

Beyond Remembrance

What Truth and Reconciliation demands of us

By: Kelly Brownbill | Posted: September 30, 2026

As a child, I was raised with a strong sense of identity. I had parents who taught me what it meant to be unapologetically Indigenous and who helped me navigate the challenges that arise from being an Indigenous child in the public school system. However, it wasn't until I reached adulthood that I realized what a rarity my childhood was. Indigenous children raised one generation before mine, such as my father, had a very different experience with their own identity and connection to the education system. My father is an Indian day school survivor and living proof of the resiliency of Indigenous people.

That is a quote from my daughter, Ziigwen Mixemong. Her words fill me with pride as well as a terrible sadness.

September 30 has now been declared as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a time where the nation comes together to remember the genocide perpetrated throughout the Indian residential school system. It is a day to honour the strength of those who survived these institutions as well as a day to memorialize and grieve those who never got to return home.

The Indian residential school system was created as a tool to forcibly eradicate and assimilate Indigenous communities by separating children from their communities and teaching them that being Indigenous was a stain on their identity. Sexual, physical, mental, and emotional abuse was rampant within these schools, as described by the heartbreaking narratives of survivors and their families. I will never forget my auntie, trying to pass on her stories to me so that I could help educate people, saying to me, "We were just children, and this is what Canada thought was appropriate, in order to rid the country of Indians."

Ziigwen's aunties and uncles, and even cousins, were taken away from their families. Her father was educated in an Indian day school, with exactly the same purpose. To this day, Indigenous communities are still battling intergenerational trauma from decades of abuse. It is often overlooked, as all of the atrocities these children suffered were so horrific, how damaging it was to Indigenous children to have their identity removed. When identity is removed from a child, they are left with holes in their sense of self. They are left with few tools to heal with, and no sense of nurturing to give to their own children.

September 30, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, demands that we face the truth of this ugly part of Canadian history, to somehow come to a place of reconciliation. Survivors determined the 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, with the vision of a reconciled nation. The Calls to Action were deliberately not named recommendations, as the time for recommendations has passed. Call to Action 80 was for the creation of a national day of remembrance, not just of the suffering of the survivors, but of the generations who, unlike my daughter, never had a chance to learn how to be "unapologetically

Indigenous.” They took our kids, and they broke them.

I don't know how to deal with the terrible sadness this day brings. I look at how many people are educating themselves about this, to bring a sense of balance to our history, our present, and our future. That gives me hope, that all Indigenous children will be raised to be proud of who they are and what they have to offer. I have hope that Canada will rise above the horror of this part of its past, not by forgetting it, but by honouring those who still carry the legacy.

Resources:

[National Indian Residential School Crisis Line](#) – 1-866-925-4419

[Indian Residential School Survivors Society](#) – 1-800-721-0066

[Hope for Wellness](#) – 1-855-242-3310

To learn more about the Indian Residential School System, please go to the [Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#).

Author: Kelly Brownbill's spirit name, Wabunnoongakekwe, means Woman Who Comes from the East and she is proud to be Waabizhashi Dodem, Marten Clan. She is a member of the Flat Bay community of the Mi'kmaq Nation in Newfoundland, and of the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge. As an educator on Indigenous issues, she has conducted countless cultural awareness training sessions across a broad range of service sectors including key staff from both the provincial and federal governments. She guides organizations in forging more respectful and equitable relationships with Indigenous communities and agencies.

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