

being brought up in a loving, caring, sharing, nurturing environment, they did not have these skills as they are not inbred but learned through observation, participation, and interaction. Consequently, when these children became parents, and most did at an early age, they had no parenting skills. They did not have the capability to show affection. They sired and bred children, but were unable to relate to them on any level." (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 1996c)

Legal charges began in the late 1980s, a few years after the last residential school closed. One of the more spectacular cases involved a Catholic bishop, the former principal of St. Joseph's residential school in British Columbia. After four years of prosecution, he was finally convicted of raping one girl (now a chief) and sexually assaulting another, resulting in a sentence of two-and-a-half years. In 1995, a male supervisor at Port Alberni school was imprisoned for 11 years after pleading guilty to sexually assaulting 18 boys between the ages of 6 and 13 between 1948 and 1968. Over the next eight years, the churches that ran the schools all issued formal apologies, beginning with the United Church in 1986, and followed by the Anglican Church, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Presbyterian Church. Agreements concerning compensation came from two branches of the Catholic Church in Canada (both in 2004), as well as from the Anglican and the Presbyterian Church, both in 2003.

On May 10, 2006, the federal government announced approval of a final Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and the launch of an Advance Payment program (the latter for people 65 years and older as of May 30, 2005). According to the document issued by the government, the Settlement Agreement proposes

... a Common Experience Payment for all eligible former students of Indian Residential Schools, an Independent Assessment Process for claims of sexual or serious physical abuse, as well as measures to support healing, commemorative activities, and in the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (IRSRC 2006a)

As with all such documents, it is difficult to know what it really means. Elders wanting to receive the Advance Payment must fill out an application to receive \$8000. It remains to be seen how difficult or easy that process will be.

The government reckoned that as of June 12, 2006 there were about 80,000 people alive who had attended a residential school. At the same time, there were 13,406 claimants for litigation, with 2763 resolved, with a total value of compensation of \$106.5 million (IRSRC 2006b).

STEALING THE CHILDREN: THE SIXTIES SCOOP

The harm we do children always becomes known in the end, even though we believe it to be well-hidden.

—Huron-Wendat writer Georges Sioui, summing up one of the main moral messages of the traditional stories of his people (Sioui 1999:37)

In 1951, the Indian Act was changed so that provincial authorities would be responsible for the welfare of Indian children. Initially, this change had little effect. British Columbia's statistics for 1955 show that 29 of the 3433 children placed in protective care in the province were Native, or less than 1 percent of all provincial children. However, starting in the 1960s, policies of taking Native children from their families, from communities, and from the Native

world became more aggressive. In 1964, the province of British Columbia took 1446 Native children out of a total of 4228 children, or 34.2 percent of the Native child population. In his book *Native Children and the Child Welfare System*, writer Patrick Johnston coined the term "Sixties Scoop" to refer to the forced migration of Aboriginal children.

The situation was worst in Manitoba. Between 1971 and 1981, over 3400 Native children were taken from their homes and removed from their province. More than a thousand of these children were sent to the United States, where there was a demand for children to adopt. American agencies could get \$4000 for every child placed. Native children in the United States had been adopted in a similar way until 1978, when the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed, protecting the children from being taken from their people (see Box 19-3).

About 300 of the Canadian Native children went to Pennsylvania alone. A study of 100 of those children showed that they suffered more problems than any other children "of colour," including African-Americans, Vietnamese, and Koreans. By 1995, five had died, about one half had experienced "difficulties involving identity issues," only about one third had completed high school, and about the same percentage had lost all touch with their adoptive parents.

In 1982, the Manitoba government finally agreed to impose a moratorium on the export of children outside of the province. It was the last province to do so. There was an investigation into the practice, however. Justice Edwin C. Kimelman wrote a report in 1985 entitled *No Quiet Place*, primarily studying the 93 children that were "exported" in 1981. He did not mince his words in his conclusions, saying:

cultural genocide has been taking place in a systematic routine manner. One gets an image of children stacked in foster homes as used cars are stacked on corner lots, just waiting for the right "buyer" to stroll by. (Kimelman in Fournier and Crey 1997:88)

BOX 19-3**Indian Child Welfare Act (U.S.)**

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was passed in 1978 by the government of the United States. It applies to any unmarried person under 18 who belongs or is eligible to belong to an "Indian tribe" in the United States. The declared purpose of the ICWA is "to protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families." An information sheet put out by the Wabanaki of Maine gives this answer to the question: "What does the law do?"

The ICWA requires that placement cases involving Indian children be

heard in tribal courts if possible [some of the First Nations in the United States have their own courts], and permits a child's tribe to be involved in state court proceedings. It requires testimony from expert witnesses who are familiar with Indian culture before a child can be removed from his/her home. If a child is removed, either for foster care or adoption, the law requires that Indian children be placed with extended family members, other tribal members, or other Indian families. (Pine Tree Legal Assistance 2002)

There is no similar law in Canada.

Two Manitoba Stories

Cameron Kerley

Two well-reported biographies of Manitoba Native children born in 1964 tell the stories for the others. **Cameron Kerley** was removed from his family when he was eight years old. His father had been killed in a fight and his mother was drinking heavily, creating a physical condition that would kill her two years later. Cameron and his three sisters were placed in non-Native foster homes. In 1975, at the age of 11, he was sent for adoption to a single man in Kansas. While he lived there, the man beat and sexually abused him. The authorities should have been aware of the signs of trouble. He was skipping school and running away from home for days on end. This happened before the adoption was made legal in 1977; the agency could have taken him away. School counsellors and social workers attempted to help him, but he couldn't speak of what was happening. In Cameron's words:

I didn't trust them . . . I wasn't able to tell them. I felt helpless. At that point there was nobody I could turn to for help. I was a kid, taken away from home . . . and put into a situation I didn't ask to be in. (York 1990:211)

He soon had run-ins with the police. In 1978, at 13, he ran away only to be picked up by the police. At 17, he dropped out of school and was soon arrested for burglary. At 19, he moved away from his abusive adoptive father. His initial plans were to find his way back to the Manitoba reserve in which he was born. But he got drunk one night, returned "home," and killed his adoptive father with a baseball bat. He was sentenced to 18 years; but after two years, he was transferred to Stony Mountain Penitentiary, north of Winnipeg. At least there he would be with others who would know from their own experiences what he had been through.

Carla Williams

Carla Williams was a Saulteaux from southern Manitoba. Her parents were alcoholics who had their four children taken from them in 1968. Her father hanged himself a few years later, and her mother also committed suicide at a later date. In 1972, Carla was placed in "permanent" adoption with a Dutch couple who were in Canada but were returning to the Netherlands. The adoption looked good on paper for the child welfare agency, for the man was a prominent physician. But the adoption broke down after six months, and Carla was fostered out. Unfortunately, her adoptive father received visitation rights. He got her pregnant twice, the first time when she was 14, the second time when she was 15. Both children were taken away from her. She was placed in a series of Dutch orphanages and mental institutions, worked as a prostitute for a while, and tried unsuccessfully to commit suicide.

Her luck changed somewhat when she met a group of Natives from Manitoba at a conference. They put her in touch with a Native-run agency that enabled her to obtain a passport and the funds necessary to return to Canada. In 1989, at Winnipeg International Airport, she saw her brothers and sisters for the first time in over 20 years.

Stó:lo Stories

Ernie Crey is a Stó:lo who co-authored the powerful book *Stolen from Our Embrace: The Abduction of First Nations Children and the Restoration of Aboriginal Communities* (Fournier and Crey 1997). It is a book of incredible tragedy as well as of hope, an amazing combination. In Chapter 1, "The Perpetual Stranger: Four Generations in My Stó:lo

Family," Crey courageously tells his own story. His father died in 1961 when Crey was 12. Without the strong support of her husband, and without any job skills, his mother fell into depression and alcoholism. All but one of her children were taken away from her within a few months of the death of her husband. They would never be reunited again as a family. Crey was driven away in an RCMP cruiser to spend his first week away from home in a prison cell. He had been skipping school and had shoplifted (so did John Steckley, one of the authors of this book, at the same age). The judge sentenced him to Brannan Lake Industrial School, which was rife with physical and sexual abuse.

Crey would not see his mother or any other member of his family for four years. They grew up within a few miles of each other but didn't know where the others were. Crey would go through several foster homes and a group home run by a pedophile who was later convicted for his crimes. His brothers and sisters lived in foster homes, where one sibling was sexually abused, and where their punishment for "misbehaving" included being locked in a closet, having their heads stuck in a toilet bowl while the toilet was being flushed, and being forced to shovel chicken excrement throughout the night.

One of the most moving elements of this story involves Crey's mother's letters. She wrote letters to each of her children and gave them to the social workers, hoping they would be passed on. They weren't. Crey was shown those letters as an adult by a sympathetic social worker. According to Crey, in those letters:

. . . my mother poured out her fears and concerns for me and tried to reassure me that she still loved me, that I should never think she did not. She told me how much she missed me and thought of me. And in one letter, she had an ingenious plan. The social workers would not tell her exactly where I was, but she proposed that I meet her one Saturday at a tiny park in Abbotsford . . . I couldn't help but wonder how many times she had driven by that park, looking for me. (Fournier and Crey 1997:35)

WHY TAKE THE CHILDREN AWAY?

Why did they take these children from their homes and from their people? There are a number of reasons. One reason is cultural. Non-Native social workers and agencies have set ideas about what a "family" and a "good home" are. A family has two parents and their children—the nuclear family. However, the traditional idea of family in Native cultures is usually much larger than this (see Box 19-4). This is well expressed in the words of **Wilfred Pelletier**, an Odawa from Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island, who wrote in 1973 (when he was 45) of what family was like when he was growing up. The same story could be told in many places across Native Canada.

If a man was having a hard time financially, it was quite common for someone in better circumstances to offer to take one of that man's kids and raise it as one of his own. So the child would have two sets of parents, and usually he'd end up with the name of his adopted parents just through usage. Of course, the child was free to stay where he chose, and often he would live with one set of parents for a while and then go home to the others. Either way, he went home. (Pelletier and Poole 1973:124–25)

Social workers envisioned a "good home" in terms of physical resources. For non-Native Canadians, this would include a separate bedroom for each child, a sewage or a septic tank, and running water. Most Native houses, often structures designed by Indian Affairs, could not meet those "standards." In 1981, 33 percent of all on-reserve dwellings

BOX 19-4 My Mothers

Traditional Aboriginal notions of family were different from modern North American notions. For example, there are differing notions of what “my mother” means. The Huron in the seventeenth century used the term “annen-en” to address or refer to the woman who gave birth to them. But she wasn’t the only one a child would refer to that way. Annen-en was also used to refer to one’s mother’s sisters as well. They would reciprocate with a term meaning “my child.” Often, female relatives would live with you in the traditional longhouse, which could house 40 or more people. If you needed a mother, there was bound to be one around.

The notion of having a mother term used for mother’s sisters is not unique to the Huron, nor restricted to the past. In contemporary Blackfoot, the noun “**iksist**” refers both to one’s mother and her sisters, and the term “**miksisst-siksi**” means “my mothers” and refers

collectively to one’s mother and her sisters (Frantz and Russell 1995:51).

Terms for fathers and brothers can likewise be linked in some languages and cultures. Likewise, the children of the mother’s sisters and father’s brothers (“cousins” in English terminology) would be considered “brothers” and “sisters.” Take, for example, the word “**ndawemaa**.” In Ojibwe, it was traditionally used in the following ways:

Female’s use: brother, mother’s sister’s son, father’s brother’s son

Male’s use: sister, mother’s sister’s daughter, father’s brother’s daughter

It had the meaning of “sibling of the opposite sex.” There was a similar term for “sibling of the same sex.” The key thing to remember is that it meant including people that English speakers would call “cousins” into the circle of brothers and sisters.

had more than one person per room, as compared with 3 percent of such dwellings in all of Canada (Frideres 1998:171). In 1963, less than 10 percent of all on-reserve houses had access to sewers or septic tanks, a figure that rose to around 55 percent by 1980 (Frideres 1998:174). Similarly, around 12 percent of those houses had running water in 1963, rising to about 70 percent by 1981 (Frideres 1998:174).

Sometimes children were taken away from their families “for health reasons.” This could mean that newborn infants needing to be in or near an urban hospital for treatment would be fostered to a non-Native family who lived nearby, and the child would never be given back to their Native parents—despite the fact that those parents had done nothing to harm the children. In Manitoba, 79 Sixties Scoop children were removed in this way.

There were, of course, many cases where children were physically, emotionally, and sexually abused and should have been removed from their parents and other potentially dangerous members of their family. But that did not mean that the children would be better off away from their extended families, their reserves, and their people.

DIFFICULTIES FOR RECOVERY IN MANITOBA

Manitoba Natives, who had borne the major brunt of the Sixties Scoop, would also have the hardest time in overcoming its effects. On July 1, 1981, Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services (DOCFS), a child welfare program run by the Dakota people, received a

legal mandate to reclaim their lost children. They took over the care of 49 Native children who had been apprehended by Manitoba's Children's Aid societies. The road ahead of them would be difficult. Within three years, the number of children in their care rose to 115. Between 1983 and 1987, the five Native child welfare agencies that had come into being had to face an increase in the number of registered Indian children in care, from 863 to 1563.

The Native children's agencies were swamped with incidents of child abuse that were beyond their meagre resources to cope with adequately. The lack of formal training of many of their workers diminished their effectiveness. When the agencies were first formed, it was believed that "Native-run" would be a panacea that would soon solve everything, so they were not prepared for the increasing numbers of children needing care.

Many of the negative effects of what was happening in Manitoba became public through the inquest following the death of **Lester Desjarlais**. Lester Desjarlais was Saulteaux, born in Sandy Bay, Manitoba, on June 7, 1974. He had an older brother and three younger sisters, so he was the "baby" of the family. He had a hard life, particularly when he was 12 and 13. Before you read the following list of what happened to him during that period of his life, picture the kind of life you had and what happened to you at 12 and 13.

During this period of his life, Lester

- weighed about 45 kilos and was a little over five feet tall.
- often got drunk and high by sniffing solvents, such as gas, cleaning fluid, and plastic cement.
- was raped by a large man from his community and was sexually molested by a male teacher.
- got into many fights and was beaten up several times at drinking parties at his mother's house.
- was placed in several foster homes in his own community as well as one in Brandon.
- was placed three times in the Seven Oaks Centre for Youth in Winnipeg.
- was put in a group home in Sioux Valley, which he escaped from, stole a bicycle, and rode 200 kilometres toward home.
- was twice admitted to the Brandon Mental Health Centre.
- had his much-loved mother call the police on him.
- committed suicide by hanging.

The inquest into his death, which began in April 1992, told a story of how the system had failed him, as it was continuing to fail other Native children. A few courageous women faced the opposition of influential people in their communities to reveal painful truths about life on reserves. The inquest showed the dark side of band and provincial politics. The band council was engaged in a power struggle with the DOCFS. Abusers were protected, and child abuse continued because of the political power of certain male band councillors in the community. The DOCFS did not want to go to non-Native agencies or professionals because many within the DOCFS felt this would be a step backwards. For historical reasons, it did not want to rely on outsiders; distrust was high. Since the DOCFS was the first Native-run child welfare organization of its kind, it had attracted a lot of attention from the media, academics, politicians, and Native leaders. Moreover, outside agencies and the provincial ministry did not want to be seen as racists, for stepping in and trying to resolve problems that were being reported. As well, the provincial government did not want to have the opposition of Native leaders during an election year. Thus, the children's welfare and happiness were sacrificed for politics.