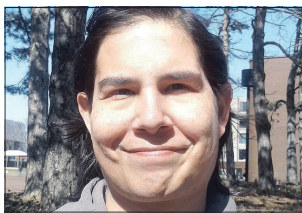


DISCOVERY HAS RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS RELIVING THEIR PAST

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IS GRIEVING, SIT WITH US IN THAT GRIEF WRITES SHANE PENNELLS



SHANE PENNELLS
Column

My mother is a Residential School survivor. I don't know the extent of my family's involvement or what happened to them there as I was adopted and raised apart from them, but I can say with certainty that what they experienced has become a defining aspect of their lives.

Like many other Residential School survivors,

they are silent on what happened there. Survivors that have been willing to talk about their experiences recount stories of unimaginable cruelty. It's been estimated that out of the 150,000 Indigenous children forced into the schools between 1831 and 1996, 3,000 to 6,000 children died. With the recent discovery of the remains of 215

children at a former school site in Kamloops, B.C., the wounds inflicted on the Indigenous community have been ripped open again, with many people being forced to relive their traumatic past.

Unfortunately, I believe we're just seeing the first of many such discoveries. In 2009, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission asked the federal government for \$1.5 million to find and map lost and unknown gravesites on former Residential School properties. Indian Affairs denied the request, citing it as too expensive. It is most likely that there are many other similar undiscovered gravesites at former school

sites across the country. Make no mistake, what we're witnessing now will get worse.

I've had a number of friends and colleagues reach out to me since the news broke, speaking about their heartbreak and anger and asking what they can do to help the Indigenous community at this time. To be honest, I don't believe there is much that can be done right now. The trauma is too recent and needs time to be processed before the way forward can be found, especially as more gravesites may be discovered.

While trauma can affect each person in a different way, one thing to know is

that if a person has gone through a traumatic event and hasn't worked through those memories and healed from them, and if those memories are triggered, they relive that experience as if it was happening for the first time. For Residential School Survivors, the Kamloops discovery has forced them to relive everything that happened to them there.

We, the Indigenous community, are grieving and mourning, so for now sit with us in that grief. Listen to us as we tell you our pain, and the path forward will make itself known when the right time comes. Be patient with us in this hour as we try to find our

next step forward.

If you are an Indigenous person in the Hamilton area needing help, or a non-Indigenous person wanting to reach out to the Indigenous community, I would recommend getting in touch with the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre. They can be found at www.hric.ca or 905-548-9593.

Also, the Residential School Survivors Society Emergency Crisis Line is available 24/7 for those who may need it. Call 1-800-721-0066 or reach the 24-hour Crisis Line at 1-866-925-4419.

Shane Pennells is an Indigenous filmmaker and writer who works with at-risk youth.

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