
Garnet Angeconeb

Speaking My Truth: The Journey to Reconciliation

When I walked into the Aboriginal Healing Foundation office in Ottawa in December 2007 to interview Garnet Angeconeb, I was unsure what to expect. I knew that Garnet was a residential school Survivor, a member of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation's board of directors, and a journalist. What I didn't know was what a warm, compassionate, and fascinating person he is. For the next two days Garnet and I talked about his life, and I felt privileged to sit with him and hear about the challenging experiences he'd survived and overcome. As I listened, I was struck by how open, honest, and generous he was in sharing his story. It was inspiring. Deeply rooted in his Anishinaabe culture and community, Garnet is an unassuming, soft-spoken, spiritual man who is passionate in his quiet and humble way. He has a vision for the future of residential school Survivors and their families and communities that he is determined to help make a reality. Garnet stressed again and again that his story is just one of many—that every residential school Survivor has a story to tell. In telling his story he made it clear that he hopes it helps others to find their voices and tell their own stories. It was an honour to work with him to bring his story to you. — Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm

At Home on Lake Seul: The Early Years

As a young child, I lived with my mother Mary, my father David, and my brothers and sister on the trapline in the Lac Seul area of northern Ontario. It was a happy time in my life. Then in 1959, when I was four years old, my older brother Harry was taken to the Pelican Indian Residential School located about twenty miles from our home. He was six years old. This was the first of many changes to occur over the next few years.

The winter of 1961 began early, and by late fall ice was already forming on the countless bays of Lac Seul. On the trapline, every minute of daylight is important. Mother and Father would rise in the wee dark hours of morning to begin their daily chores. In the evenings, I would fall asleep listening to Mother and Father talk about their day or Mother recount a story or legend. One particular night, a long turn of events began that lasted all winter. I awoke in the middle of the night and found that Mother and Father were up. My baby sister Florence and my little brother Ronald were both in deep sleep, but I sensed there was something wrong by the sound of my parents' voices.

“Your father is very ill,” Mother said to me. Sitting up, I could see Father sipping tea by the wood stove, visibly uncomfortable and shaking from his illness. When I awoke again, daylight had already broken. Mother and Father were busy doing their daily tasks, only this time they seemed to be doing more than usual. Mother was packing all our worldly possessions—blankets, dishes, food, clothing, and furs. We were going back to

the village of Ningewance Bay to be near help should Father's condition worsen. At least there we would be close to my grandparents, Rupert and Christina Ningewance, and their large extended families. Normally, we would have stayed on the trapline until Christmas, but not that year.

While Mother was busy packing, Father was working down by the shoreline in his *putt-putt*. "Putt-putt" was the nickname for a type of wooden boat used by the Lac Seul Anishinaabek for their commercial fishing activities in the 1960s. To keep the younger children warm, Father put a canvas shelter over the *putt-putt*, and inside he set up a little wood stove. The journey through the frozen waters of Bray Bay, where our cabin was located, to Lac Seul was slow because Father had to use an axe and an ice-chisel to break the ice in front of the boat.

At Ningewance Bay, it became clear how seriously ill my father was; he went to bed and there he stayed until the warm winds of spring arrived. Extended family members and others would help us a great deal that winter. We were so grateful whenever someone arrived with a fresh catch of fish or moose meat to feed our hungry stomachs. There were many nights we went to bed hungry and tired. Help from others was always very much appreciated.

Throughout that winter, I watched my father fade into a deep unknown illness. I was often scared. I had involuntarily become the man of the house and had to assume a lot of responsibility. I got firewood, hauled water from the waterhole down at the lake,

and went for help at times when my father's condition worsened. Many nights Mother would rouse me from bed to seek help from neighbours and relatives. I would walk through the bush in the middle of a winter's night to tell people that Father was very sick and that he might die very soon. Walking along the bush trails of Keesic Bay Island with my coal oil lantern was an eerie experience. I was so scared that I never turned my head in case someone was lurking behind me. Now I realize it was probably the spirits looking after me, and certainly the Great Spirit was always watching over me. The walk home was such a relief because someone always came back with me to sit beside my ailing father.

It was a long and difficult winter for me and my family. Finally, the snow and ice began to melt. The days were getting longer. In the air there was the welcomed call of the crow—*an-deg*. The return of the *an-deg* was a sure sign of spring. Father sought help from two highly regarded Elders from the community: *Ochi-kiyashk* (Baby Seagull), otherwise known as Tom Pemmican, and *Baswewe* (Echo), otherwise known as Jean Southwind. I recall Father attending healing ceremonies with the Elders. He would faithfully take the medicines they gave to him and soon he began to feel better. Through this experience, I learned the importance of respecting Elders to the highest degree. And not only that, but to have respect for everyone. This is a lesson I still struggle with each day.

In the Anishinaabe tradition, one brings gifts and an offering of sacred tobacco to the Elders when seeking their advice. Mother

and Father would gather whatever they had to take as gifts to the Elders—hunting rifles, ammunition, traps, knives, tools, or clothing. Father taught us to give things of value to others: the teaching of sharing. I also learned the importance and significance of offering tobacco. These were teachings that would help me throughout my life.

Separation: The Residential School Years

Shortly after my dad was well again, I was forced to go to the Pelican Indian Residential School where Harry was already a student. I attended the residential school and lived in the school dormitories until 1969. My older brother was there until 1968. My sister Florence was forced to go in 1968, and eventually my younger brothers Ronald and Gordon followed. Although I saw my brothers, I had no contact with my little sister because boys and girls were kept separate.

My father had attended this same residential school as a little boy. He was the ninth student enrolled when the school opened in 1927. He attended for five years. When he spoke about it, he talked only about working on the farm. The “students” were actually unpaid farm labourers—there was very little classroom teaching or instruction of any kind except, perhaps, for whatever religious teaching the children received when forced to attend chapel.

When I attended the Pelican Indian Residential School in the mid-1960s there were about two hundred and fifty of us

students ranging in age from six to twelve. For six years I attended school there and lived in the dormitories. The Senior Boys Dormitory Supervisor was Leonard Hands, a young man in his early twenties. Hands came to the school from Toronto through the Anglican Church. He was not a teacher or social worker and had no qualifications for the job of dormitory supervisor. Regardless, he was given responsibility for the senior dorm that housed about forty of us boys aged ten to twelve. Hands had private quarters near the dormitory. In the morning and evening he supervised us. In the morning he made sure we got up on time, ate breakfast, did our morning chores, and attended chapel before going to the school. After school, he would make sure we did chores, had supper, attended evening chapel, and went to sleep when we were supposed to do so.

Forgetting: The Lost Years

When I left the school in 1969 at the age of twelve, I buried the memories and feelings of my time there and rarely spoke about them again until many years later. I began drinking to dull the pain and anger I felt. It was a coping method I used for a long time. I struggled with a sense of spiritual confusion and trying to figure out my place in the world.

One wickedly cold January night when I was twenty years old, I sat in a local bar wasting my paycheque on booze for me and my drinking buddies. A bunch of former residential school students sat at my table guzzling bottle after bottle of beer. One beer was not enough it seemed, yet one beer was too many for most of us.

An old school chum, Paul, screamed across the barroom, “Hey Garnet! Remember that asshole supervisor at Pelican? You know, that guy we used to call Beanie!”

“Yep! I remember that asshole! He didn’t have the last name Hands for nothing. Why don’t you forget about that useless piece of shit. If I ever see that bastard, I’ll kill him!” I yelled back.

Once in awhile, usually while in a drunken stupor, former students would muster enough courage to talk about our negative experiences at residential school. As much as people wanted such conversations to carry on, these exchanges were always quick to end. The memories of Pelican were best forgotten and washed away by beer I thought—at least it felt like some of the pain was numbed by the alcohol.

“Paul, I’ve got to go,” I yelled over the noisy jukebox that was blasting *Heaven’s Just a Sin Away*. “I’m heading for Keesic Bay to visit my folks tonight.”

I jumped on the snowmobile I had borrowed from my brother. Although I was in no shape to go, I set off at top speed into the cold winter night for Keesic Bay on the Lac Seul First Nation traditional territory where my parents lived. When I was about eight miles from home, I somehow got the snowmobile bogged down in the heavy snow around the shoreline. Try as I might, I couldn’t get it out. Being a young man of twenty years, I foolishly decided to walk the rest of the eight miles. It was pitch black and the coldest night of

the winter. Before long, I realized that I had strayed from the snowmobile trail. I was lost.

I had no matches to start a fire. It seemed senseless to bed down in the bush, and so I pushed on, walking out into the vast open air in the middle of the frozen lake. I quickly lost all sense of direction. I could see nothing except darkness and the snow blowing all around me. I was in the middle of a fierce blizzard, the kind of storm my father had warned me about. Each step became a real challenge as I walked aimlessly in circles in the deep slush. My boots were getting heavier as ice began to form from my knees down.

I realized that I was in big trouble. I couldn't even put my fate into the hands of the Creator. As a young person who went through the residential school system, I was deeply confused about my spirituality. I refused to believe in Jesus Christ. And now, as I lay on the frozen lake of Lac Seul, buried in the snow, I questioned how I could rely on God's help with whom I didn't have a relationship. Somehow, though, I learned to pray again that night.

After lying down half-buried in snow for what seemed like infinity, I heard the familiar sound of a snowmobile off in the distance. I looked up. The blizzard had subsided. In the dark, I could see the faint outline of the landscape and the distant flicker of two snowmobile headlights. I yelled at the top of my lungs but I was too far away. Later I learned that my father and uncle had been out looking for me.

I buried myself in snow to stay as warm as I could. I would yell every once in a while into the stillness of the night. It seemed to help with blood circulation, and I would feel warmer for a little while. It was a long night, probably the longest night of my life. Then, as I looked into the night sky, I saw a woman approaching me. She looked like my mother but it was as if she was the spirit of Mother—a holy, spiritual being. In the Anishinaabe language, the woman assured me that I was going to be all right. As she was talking to me, I noticed she was carrying a large blanket made of rabbit skins. In the sweetest voice I had ever heard, she said, “Here, I have come to cover you with this blanket so you don’t get cold out here. This blanket will keep you warm.”

I dozed off. By this time, I felt so warm under the cover of a loving Mother’s rabbit quilt. When I awoke sometime later, I could see the early hints of the morning sunrays. It was the first day of February, my only sister’s birthday. The sunrise was beautiful. The skies were beginning to glow pink and orange. I couldn’t believe that I had survived that long, cold night.

I looked around me. Tobacco was sprinkled all around where I had bedded down. I unburied myself from the snow and sawed away the huge chunks of ice around my legs and feet. I stood up but quickly fell back down. I thought, now that daylight had arrived someone would soon find me. I laid down quietly to wait for help.

Help soon arrived in the form of an OPP airplane. After circling a couple of times, the airplane landed and stopped near me. Right away I recognized the two police officers who

disembarked. Constable Roydon Kropp was the first officer to jump out of the airplane. He was followed by Constable Myles Lang. I was unable to walk so the two officers dragged me to the airplane. The pilot, Sergeant Larry Moore, remained on board and helped to lift me into the warm aircraft. After landing, I was taken by ambulance to the Zone Hospital in Sioux Lookout where I was laid up for three months. I had suffered severe frostbite to both feet and legs. Not only had I miraculously survived an entire night in 40° below weather, I had also escaped the real threat of amputation.

When I think back on it now, I see the vision of the woman who covered me in the rabbit fur quilt as a symbol of hope. With her loving presence, against all odds, I survived. I now know there was a reason I survived, but it took me a number of years to understand what it was.

Remembering: The Grieving Years

Understanding first began to develop on October 31st, 1990 when I was set on a path that I continue on to this day. I was on a business trip in Ottawa. That morning, I got up, showered, dressed, and headed downstairs to meet a colleague for breakfast in the *Toulouse* restaurant. He was already sipping his third cup of coffee by the time I got to the breakfast table.

“Hey look at this front-page article on the residential school issue,” he said as he sipped his coffee.

I had my own copy of the *Globe and Mail* tucked under my arm. There, on the front page, was an article about how the then-Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Phil Fontaine, had publicly disclosed that he had been physically and sexually abused while attending an “Indian” residential school. As I read the article, I began to feel an indescribable pain crawling all over my body. With great difficulty I struggled to maintain my composure. I looked over to my colleague and, without thinking, asked him if he’d ever been abused while living in one of the notorious “Indian” residential schools.

His immediate response was “No.” I guess I was hoping that he would say he had been. In some way I wanted him to say yes, so that we would have something in common to talk about: a legacy of abuse from the residential school system that had haunted me ever since I left the school in 1969.

I felt incredible pain build up inside me. Through this haze of pain, I struggled to admit to my colleague that I, too, like many former students, had experienced sexual and physical abuse while at residential school. I was also enraged by the psychological and spiritual scars inflicted on me and the other students from the colonialistic and genocidal approach inherent in the residential school system. My colleague and I grew almost completely silent. The silence continued as we ate our breakfast.

After a while my colleague quietly asked, “So you were abused in residential school?”

Not knowing what exactly to say, I responded, “Yes, I was abused—sexually.” I told him that a man at the school named Hands, who eventually became an Anglican priest, had abused me and many others at Pelican during the 1960s. I felt a wave of rage overtake me. I had a huge lump in my throat as I struggled to hold back the pain that I had buried for so many years. Then, as if a floodgate had been thrown open, I cried uncontrollably. It was the first time I had ever told anyone that as a little boy I had been sexually abused at residential school.

For the next year I tried to figure out how to deal with that admission. I had to tell my family (I have been married since 1978 and had never spoken of the abuse to my wife). It took a lot of soul-searching—I had so many doubts. It was a very emotional time. I experienced a lot of anger and grief. My children were ten and eight years old, and I had to explain to them what was happening because my behaviour during that time was unsettling for them. I was drinking a lot and crying often. I had to come to terms with the idea of others knowing what had happened to me. I sought help from a mental health nurse who helped prepare me to meet with Leonard Hands, the man who had abused me. She made me feel validated and helped me to realize that although I’d had no control over the abuse, I did have control over the process of disclosure.

Disclosing: The Truth-Telling Years

In late 1991, I was ready. I met with Bishop James Allen of the Anglican Keewatin Diocese to disclose my abuse. The bishop

said he would come back and deal with it after Christmas. He left soon after and never did deal with it. It was very discouraging, but a new bishop, named Tom Collings, was appointed to the diocese in the new year. After discussions about an out-of-court process, Bishop Collings suggested that I meet with Leonard Hands to discuss it. I agreed. The day before my meeting with Hands, I went to the site where the abuse had taken place at Pelican Falls. Once there, I prayed for courage and strength to get me through this ugly ordeal. As I left the grounds, I spotted a bald eagle soaring way up in the clear blue sky. I took that as a sign of hope for restoration, for healing, for reconciliation, and for forgiveness.

It was April 1992 when I met face-to-face with Leonard Hands, the person who had abused me in residential school. There was strong denial from him, and the meeting ended with no resolution. Still, I realized later that confronting him was a significant milestone on my long journey toward healing.

As I pursued the matter, the first hurdle I had to overcome was denial from those around me. My parents didn't directly tell me, but did tell my siblings that perhaps I should drop what I was doing and move on with my life. Many leaders also did not support me. An Elder told me that it was because so many of them were in denial themselves. Perhaps it was too painful.

During this time I often wondered, "Is anyone out there really listening?" It saddened, frustrated, and angered me. Then I started to link up with others who were also dealing

with residential school abuse. In northwestern Ontario, there was a heavy layer of silence surrounding the issue. Some people even questioned my motives for pursuing my case, suggesting that I was doing it for political gain. But as I learned about others who were taking action and began to connect with them, I began to feel supported. It gave me the strength to continue.

Still, it was very difficult. The denial and silence extended to the churches as well as the government. It took more than three years for Michael Peers, then-Primate of the Anglican Church, to respond to a letter from me, and when he did it was in a very legalistic way. Obviously, the letter was written by lawyers since the Church must have feared law suits. One of the things that I've learned, whether dealing with government or churches, is that we're afraid of each other. We're afraid to talk openly to each other.

Despite this, I continued to pursue my case. My mother never saw the end of what I started. Sadly, she died in April 1993. Later that year, in September, the OPP began investigating my allegations of sexual abuse. At first I was all alone in the allegations. By the time it was over, there were nineteen of us who had given statements about having been sexually abused by Leonard Hands. The police believed there were a lot more, and I knew myself that there were others who weren't willing to come forward. Around the same time, in 1993, there were allegations that Hands was abusing an altar boy at his parish in Kingston, Ontario. Hands was suspended by the Church,

although no charges were laid. It was sickening to me to realize that he was still abusing boys, and I wondered how many others there had been in the years between.

When the police investigation of my case started, my father said that maybe I should drop it and move on with my life. It wasn't until after my father realized that two of his other sons (this meant three of his six children) were also abused by the same man that he started to change his views and became more supportive. Father also began to recognize and understand the patterns of behaviour of his sons—the anger, drinking, short tempers, and so on—that we'd been using to cope with our abuse as well as with the shame and secrecy that had surrounded it.

The sign that my father was really supportive was when he went to court on the day that Leonard Hands was being sentenced. Hands was convicted on nineteen counts of indecent assault, and my father was there in the courtroom. He realized that day that there were sixteen other men who had been abused in addition to my brothers and me. When my father showed up that day, it was one of the greatest gifts I ever received. It was a victory in the sense that I started feeling that my father was listening and that the denial had been overcome.

I'll never forget that day. It was January 5th, 1996 in Kenora District Court. I saw Leonard Hands, at last, sitting in the prisoner's box. He had pleaded guilty in court, but previous to that had vehemently denied the abuse. At the last minute he

accepted a plea bargain. At the sentencing, Hands apologized to the victims of his abuse, but he specifically stated that he was not apologizing to me. He wasn't allowed to use my name but said that he was specifically excluding "G.A." from his apology. He claimed that he had already done so during our meeting in 1992 and that I had refused his apology. It angered me, but I realized he was a man going down and that it was his only way of lashing out and trying to regain some control. He received a four-year sentence. Leonard Hands was only fifty-four years old.

I rode back from Kenora with my friend, another Survivor, and we talked for the two and a half hours of the drive, so preoccupied that we ran out of gas. My friend started talking about forgiveness and I listened but at the same time I was saying, "No. I'm not ready to talk about that yet." It was not until years later that I had the urge to seek forgiveness, to forgive.¹

Reconciling: The Journey Continues

I never received an apology from Leonard Hands. Nor did I get the opportunity to forgive him while he was still alive. I wanted to, but in the process I learned that he had died in 2000 while living at a halfway house in Winnipeg. Today, I can truly say, "Beanie (that was his nickname), I forgive you. I forgive you." I wish I could have said it to him when he was still here on this earth. Being able to forgive him has been a huge step forward in my personal healing and spiritual growth. But I know how difficult it is. It takes time and a great deal of support and love to reach that point. I hope that the

Commission can help former students, wherever we may be on our journeys, to come to terms with what happened to us at residential school and to find some peace within ourselves as we move forward in our lives.

For me, the 1998 *Statement of Reconciliation*, issued by the Honourable Jane Stewart, was another milestone in my healing process and the start of a very much needed dialogue. Some of the frustration and silence I had been experiencing lessened because I realized that people were starting to listen. I also think that because the residential school experience disrupted my relationship with my Mother, I was more receptive, and the message had more of an impact on me because it had been made by a woman.

My understanding of what *reconciliation* means has evolved since that time. To me, it's all about relationships and communication. Often, we're too afraid of each other to speak our truth openly. For me to heal, I had to find a way to do so. When I think about reconciliation now, what it means, and how it can be put into action by the Commission, I think about my friend Brian Brisket. We grew up together, went to residential school together, and were lifelong friends. In the summer of 1995, Brian and I had gone through the preliminary trial where the judge had to determine if there was enough evidence against Hands to go to court. Afterwards, Brian and I drove together on the five-hour trip from the court to Winnipeg. We talked about many things during that trip, and Brian offered me some advice: "Whatever you do," he said, "don't ever leave your family. Don't ever leave your wife and children as a result of all of this—it's not worth it."

As the case progressed, life at home became more and more difficult for me and my family. The case was taking a toll on all of us. There was a lot of tension, and eventually I reached a breaking point. In October 1995, I packed my truck and drove to the outskirts of town. I was leaving my family. I got to the Trans-Canada Highway and had to decide whether to go east or west. It was storming terribly. I made a choice, turned, and set off. I was fifty-six kilometres outside of Sioux Lookout when I encountered a horrible car accident. There were three fatalities, one was my friend Brian.

It was like a wave came over me. I felt numb, the message was so strong. Brian had told me never to leave my family and that's exactly what I was in the process of doing. After about four hours at the accident scene helping the survivors of the accident, I turned around and went home. I'm so grateful to Brian because without him, I might not have a family. I don't know what would have become of me.

Sadly, Brian didn't live to see the end of the case, to see our abuser convicted and sentenced. He never heard the 1998 *Statement of Reconciliation*. He didn't get to see the formation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I feel strongly that we need to remember and honour people like Brian and the many others who have passed on without seeing the steps we have taken toward achieving justice and recognition for all of the children and families who were forced to endure the residential school system. To me, that is a necessary part of reconciliation and one that the Commission can fulfill.

I believe that this Commission will provide us with an opportunity to acknowledge and validate what has happened to us as Aboriginal peoples because of the imposition of one policy enacted by the colonizing state—the policy of assimilation. The residential school policy was just one aspect of the broader assimilation policy. The overall impact of colonization and assimilation is the disempowerment of people. That is why, today, we are still plagued by issues of poverty, racism, missing women, and other horrifying impacts of that broader policy. The Commission, in some ways, can begin to turn that around so that people are empowered.

One of the things that I would like to see is a genuine apology. I would like to see the prime minister stand up along with the churches and say in no uncertain terms, “I’m sorry.” If there was a collective effort to do this, can you imagine what profound rippling effects that would have? I think that a collective effort to come together to say “I’m sorry” would be very powerful.

Although the 1998 *Statement of Reconciliation* had an impact on me at the time, the statement was specific to physical and sexual abuse. It was not inclusive and did not look at the broader implications of the policy and how it fit into the government’s assimilationist agenda. At the time, everyone was being very careful about what they said because of the fear of lawsuits and what any sort of admission might ultimately cost. But now is the time for us to be honest with each other. We’ve got to get over that fear of being sued. That is another area where I see hope for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to instigate

change. I see the Commission helping to facilitate a process of social change. A priority should be the eradication of the intergenerational impacts of residential school. My children lived with the intergenerational effects, and it is my hope that my grandchildren will not have to do so. The Commission can lay the groundwork and begin facilitating that change.

When I was young, I was afraid to speak out because it was too painful. It took a long time to have the courage to find people who would listen. I just didn't feel strong enough, I didn't have the courage to speak about something so painful that I had buried for so long. I was afraid to let those ghosts out of my system. I was afraid of not being heard so I shut it in. It would be easier today. It's in the open now so there are support systems, and more and more people are becoming aware of it and providing help. I also find a lot of courage in our Elders talking about it in ceremonies. What I've noticed is that whenever I go to ceremonies most of the Elders talk about it. They are honouring Survivors and are creating honour songs for Survivors. The role of Elders has become quite powerful. They are helping in revitalizing and restoring what was put aside and seeking that rightful place where we were before.

If the Commission can create a space that allows people to feel that their stories are accepted without fear of repercussion, perhaps it can help to neutralize some of the negativity that has poisoned our relationships with each other. When a lake is poisoned by acid rain, lime is poured in to neutralize it. Hopefully, in some ways, our relationship with Canada can be improved. It's all been

so negative. I see this process as helping to lead that relationship toward the way it was meant to be. For us, the treaties were about co-existence. We need to mend those historical misunderstandings and accept the true history of this country before we can move on.

When you're ashamed of your own history, you deny—that's also what has happened on the part of the government and churches. What it all boils down to is respect. Denial is damaging and disrespectful, not healing. Our new relationships have to be built on respect.

I look at my own life and I have to ask myself, "Why did I have to go through some of those experiences?" As my own doctor said, it's amazing I'm still here. Most people would have succumbed. I look at that from a spiritual perspective and say perhaps the Creator is working through me to give a message of hope to our people about overcoming the impacts of colonization and the residential school system.

Because of those impacts, many of us went through a cultural identity crisis—loss of language, loss of family and community ties, loss of self-worth—to name only a few of the negative but real impacts of residential school. I myself lived through times of spiritual confusion. I lived through times of anger. I lived through times of cultural confusion. I lived through the disruption of my family relationships. At one time in my life, I was ashamed of my culture. To me, though, the residential school issue is not about making others feel bad or guilty. This issue is

about truth and understanding. Truth and understanding are two key ingredients that will lead to healing and reconciliation.

When I look back on my life now, I can see that as a boy of six I had to walk alone through the darkness and cold and to confront my fears in order to find help for myself and my family. Then when I was twenty years old, I again had to face the darkness and cold during that long night alone on the ice. But when I felt covered by the warmth of a Mother's love, I knew I could overcome my ordeal. The process of residential school healing and reconciliation, for me, has been like that. It's amazing how strong we can be when we act out of love and respect and know we are a part of something much larger than ourselves.

May we all find the strength, warmth, and support to be able to speak our truths.

Note

- 1 Garnet Angeconeb, 28 March 2004, Meeting on the Future of the Residential School Healing Movement, Ottawa as reported in Castellano, M. Brant (2006:157). *Final Report of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Volume I: A Healing Journey: Reclaiming Wellness*. Ottawa, ON: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Biography

Garnet Angecone is an Anishinaabe originally from the Lac Seul First Nation and now living in Sioux Lookout, Ontario. After attending Pelican Indian Residential School, he completed high school in Sioux Lookout and, in 1982, graduated from the University of Western Ontario with a diploma in journalism.

Garnet worked for many years with Wawatay Native Communications Society in positions ranging from news editor to executive director. With the guidance of community members and Elders, he developed the Wawatay Radio Network with coverage to the Nishnawbe-Aski communities in northern Ontario. He also worked for CBC Radio in Thunder Bay and served as executive director of one of the northern Ontario tribal councils. In 1985, Garnet was the first Aboriginal person to be elected councillor in the town of Sioux Lookout. An active member of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation's board of directors since 1998, Garnet serves as its secretary. He is also a recipient of the Queen's Golden Jubilee Award.

In 1990, Garnet embarked upon a lifelong journey of healing, and he shares his journey with us in this collection. Garnet's story begins on Lac Seul where he lived as a young child surrounded by a loving family and concludes with his reflections on truth, understanding, healing, and reconciliation. In between, he describes how, as an adult, he struggled alone and in secret with the emotional burden ensuing from the sexual abuse he experienced in residential school. When he was ready to reveal his secret, even greater personal resources were required, but he courageously persisted in spite of the grief and anger his revelation aroused in himself and others. We follow Garnet as he confronted his abuser, first in person and later in the courts. We begin to understand how, when the time is right, forgiveness can reinforce healing and healing makes forgiveness possible. Garnet's

candour, sincerity, kindness, and courage are all evident in this personal narrative of a journey from truth-telling to reconciliation.

Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm is an accomplished writer, multi-arts collaborator, publisher, Indigenous arts advocate, and communications consultant as well as an emerging video producer and director. She is an Anishinaabe of mixed ancestry from the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation in southwestern Ontario. Since 1994, she has lived and worked at Neyaashiinigmiing, Cape Croker Reserve on the Saugeen Peninsula in southwestern Ontario. Kateri worked with Garnet's written memoirs and spent hours in conversation with him to create a compelling narrative of his life.

Father Trinell with Inuit children in front of the Roman Catholic Mission, Cape Dorset, N.W.T., October 1951
Photographer: Douglas Wilkinson, National Film Board of Canada
Library and Archives Canada, PA-146509
(This photo can also be found, along with many other resources, at www.wherearethekids.ca)

