

Narrative #4

in the winter time it got really cold
on this side of the community hall
sleeping on the floor
in a very small boarded house
i guess something like a 10 by 20
square building
the old time wooden heaters
like a round barrel
you put wood in from the top

i was staying with my grandparents
at McLean's lake
there was a little log cabin beside the lake
it was nothing to see moose every day up there
and deer
then we moved into a big ranch house
there was a lot of Indians working on that ranch house for a while

i didn't understand family
i understood my grandparents
my mom
my brothers and sisters

we stayed in a root cellar
then we moved into a house
my younger sister was being born
at four years old i had to watch her while
my parents were out in the field

i played with other (indian) kids at the ranch
i remember playing hide and seek
cars
in the water ditches
picking apples

in those times the value of generosity and sharing was much stronger
amongst our own family and relatives
out to friends
when people came to visit they were
inviting
welcomed
my grandmother would offer them tea and something to eat
without asking

my grandfather would take the horse
brush it down
take it to the barn
prepare the horse and harness

like it was done without question
without anybody asking of waiting
for somebody to ask

i had a real sense of close family ties
of bonding
my parents were out doing the work
I was brought up and raised with my grandparents

when we're with our own people
and i say like
indian people
there's a note of family
relatives
friends

when we interacted with white people
there was
racism
discrimination
prejudice

back in those days you were
not permitted to go into a restaurant
that's how bad it was
you couldn't go in and sit down
and order
anybody else could but
indians weren't allowed

only two restaurants come to mind
the silver grill
and another restaurant beside it
were the only ones where you could go in and order
and not be told to leave

my grandfather
i followed him around wherever whether
it was work
hunting
or fishing
my grandmother
clothed me
taught me the language
in my early life
my teachers

Pause here

the big front doors
going up the first flight of stairs
my mom said i had to go to school now

she was bringing me here to learn my ABC's
she was telling me not to run away
she would come and see me every once in a while

my mom didn't come back in
a nun came in
she took me down the hall
there was this guy cutting hair
all your hair was shaved off
i can only remember crying all the time
during the day during the night

i was an emotional wreck
i couldn't
i just didn't
understand
crying myself to sleep

trays would come by the aisle
while you were lining up
all kinds of good food
would pass the line
every kid would look at what was going by them
down to the room the brothers and sisters gathered
to eat

if you couldn't eat all your food
you yelled who wants it!
ME! ME! ME!
you had the choice to trade for the food
or make friends

we used to make forts out of tumbleweeds
cowboys and indians
stuff like that

after supper
we would run through those fields
pick whatever we could get stash them
in our shirt
make cache pits
for later

Pause here

i lost that sense of family bond
i wasn't with my grandparents or my parents
it's still with me today
it's difficult for me to be affectionate
to hug
kiss
and touch

it's a barrier that i don't seem to let myself
get into
even with my own brother and sister

when you came back?
my parents drank a lot
mom auntie died
siroccos (cirrhosis)
other one drowned while she was intoxicated

my grandparents?
in my younger years
i had never known grandpa to drink
but coming out of indian school
he used to drink
he always cried about the kids

the food changed
from wild game and fish and whatever vegetable was picked
hunting and fishing
if you were caught doing either
charged and slammed in jail
you could do it if you didn't get caught
that whole suppression still happens today
it is kind of still
instilled

that's the lesson i learned
not to get caught
i still had to provide for my family
jobs were hard to come by

not being about to see my parents
i began to develop an anger over that
towards
well
my mom
for not coming in to see me
she would bring gifts when she did
candies
clothing
but the brothers took whatever mom gave me
put it away
never gave it back

there was no one there during the crying times
nobody around
to give me safety
love and
hugs
ensure that i was safe

i was always fighting
all those tribes fighting against one another
always trying to defend yourself
some boys would recognize me and call me relative

in my second year there
i don't know what happened to this kid
something pushed him over the edge
he was hanging in the barn
in plain view
in that hay loft up there

my cousin did the same thing i did
he was dropped off there
he just cried all the time
i did my best to comfort him
talk to him
he just wouldn't hear it
he just wouldn't accept where he was
how he got there
he just wouldn't accept anything i would say

togetherness
protection
love
and
affection
those are the values i was brought up by

the indian school just reinforced that to me
confirmed
made them pretty strong

the other thing that came out really was
you had to be a fighter
i became a liar
a cheater
out of that system
defense mechanisms to survive

to get better treatment i became an altar boy
when you became an altar boy you could
leave church early
you got food earlier
you could pick what you want
you got dressed better
if you were caught in a fight
the other kid got strapped
untouchable
you weren't to fool around with altar boys
you had to learn the latin language

i call it the
dark cloud
over
my life
i tell myself
i don't want my children
to go through that kind of system
i really regret losing (?) my language now
language gives you strong cultural grounding
self identity
confidence
esteem

my strengths?
(laughs)
knowing who you are
self knowledge of your boundaries
in strengths and weaknesses
that give you either the motivation
or a defense
to take action for what we want in life

there are some things that i won't tell you
talking about it
HARD
i won't even tell my kids about that time
in my life
i was away for 28 years
and i was asked to come back

i forgot this place eh
my uncle asked me to come home
then I fought the system for a long time

fighting wasn't a family value
that was an acquired
imposed
value
i wanted to make things better
and come to the defense of the people that were
discriminated
prejudiced
racism
towards my parents and grandparents

one of the things I recognize now
a sense of justice
social justice
economic justice
we had a hard history

and a lot of that has to be corrected
recognized
exposed
for the atrocities our people suffered
having our people that live today
and tomorrow
see the benefits of seeing justice done
to our people
for our people

i think that's enough