

September 29, 2020

ON WEDNESDAY, WE WEAR ORANGE

Remembering and Honouring Residential School Survivors

On September 30, we observe Orange Shirt Day, a movement that officially began in 2013 in British Columbia to commemorate the residential school experience, to witness and honour the healing journey of the survivors and their families, and to commit to the ongoing process of reconciliation.

It has since become a national day for meaningful discussion about the effects of Residential Schools and the legacy they have left behind. It is a day to honour survivors, to reaffirm that they matter.

The date is significant as, historically, it was during the early Fall that children were taken from their homes to residential schools, and because it is an opportunity to set the stage for anti-racism and anti-bullying policies for the coming school year. It is an opportunity for First Nations, local governments, schools and communities to come together in the spirit of reconciliation and hope for generations of children to come.

While this day has been recognized since 2013, in reality, the idea behind this day began in 1973, when six-year-old Phyllis Webstad was brought to the St. Joseph Mission Residential School outside of Williams Lake, British Columbia.

"I lived with my grandmother on the Dog Creek reserve. We never had very much money, but somehow my granny managed to buy me a new outfit to go to the Mission school. I remember going to Robinson's store and picking out a shiny orange shirt. It had string laced up in front, and was so bright and exciting – just like I felt to be going to school!"

When I got to the Mission, they stripped me, and took away my clothes, including the orange shirt! I never wore it again. I didn't understand why they wouldn't give it back to me, it was mine! The color orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared."

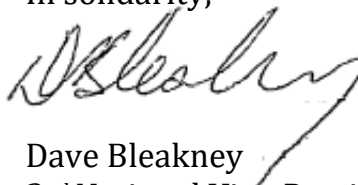
– Phyllis Webstad

Orange Shirt Day may have originated in British Columbia, but it is a national day of remembrance and reconciliation across the country. The suffering and the strength of Indigenous Peoples from coast to coast to coast should be recognized.

We are encouraged by the resolutions passed by local and provincial governments and school districts in support of Orange Shirt Day.

On September 30, we call on our fellow CUPW Sisters and Brothers to wear orange and listen with open ears to the stories of survivors and their families, and to remember those that didn't make it.

In solidarity,



Dave Bleakney
2nd National Vice-President

on behalf of
the Indigenous Working Group

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300 SLEEPS

by Jen Whiffin

Many children
Tired children
Worked at school each day.
And when the day was done,
When the day was through,
Many children
Tired children
Through the night would stay.
Waiting 100, 200, 300 sleeps
300 sleeps
Not so long ago,
Not so far away,
Many children
Lonely children
Always dreamed that they
Could cuddle with their mums,
Their families back home
But many children Lonely children Didn't have a say.
They waited 100, 200, 300 sleeps
300 sleeps
Why did they stay there? They didn't have a choice.
Tell someone! Tell someone! They didn't have a voice.
And then one day
Those schools all went away
Those tired lonely children all grew up and now they say:
Not so long ago,
Not so far away,
We had no choice
We had no voice
They took it all away.
And now that it is done
We're really hoping you
Will understand
What happened to us
Will know the real truth.
We waited 100, 200, 300 sleeps
300 sleeps
300 sleeps.

