

## PROFILES

## We are their children: Kids of residential school survivors share their stories



intergenerational effects of residential schools

Jillian Taylor · CBC News · Posted: Jun 02, 2015 5:46 PM CT | Last Updated: June 3, 2015



Amber Chartrand says she didn't know about residential schools until compensation happened. Her grandmother is a survivor and her mother attended day school. (Jillian Taylor)

Amber Chartrand said she didn't know what a residential school was until compensation was given out to survivors.

Her grandmother was one of them.

"I just started digging around on my own," said Chartrand. "After I went to university, I took a lot of classes just to find out what happened."

Chartrand is from Lac Brochet, but grew up in Winnipeg. She said no one talked about residential schools: "It was a hidden thing."

Her mother attended a day school, similar to residential school, but kids went home after class was done. Day school survivors were not included in the compensation package from the federal government.

The 23-year-old went to the University of Winnipeg by herself to watch the Truth and Reconciliation findings.

"It was very emotional, just me myself being an intergenerational survivor," said Chartrand. "I myself have experienced the alcoholism, the poverty, all those things."

She says the biggest intergenerational impact is not knowing her culture. She was raised by her father in Winnipeg, because her mother struggled with alcoholism.

"It wasn't until I decided to move to my reserve that I really connected with that (culture)," says Chartrand. "I learned some of my language (Dene) and the traditional stories and all that."

Chartrand is raising her four-year-old daughter the way she wishes she was raised.

"Trying to keep her away from the violence and the alcohol and really instilling in her the culture and the knowledge," she said.

## **Lack of knowledge**

Stuart Desnomie said he was the first generation in his family to attend public school, not residential school.

Still he said, the intergenerational impacts are great.

"I'd have to say the biggest legacy is the knowledge, lack of knowledge," said Desnomie.

Desnomie said his studies suffered because his parents couldn't help him at home.

"Seeing the disparity of what kids were learning at home and what I was learning at home," he remembered. "All I was learning at home was love. But not trigonometry, not money management, not science, or any kind of knowledge like that."



Both of Stuart Desnomie's parents went to residential school. He says their parents, and their parents went too. (Jillian Taylor)

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Desnomie said he was the first in his immediate family to graduate high school and go to university and graduate.

He's been going through the reconciliation process with his parents for the past six years. Both of his parents shared their stories with the TRC.

"I never realized how much I lost, how much I wasn't given, how much opportunity I'm not able to experience," he said.



Listening to Justice Murray Sinclair's findings brought up a lot of emotion.

"There's no answers for why I am feeling this way. There's no explanation for it growing up, until now," he said.

He listened to the TRC findings with his daughter, her mother and grandmother. "It's a wonderful day."

## No education

Travis Spence moved to Winnipeg from Split Lake last year to get an education.

The 26-year-old started high school at the Aboriginal Centre.

"I never had that experience before because I was so poorly educated on our reserve," said Spence.

He said he went to elementary school on and off growing up. He said his father told him just to stay home most days.





Travis Spence (right) comforts his grandmother, Caroline Ouskun, a residential school survivor. (Jillian Taylor)

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Both of his parents are residential school survivors. He said the legacy of that was a lack of parenting.

"I began to understand how they were raised and how they raised me," said Spence.

Spence said there was always love in his home, but a lack of support when it came to learning.

He said because his parents were so poorly educated, they didn't have the ability to help their children.

Spence watched the TRC findings beside his grandmother, a residential school survivor.

He said he was honoured to share the experience.

"All I could think about was my parents, it was deep," said Spence. "I am glad we didn't have to go through this."

But he admits in a way he did, and he's now changing his family's legacy.

"After coming here I changed," said Spence about starting high school. "I'm still struggling, but I'm doing better."

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