on a boat to trying Ethiopian food, there's only one way to find out what it's like. We have all had experiences where we tried something we didn't think we'd like and fell in love. We may have found ourselves stuck with nothing to read but a "boring" book, only to kick-start a lifelong passion for Victorian literature. We may have decided that sailing was not for us until we fell in love with someone with a boat. On the other hand, we may try tofu only to learn that it is truly not for us. In this case, we gain greater self-knowledge from the experience. And yet, we might still remain open to trying it prepared in a different way. The right marinade might make you a convert -- you'll never know if you don't try it.

It is often said that at the end of our lives we are more likely to regret the things we did not do than the things we did. As an exercise to test your own willingness to discover through doing, try making a list of things you regret not having done. You may begin to notice patterns such as a failure to say what you really think at key moments or closed-mindedness to certain types of activities. Just being aware of the opportunities you missed might encourage you not to miss them again. There's only one way to find out.



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- Summer Riddle Answers
1. A towel
 2. An icle
 3. A stamp
 4. An earthworm
 5. The man was bald
 6. Are you asleep?
 7. Because they peel
 8. A sponge
 9. A hot dog
 10. A sleeping bag
 11. An ice cream van
 12. An ice cream sundae

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