

Total mcc resources:

<https://mcccanada.ca/media/resources/more/truth-and-reconciliation-%28trc%29>

Map of residential schools:

<https://mcccanada.ca/media/resources/1269>

Anabaptist response to TRC:

https://mcccanada.ca/sites/mcccanada.ca/files/media/ontario/documents/statement_of_anabaptist_church_leaders_to_the_trc_march_30_2014_0.pdf

Apology from Mennonite residential school orgs:

https://mcccanada.ca/sites/mcccanada.ca/files/media/ontario/documents/apology_statement_2012.pdf

<https://canadianmennonite.org/articles/mc-canada-shares-pain-indian-residential-school-legacy>

What does “sorry” mean?:

<https://mcccanada.ca/stories/what-does-sorry-mean>

TRC full reports:

<http://www.trc.ca/>

Undercurrents: Season 1: Episode 6: “Save The Evidence”

VO: You are now listening to undercurrents. My name is Ken Ogasawara and I'm part of the communications and community engagement team at Mennonite Central Committee in Ontario. This podcast is an experiment to find a new way to share the stories we are privileged to hear from our program participants, staff, volunteers, and others. Undercurrents is brought to you in part by Kindred Credit Union and the Kindred Charitable Fund, which seeks to inspire peaceful, just, and prosperous communities.

This episode is about Saving The Evidence.

[Oh Canada begins]

A few months ago I was reminded of a little tradition I had with my dad when I was a kid. When my dad would come home after a long day's work on the farm, I would wait patiently for him to finish showering in the basement bathroom. On the way upstairs for supper, we would both stop, me on a higher step, my dad on a lower step, and sing O Canada together, reading the words off a tattered old Canada Day flyer that was pinned to the wall. Thirty-some years later, as Canada started to quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic and people were finding creative ways to come together virtually through music and art, my dad enthusiastically told me about one such initiative of singing O Canada on the porch at exactly noon the following Sunday, together with thousands across Canada.

[music break]

This was unusual for my normally reserved father, and it made me realize how much our national anthem meant to him, and how appreciative and devoted he was to Canada. My parents moved from Japan, to pursue a better life and they found it here in Canada. They are genuinely grateful and loyal to their adopted country.

[music end]

Growing up as one of only a handful of non-white kids in my small hometown, I, too, was a proud, if typical Canadian - I stitched the obligatory Canadian flag to my backpack, I got emotional watching Tim Hortons commercials during the Olympics, and I felt a burst of pride every time a Canadian musician, actor, or comedian made it big in the USA. But over the last number of years my feelings about Canada have become more complicated and calls for patriotism have become uncomfortable.

LYNDSAY: It's incredibly important that we have a person that wants to be there and, um, intrinsically...[audio fades out]

VO: *This is Lyndsay Mollins-Koene, MCC's program coordinator for the Indigenous Neighbours program in Ontario. She's been working with indigenous communities with her husband Job since the mid 90s.*

LYNDSAY: [audio fade in]...discomfort that stops them from reading the book.

VO: *Lyndsay's work is two-fold: the first is development work, connecting with communities, always at their invitation, to address specific needs they have identified, like food security, clean water, or education.*

LYNDSAY: The second piece of the work we do, um, that, um, needs to happen, and that we actually have a responsibility to make happen, um, as, as part of one of the calls to action, is education with settler community. Whether they're churches, schools, or organizations, and that can happen in a number of ways. You know, screening films, we've had guest speakers in, we've done many blanket exercises and learning tours like Save The Evidence.

[music break]

YOUNG GIRL: 1974, 1977, 1978, wow. A lot of these are artists I think.

VO: *Last summer, MCC, Mennonite Disaster Service, and Woodland Cultural Centre teamed up for an epic month-long project on the grounds of the former Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School on Six Nations, near Brantford, Ontario. The Woodland Cultural Centre is a unique museum that works to preserve and promote Indigenous history, art, language and culture, with a focus on the Haudenosaunee people of the Eastern Woodlands.*

NICK: *Well, I, uh, once, once we started the, uh, project I, I knew I was working with the Six Nations, I, I did a lot of reading. And, uh, through that, the more I read, the more I needed to know.*

VO: *This is Nick Hamm, and I'm interviewing him in his truck as we drive to the airport to pick up a co-worker. He's the Ontario Unit Chair at Mennonite Disaster Service, or MDS as it's called in the acronym-loving world of Mennonite organizations. Typically, MDS responds to natural disasters around North America - rebuilding homes, repairing damages from floods, hurricanes, or tornados. This project, however, was unique.*

Four separate youth volunteer groups from Mennonite churches in Ontario as well as one from Abbotsford, British Columbia came to stay and work for week-long stints at the Woodland Cultural Centre. A huge part of their week was learning about the history of the indigenous people on that land, about the history of the Mohawk Residential School, and hearing from those who survived it. It was in some ways, a bigger education for Nick than for the youth, as the public school curriculum when he was growing up made no mention of residential schools.

NICK: The indigenous history was not really stressed, but, uh, talking to my grandchildren from my oldest, who is almost 20, to one of my younger ones, who is 11. I asked him about residential schools and they knew all about it. So that told me that at least it's being taught in school. (Ken- Right.) But after listening to our youth here after the four weeks and they have said, every group has said this, that they learned about that in school but not to this great detail, and they did not realize how bad it really was.

[SFX/power tool and people talking in the background]

VO: In addition to the steep learning, the youth and their leaders did some good ol' fashioned manual labour which included renovating a longhouse, building period-era desks and tables for the classroom exhibits, and organizing and moving literally tons of books from storage into the new library.

YOUNG CHILD: So many Williams. (Other Child- Yeah) There's like, there was a Saul, now he has a Paul.

[music break]

VO: The Woodland Cultural Centre operates for now in a separate building on the grounds of the Mohawk Institute, the imposing colonial-era building that dominates the property. In 2013 after a serious leak in the roof caused significant damage, and a quote for a \$1 million price tag to repair it, the Woodland Cultural Centre had a tough decision to make: do they let it fall into disrepair? Or would they go all in and restore it? In a series of information sessions and consultations, they brought this question to the community. The community responded with an overwhelming 98% vote to restore it. Thus, Save The Evidence was created - an ambitious campaign for a complete restoration of the building. As more and more residential school buildings across Canada crumble away or are demolished, the community at Six Nations are determined not to let people forget the history of Mohawk Institute, Canada's longest running residential school.

[music break]

TARA: Uh, my name is Tara Froman. I'm from the Lower Cayuga Nation. I'm Wolf Clan and we are part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

VO: Tara is Collections Registrar at the Woodland Cultural Centre. She oversees the vast collection of artifacts, art, and archives at the Woodland Cultural Centre. She explained to me that when the Mohawk institute first opened as a day school in the early 1820s, it actually had the cooperation of the Mohawk people, many of whom were evangelized Anglicans, who saw that having a select number of male students learn English might help them in their dealings with Upper Canada. However by the late 1820s, the school decided that they would start taking in needy and orphaned children which meant they

needed a residence there for them to stay in. Once it became a residential school, the school administrators and teachers became a much stronger controlling influence than the Mohawk people had initially planned for. In this way, the cultural genocide that took place over the next 140 years, truly began in earnest.

TARA: They imported a headmaster from England whose experience was in military school. It was Robert Ashton, he put in a lot of the corporal punishment, the uniform, the emphasis on the military type of training and look. And under him the rules become very much, we're here to civilize you. Your language is backwards. Your belief system is backwards. Your people are backwards, and we are going to make you as English as possible by any means possible.

VO: Ashton's family went on to run the school for close to 80 years, with his son, then daughter, and finally his son-in-law taking turns ruling with the same iron fist.

TARA: In the Anglican system that it was under it was known, in the Anglican system, as the worst of their schools. Native students at other residential schools were, were constantly threatened, "If you don't behave, we'll send you to Mohawk."

[music break]

LYNDSAY: Do you remember how old you were?

KAREN: I, I was seven when I came. The first day I came, I got the strap (Lyndsay- Okay.) because I was running in the hall. I was happy. I was running and skipping. I was happy and I got caught. I-I couldn't read, I didn't know ABCs. E-even if there was a sign, no running or, no skipping or, no being happy, I didn't know it. I could not read it, right? So I got the strap my very first thing.

VO: Karen Hill is a survivor of Mohawk. She had come to speak to the youth group for that week about her experience there. She is a bubbly, kind woman - quick with a joke and a laugh. Karen and her brother and two sisters were sent to Mohawk as children because after their father died, her mother could not afford to take care of them.

KAREN: You got up early, six o'clock, you'd hear the door open, the lights come on, then, and everybody up and then we'd have to stand in line and go to the washroom. You couldn't just go to the washroom, everything was, you had to stand in line. And then you'd stand in line to brush your teeth. Stand in line forever, seemed like a lineup for, all the time. I could see my brother only on supper time because, the girls had supper here and the boys had supper this way. So if I looked at him and he would just happened to look at me, I could wave at him, but if I got caught, um, [clap] I got the strap. You get the strap for every little thing, you got the strap.

VO: Karen shares another incident that sticks in her mind, not because of the severity of the punishment, but because of the blatant injustice of it - the unfairness that young children are especially sensitive to and that Karen feels keenly even now, nearly 70 years later.

KAREN: And I remember telling my mom once about something happening and when she talked to the principal, then the principal said that wasn't true. I need more Kleenex than this. The principal said that wasn't true and then, um, then I got strapping for lying, but I wasn't lying. But, so then, um, we just learned to keep our mouth shut and not tell. We just learned to keep our mouth shut cause you got a strapping for lying and telling our moms stuff. And I think that's why I'm good at keeping secrets. Because I worked for a victim services at Brant. Worked on the crisis line, and we had to sign a thing in front of a judge that nothing comes out from. So when I went home, I couldn't tell my husband and I think that's okay. That's a good point, right? I learned to keep secret. It's a good point. Yeah. Okay, fine. A good point.

VO: Karen does this often. She finds glimpses of hope or positivity, even as she recounts her worst memories. For example, she remembers fondly her mother's visits to the school which sometimes only happened once a year if she could hitch a ride with someone.

KAREN: My mom, uh, played guitar and sang so I remember she would go down in the playroom and we'd sit on table, at the table, and um, she would sing to all the little girls. All the little girls would be sitting around listening to my mom. And I remember saying she's my mom, (Lyndsay- Awe.) you know, but then...[audio fades]

VO: Or another time - she recalls that she had won first prize for a cake that she had made at a weekend fair.

KAREN: Yeah. Cause we had, we were a certain age and then we could, uh, work in the dorm or, we worked in the kitchen and I, they chose me to make a pie so, I mean a cake. So I won first prize at this weekend fair, but I never got to taste it and I never got anything. I, they just told me I won first prize and the supervisors, their table was up and they got to eat my cake. So I know I would've like to have a taste anyway. See what good cake tastes like. Right? Yeah.

VO: When things get too intense in her sharing, she switches to talking about her children or grandchildren or great-grandchildren. Our conversation is full of tangents about her family, always with warmth and joy.

KAREN: So one time she said to me, grandma, she said, is-is my dad an old geezer? And I said, no. Somebody told her, her dad was an old geezer. I said, Lisa, your dad is not an old geezer, but your grandpa is. [laugh] My husband.

[music break]

When I had kids, I was going to make sure they would never, ever, ever have to come to a school like this. I had a good husband. We were married for 48 years. We had three boys and they all, we made sure they all got a good education, university and college, because of my experience here. I'm going to treat my kids totally different than the way I was treated. And that's one of the reasons I was like, I like hugs too, because seven years you never got a hug. If you did something, you got shoved around or the strap or the bigger girls. [pause, voice is heavy with emotion]

That's okay. No, I just said I'm not going to treat my kids that way. So I always say, I love you. I always say please and thank you. I always praised them up. I try to be positive now because it was hard when I was a kid and I never ever told my kids what happened to me here. Because when you love somebody you don't tell them bad news. You don't tell them the bad things that had happened or you go on and do good stuff. And so my kids, if they know anything about here, it's not because I told them it's because other people told them stories because I won't hurt my kids.

[music break]

VO: *This decision of Karen's to not share about her residential school experience with her children, even while she shared so vulnerably and candidly with strangers, reveals the deeply complicated feelings that entangle her past. On one hand, she wants to "save the evidence" - to share her story so that others may know her truth, learn from it, and for some good to come of that learning. On the other hand, when it comes to her own family, she wants nothing more than to leave all that in the past, to surround them with warmth, love, and hugs.*

[music break]

CARLEY: -So, uh, hi, my name is Carley Gallant Jenkins and I am Cayuga Nation Turtle Clan from Six Nations, the Grand River.-

VO: *Carley is the coordinator of the Save The Evidence project at the Woodland Cultural Centre.*

CARLEY: So we'll start on the other side. This is the, uh, archive room, it's just...[audio fades]

VO: *Last summer, Carley gave me a tour of the Mohawk Institute building, being careful to avoid construction zones and making way for carpenters and drywallers. (Lyndsay- Have you met Virve yet?) Some rooms were exactly as they were on the day it closed - chipped lead paint hung from the ceiling, dust clung to the walls. It was eerie.*

CARLEY: That room was originally the girls side playroom.

VO: *Carley's own family history is deeply tied to the long hallways, tall ceilings, and infamous reputation of this imposing building.*

CARLEY: So my great grandfather went to the Mohawk Institute, so this is my mom's grandfather. He raised my mom's mom, in the church so-so he could keep her home. He didn't want her to go to the Mohawk Institute. So he told, uh, then that he was teaching all his children English, that they were all going to church. Uh, they were not, you know, learning their language. They were not learning their, their culture. And, um, that was his way of being able to keep them home and safe.

VO: *Carley recognized the irony of her great-grandfather's actions - that though he was able to keep his children home and out of the notorious Mohawk Institute, the residential school's mission of "taking the Indian out of the child" was accomplished anyway.*

CARLEY: Because my great grandfather lived in such fear of his children being taken, he put that in that little seed of fear and of into grandma. And so when an unknown vehicle would approach their hou-, they're like my grandma's house and all the kids, you know, my aunts and uncles and my mom were all so young, she would be afraid that it was an Indian agent coming to take them.

[music break]

So she would tell them all to run and hide. She would say white man run hide and all of them would go running and hiding and she would put her body across the door after locking it. But, like, shield the door with her body to, even if they could unlock the door, they wouldn't be able to come in. And if they did, they'd have to go through her first before they could get to her children.

[music break]

So, my grandma was raised in a church and she was raised speaking English. And then she had my mom and my mom, all my mom's siblings and they all only knew English and, um, all went to church. And then when my mom had me and my sister, we were raised to speak English and we went to church. So that, that ripple there, they had to just take that one like little boy. And that affected this many generations afterwards.

***VO:** The overall legacy of residential schools, and by association, its teachers, is widely accepted as destructive, and often as outright evil. But as Tara reminded me, the history of the residential schools is not a single story, nor is the experience of the past students a homogenous one.*

TARA: -So, to some people it was better than home. When I give tours of the residential school, I try to, to kind of balance that out in that, you know, it wasn't 150 years of the same thing. I know people, um, in this community who, who say, "just wanting to prove to that school that I was better than they told me made me better." (Ken- Oh, wow.) A hundred percent of the students were not molested, were not physically abused, but a hundred percent were taken from their culture. A hundred percent lost their language. (Ken- Right) Everyone who is Native is affected by that. The reason I don't completely know my language is because my grandmother went to that school and was taught it was wrong. We know she went in practicing our traditional belief system only knowing Cayuga and Mohawk. And she came out very conflicted, you know, wouldn't teach her kids the language, because it would keep them back in her mind.-

[music break]

***VO:** This deserves a deeper dive and we'll do so in Season 2 where we will explore not only the bigger picture of residential schools across Canada, but of Mennonite complicity in participating in three residential schools in Ontario alone. Hearing these stories is uncomfortable, and for those of us hearing it for the first time, it's shocking. And there is no easy fix, either. The repair is more complex than putting a new roof on a house or renovating a flooded home. Nick Hamm of Mennonite Disaster Service felt this challenge keenly.*

NICK: Laurie, uh, Gallant said, "getting to know the truth is one thing," and she says, "You will not learn that truth by just being here for a week."

VO: *Lorrie Gallant who Nick quotes here is the former long-serving, Education Program Coordinator at the Woodland Cultural Centre and still works closely with them. She is also Carley's mother.*

NICK: "It's what you do after you leave is finding out the truth and how you apply that in reconciling." And that, that was a big challenge, and for me that's really what it's all about is what we do once we leave.

[music break]

VO: *For Nick, his volunteers, and other settlers like me, that is the question we wrestle with. What to do with this knowledge? Will it propel us to meaningful action? Or will we let it quietly fall behind us so that we don't have to deal with it? For Carley and Tara, part of their lifelong journey is figuring how to live their culture and honour their traditions in the modern world. To reclaim what generations of systemic racism and cultural genocide have taken from them.*

CARLEY: I have, uh, taken, uh, my first round of Cayuga language lessons, so I can, you know, say a few things, um, but I definitely want to learn more. You know, me and my mom, we try and speak, Cayuga to my nephew and we feel like we're doing our part of like counteracting what happened.

[music break]

KEN: Would you be able to, I don't mean to put you on the spot, would you be able to like introduce yourself in Cayuga? Or just like [inaudible].

CARLEY: Ah, okay, so it would be [introduction in Cayuga].

[music break]

VO: *I want to express deep gratitude to Karen Hill, Tara Froman, Carley Gallant-Jenkins, and Nick Hamm for sharing a part of their rich stories with us. Personal stories and histories are priceless and I appreciate your generosity. Thank you also to my colleague Lyndsay Mollins Koene for her good will and good humour in her work.*

A huge thank you to Kindred Credit Union and the grant we received from the Kindred Charitable Fund, for helping to bring these stories to life. The fund is one of the many ways Kindred Credit Union invests hundreds of thousands of dollars each year, in communities across Ontario, inspiring peaceful, just, and prosperous initiatives that range from affordable housing, to food security, to refugee and newcomer supports. Finally, I would like to thank you for listening to Undercurrents.

This is the final full episode of Season 1 but we hope to post monthly updates and mini-episodes to stay connected with you and to keep me from forgetting how to make podcasts. If you have any questions or comments about this episode, or suggestions for Season 2, please write to us at podcast@mcco.ca - I'd love to hear from you. I'm Ken Ogasawara. Have a great rest of your day.