

possibly 5 percent of the pupils in our schools can be so trained and educated that they will leave the school and integrate themselves in the common life of the Canadian people. . . ." What they aimed for was the remaining "95 percent to become healthful, capable, cultured Christian people. . . ."

Bull puts it more bluntly. The schools were attempting "to make them into good Canadian citizens, to assimilate them, Christianize them, turn them into little brown white men."

But there were, says Dieter, "good people around." When, at 14, he ran away from the school in "Indian summer weather," he was picked up by an RCMP officer. "I thought police were only for arresting and shooting," he says. "Well, I was wrong. Corporal Myers took me hunting all day. Wild birds. I was spotting, he was shooting. But while all this was going on, he was asking me about the school. I told him everything. When I was in his office, he was writing everything I said. To make a story short, he said, I will not be punished. And I was not punished."

There were other people who offered hope: Lee, writing to the government, asking for an end to it; Affleck, sacrificing a job in the Depression in the hope of making things better; individual teachers and staff. Most of all there were the children themselves, Bull's father, and Dieter, and so many others who became today's elders. "Super people," says Bull, her voice softening, "because they were able to look at themselves and be self-reflective. The hardest thing they learned was how to forgive those people who brought them up. When you are dealing with personal spiritual growth, to relieve suffering you have to start dealing with it, not put the blame on anybody. That's one of the hardest lessons."

There is healing in knowing you have defeated attempts to take away who you are. Bull says she "became more Indianized while I was working on this thesis. I hope Native people will get back their pride, get back their own identity, and start promoting their own language, culture, belief system. It's very important to me."

And there have been other steps, including a moderator's task group set up by the United Church, to research and respond to issues raised by the schools. Dixon points to "building

blocks for growth" in British Columbia; the Native Ministries Consortium; which enables Native people to receive a Masters of Divinity degree by extension; the Theological Education by Extension Centre, which offers theological education for lay people; the B.C. Indian Land Claims Fund; the Thomas Crosby ministry and its redesigning; and the election of Gitksan hereditary chief Jim Angus as B.C. Conference president. "In the last 10 years, the staff and students of the residential schools in British Columbia have had two successful reunions. We see that as part of the healing process, too."

Bull points to the apology made by the United Church to Native people. "The same hand that abused is the hand that can heal."

But as with any abuse, cultural abuse takes years to surface. It still may take a while. All Native Circle Conference Speaker Rev. Alf Dumont suggests it is possible there may have been some healing, and that experiences may not have been as severe as in Catholic schools. It is also possible, though, that "many people have scars which make it difficult to bring these experiences forward, and this may be the beginning of the process. It may take years to get to the stage where they have a voice."

Nine years at File Hills couldn't destroy Wilf Dieter's voice. The small boy who slipped over the fence with his friends on Saturdays to hunt partridge with a slingshot—and who later became a United Church minister—says he "never had problems with my identity. I always knew who I was and am aware of my strengths and weaknesses. Identifying both gave me the challenges of my life and made me proud of who I am. Proud of my parents, wife and family, keeping ever closer to our great spirits."

Donna Sinclair

Note: All the schools referred to in this article were run by the Board of Home Missions or the Woman's Missionary Society of the United Church, with the exception of the one referred to at Alert Bay. Linda Bull's thesis will be published as Indian Residential Schooling: a Native Perspective; other historical material in this article is from Sinclair's forthcoming book on the Woman's Missionary Society of the United Church.