

**THE HAUNTED HOSTEL:
Shades of the Past in a Modern Day School
Residence for Native Children**

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ABSTRACT

In the summer of 1987, I was asked by the council of chiefs of a Northern Canadian region, to do a 'review' of the operation of one of the few remaining school residences for Native children in Canada. The residence, or 'hostel' had been staffed by nuns until its administration was transferred to the Council of Chiefs in the early 1970's. The building was thought by the Natives to be haunted. It did seem to be haunted by some institutional patterns that had been established under the new administration, and persisted though the staff in 1987 was entirely Native. This paper explores these observations and attempts to make sense of them.

RÉSUMÉ

En été 1987, le conseil des chefs d'une région nordique Canadienne réquisitionna une étude du fonctionnement d'une des dernières résidences scolaires pour enfants autochtones au Canada. La résidence fut administrée par les soeurs jusqu'au transfert administratif au conseil des chefs au début des années 1970. Les autochtones croient que l'édifice est hanté. Il apparût effectivement hanté par des pratiques institutionnelles qui ont été établies par la nouvelle administration et qui ont persistées malgré que le personnel en 1987 était composé entièrement par des autochtones. Cet article explore ces observations et tente d'en établir une interprétation valide.

INTRODUCTION

The 'hostel' housed children attending the regional school; as young as six years of age, they lived there if their families wanted them to attend school and there was no schooling at the appropriate level in the home settlement. A few were housed there as Social Service placements because of a lack of foster care.

It was a huge structure, built to accommodate 150 children. At the time of my study it housed only 24. All but one were Native; they had

been flown in from tiny scattered communities, some of them hundreds of kilometres away. The youngest child was 10 years old, and the oldest was 20. Between September and June of each school year, they only returned to their families at Christmas.

There were 16 staff persons, all Native (Indian, Metis and Inuit), divided by gender to care for boys' and girls' sections respectively. None had any child-care training; most had been hostel residents themselves as children. There was no administrator, the previous one having been fired. A new one would not be hired immediately as it was almost the end of the school year, so male and female Head Child Care Workers were in charge, and a representative of the Council could be reached in case of emergency.

The Council had arranged for me to do a 'review' of the situation of children in care at the hostel. By this they meant a grass-roots consultation process to explore with the children, their families, the staff, teachers and other interested persons, their perceptions, goals and suggestions regarding the children's well-being. An 'outsider' was wanted, to come from an uninvolved stance and facilitate the process of gaining consensus on problems and suggested changes.

My approach was developed in the community development tradition, much influenced by Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1973) and by Bill Lee's *Pragmatics of Community Organization* (1986). I was there to facilitate the communication of those most involved, with each other and with myself. Feedback of results of meetings and interviews (as well as plans and invitations to participate in upcoming events) was conveyed regularly to hostel residents and staff. I listened and learned from as wide a variety of concerned persons and groups as possible, then summarized the input and recommendations in a report to the Council of Chiefs.

The review process was carried out, as many applied anthropology projects are, within severe time constraints (Conlin 1985:85) but there was very full participation and little opposition. It was gratifying to be told by the Council contact person that whatever the written results were, the process had been worth it.

HISTORY

I: THE REGION

The Native people of my region of study lived in a subarctic region consisting mostly of low hills covered by forest or muskeg, with access to mountains and a riverine environment. They had survived prehistorically in bark or skin shelters despite seasonally harsh temperature ranges. They

had subsisted largely on game (caribou, moose, rabbits, fish, etc.) supplemented by berries and roots in the brief summer (Petitot 1983). Socially, they were extremely egalitarian, moving about in small kin-based family groups. Only in summer did they congregate in larger groups for lake fishing and ceremonials (Cooke and Piche 1984:7). Communication style among them even today is noticeably more reticent than among nearby Native groups (McGregor and Snyder 1987; personal communications).

The earliest direct contacts with Whites were with missionaries and traders. A major fur-trading post was established early in the nineteenth century, followed by Roman Catholic and Anglican missionaries who competed for numbers of baptisms (Heming 1986:33-39; Cooke and Piche 1984:11). The people seem to have taken readily to Christianity. Petitot wrote (1876:21)

They are naturally religious, have few superstitions ... they can be considered a relatively moral race. You don't have to search outside of these qualities ... for the motivation, great aptitude, and I would even say, joy, with which [they] have accepted and carried on their new religion".

Most of them now are Roman Catholic (Heming 1986:35).

The Native people of the area suffered the same debilitating effects as aboriginal people in other areas had, from the alcohol that was provided to draw them to competing trade posts. The Whites' viruses and bacteria were also a major threat, as colds, influenza, smallpox, measles and tuberculosis decimated the population (Cooke and Piche 1984:10). People still alive remember the horror of losing most of the people they knew or were related to in the flu epidemic of 1928 (Fumoleau 1975; personal communication; Thom and Blondin-Townsend 1987:56).

Control over their land passed to the Crown when the treaties were signed: these almost entirely illiterate people were influenced by Church leaders to agree to the signing of the documents they could not read nor understand. They now receive \$5.00 yearly in return for control over lands they had inhabited for thousands of years (Fumoleau 1975:81). They were learning that they were powerless in the hands of Whites who, even in clerical roles, could not be trusted.

II: EARLY EDUCATION (DENOMINATIONAL)

The Anglicans in the town that was growing up around the major fur-trading post had established a day school as early as 1868; the Roman Catholics followed in 1918. However, most school children were being

educated at a Roman Catholic residential school a couple of hundred miles away (Heming 1987; Cooke and Piche 1984:20-23). In the 1950s, with the provision of Family Allowances to families whose children attended school, two trends began; more families left their traditional life on the land to live in towns near schools, and the government began exercising more control over education (Fumoleau 1987; personal communication).

A compromise was struck in the controversy over day schools vs. residential schools, and Roman Catholic vs. Protestant vs. non-denominational education. It was decided to build a large education complex providing both day and residential options, with all facilities twinned in denominational wings of the school as well as denominationally separated residences (Cooke and Piche 1984:25).

A Roman Catholic cemetery with about 800 graves was bulldozed for the foundation of the Roman Catholic residence (hostel). While burials of priests and nuns were moved to a nearby separate cemetery, the Native ones were not, and to this day bones are found near the surface if the earth is disturbed. There is still discomfort and anger among many Native residents whose relatives' graves were disturbed. They believe the hostel is haunted. I was told by several people that babies can be heard there, crying in the night (McGregor and Native informants 1987; personal communications).

From the late 1950s until the early 1970s the hostel housed about 150 children at a time. Living hostel 'alumni' (teachers-in-training, staff and parents) have vivid memories of hostel life 'under the nuns'. Their stories put a personal face on the documented patterns at Native residential schools across Canada (Johnson 1988; Barman et al 1986; Lydell 1979; Sheehan et al 1986; Shunan and Goodwill 1982; Titley 1986; Wright 1988; Haig-Brown 1989).

These children, as young as four or five, were separated from their families, sometimes without warning, often for years at a time. On arrival from their homes in family bush camps or tiny log-cabin settlements, they were stripped of any clothing or possessions considered unsuitable, bathed in large communal washrooms, and had their hair cut in a uniform, severe style. The haircutting seemed to be a traumatic memory; some said also that their parents didn't know it would be cut, and were upset when they found out. They were put in large 'dorms' by age groups, strictly segregated from the opposite sex. Thus brothers and sisters who could have given each other emotional support often did not have any communication except during the Christmas gift-opening. A particular position for sleeping was enforced, to prevent masturbation: children slept for years only on the right side (Cooke and Piche 1984:20-24).

The Native language was forbidden, and Native culture regarded as pagan. Discipline was severe, and very traumatic to children raised in the

gentle, permissive, Native style. Indians, if they don't understand, or are being rushed and pressured, often respond with silence or "I don't know", probably meaning, "I don't know how to give an answer that will satisfy you" (Preston 1987; personal communication). People told me of violent beatings, hair-pulling and long isolation when they did not understand the nuns' questions or accusations.

A story was told by a woman in her twenties. Her young sister was wiggling while having her hair brushed and the nun pushed her head forward forcefully, banging the child's nose on the edge of the table. Her nose bled all day and she was inconsolable. At bedtime, she crawled into bed with her older sister for comfort. When a nun discovered her there she was given a severe beating and sent to her bed alone.

Food was a problem. The children were being prepared for a farming life and spent a great deal of time out of class tending garden and livestock, and sawing logs. The vegetables provided at meals were unfamiliar to the children, who were used to a wild meat diet. Cabbage soup and beans were frequently served and both were revolting to the children, but had to be completely eaten to avoid severe punishment. The beans were often 'wormy'. Fish was a familiar food but was often spoiled or even wormy and, as the only meat usually available, had to be eaten. Refrigeration and storage of fish were problems in times when food was in frighteningly short supply for nuns and children alike -- perhaps a valid excuse in early times, but not after 1960, when the new hostels were built with huge walk-in refrigerators (Cooke and Piche 1984:20-24).

Both parents and children suffered greatly, as children were completely out of touch with their families for as long as 15 years. Native crafts, skills, and language were not taught. Those who were reunited with families later often could not recognize nor talk to them, and were unskilled members of the hunting/gathering groups (Thom and Blondin 1987:110).

Christianity was imposed, with prayers scheduled several times daily. Native spirituality (which seems to have been, in fact, compatible in many respects with Christian belief) was not respected. The repressive attitudes toward sexuality that would have been common among nuns of that period were imposed on the children in ways that often left them puzzled and distressed. Girls and boys who even looked at each other, for instance, were questioned fiercely about temptations and sinful thoughts, in unfamiliar ecclesiastical terminology (Native Informants 1987).

The entire experience was one of emotional deprivation and severe culture shock that left many individuals unready for independence, parenting or family life in later years. Personal competence, social connections and parenting abilities were adversely affected or destroyed (Native Informants 1987). One woman in her forties told me that she and

her husband are still struggling with a lack of understanding of how to relate to the opposite sex, how to show tenderness, and how to nurture a family. Neither one of them could remember their original homes well enough to provide a model for household management. Their inadequacies at times overwhelmed them, driving them to drink for escape.

An older woman wept as she told me about her confusion and pain as a small child. She said she still doesn't understand, and cries every time she talks about it. A young woman talked about her inability to make independent decisions: when she left the hostel she couldn't use the phone, shop effectively, cook, do laundry, schedule her time, or write cheques. She felt she had been made unfit for adult life by having all decisions made for her for many years. A man who grew up in the hostel said he was grateful for the necessities of life that had been given him; however, he felt he had missed out on home life and was having a lot of problems with the role of parent and husband (Native Informants 1987). 'Brainwashing' no doubt played its part in the ability of generations of Native people to objectively assess and constructively incorporate those experiences in later life. Certainly respect for themselves, their native life-style, culture and spirituality were unlikely to be products of this degree of institutionalization.

It must be said that there were individual nuns who were kind and understanding; but the institutional setting, with its rules, schedules and prevailing norms was a strong, ongoing structure that shaped the life experiences of the children for several generations.

III: RECENT EDUCATION (NATIVE ADMINISTRATION)

In the early 1970s, a change in legislation allowed a native society to take over administration of the hostel as a nondenominational operation, part of a wide-ranging project to support Native elders and troubled youth, and to educate non-Native residents of the area about the real nature and purposes of the Native people. Minutes of the society from those years indicate a vital, progressive and inclusive approach. Some elders were moved into the hostel to offer their wisdom; land-skill camps were run with elders, hostel youth and disturbed youth from the town. Alcohol and recreation programs were offered; families from outlying settlements were encouraged to visit their children (Native Informants 1987).

Sadly, there was a gradual collapse of these programs. The few elders who tried living at the hostel found that the setting and the preponderance of young people did not meet their needs; visiting parents at times caused embarrassment by becoming inebriated; the land-skill camps included too

many out-of-control youngsters, and too few elders. Members of the society were discouraged about the possibility of Whites in short-term Northern job postings ever gaining an understanding of Native life and values. There was a series of administrative problems and family vendettas that finally led to the collapse of the society's cultural programs and the taking over of the hostel administration by the Regional Council of Chiefs in 1985 (Society minutes; McGregor 1987; personal communication).

Throughout the period of Native administration the policy of hiring all-Native staff has been adhered to. These individuals have almost all been local people, usually hired in haste, all without training in child care or residential care. Many have been hostel 'alumni'. This pattern of emergency hiring, incompetence or wrongdoing and being fired or quitting, has been common among both staff and administration. It should be noted that a small number of older staff persons have remained (one for more than twenty years) and have provided an element of stability. Also, many who were on staff in 1987 were acutely aware of continuing problems and were anxious that the needs of all concerned be met more adequately.

THE HOSTEL SITUATION, 1987

When I came to stay with the children at the hostel, my first impression was of the town it is in. It was visibly segregated, with the homes of most Native people clustered together, and of obviously poorer quality than the rest of the town.

The next impression was of the hostel building itself. A long, low building, it still had a cross on the front. Inside, it was very shiny, bare and institutional, painted entirely in "government white". It was also spookily empty. Even though the end of one wing had been turned over to community use, the remainder was only fractionally filled up. There were 24 children left from the 50 who had started the school year in a building designed for many more. This left many empty rooms, offices and storage areas. The empty effect was accentuated by the lack of decoration in hallways or 'dorms'; there was really nothing that reflected the presences of children, their interests or accomplishments. Native culture was represented by a mural in the large, shiny dining room.

My next impression was of the children themselves. A few had been quietly hanging around the main entrance hall when I entered; my first personal encounters were in the dining room where, to my surprise, there were no other adults (the staff routinely took their trays out to their lounge to eat together). I invited myself to sit with a group of senior girls.

It was a rather tense experience sitting with them, as they were pretty silent, but after I had explained my reason for being there and passed around a mini-album of my family photos, they loosened up and shyly asked if I would help with their homework that evening. As the days went on the children appeared to be more relaxed with me, and began to talk about their concerns and suggestions.

Common themes they raised were the lack of activities, the lack of consistent care and the positive role modelling by the CCWs (child-care workers), the lack of communication between school and hostel, and the lack of attention to special needs. There were many comments about the food (which by my Southern standards was excellent) being too unlike the largely wild-meat diet they were accustomed to at home. There were also comments about inconsistencies in rules, chores and expectations between the girls' and the boys' side. My own observation was that the children were being 'warehoused'.

In the home settlements, I was told by many informants, children begin taking on helping tasks at a very early age and are busy, responsible community members with few or no overt rules to follow. They learn by example and trial-and-error rather than verbal instruction, gradually gaining skills within the context of kin groups and tiny communities. The families are commonly involved in hunting, trapping and fishing at least part of the year, even if they have paid jobs. The contrast between that life and the way of life in residence at the hostel must have caused severe culture shock for many. They had no responsibilities except for rotating dish-washing duties, weekly dorm cleanup, and an evening study hour. They were provided with food and shelter but little in relation to other needs (parenting, consistent care, variety, activity, creative outlets, encouragement, family/community/Native identity, spiritual practices, responsibilities).

As there were no scheduled recreation activities, many children spent a lot of time wandering about, sitting on the playground swings, or just hanging around the entrance. Some of them got into trouble doing 'window escape' at night, drinking and getting into fights on their return to the hostel. There were numerous times, night and day, when staff persons were late or simply did not show up to supervise.

There were no regular health check-ups nor any provisions for the needs of sick children, short of hospitalization. There was no monitoring of clothing and dietary needs. For instance, the youngest boy had eaten little but white bread and cereal all year as he hated the food so much. One day the same child, who had been longing for 'the bush', missed out on a class hike because his shoes fitted so badly that he could hardly walk. The kitchen staff were willing to cook special dishes for children

recuperating from illnesses (Native Informants 1987), but had been given no instructions, so they simply followed the pre-arranged menus.

There was no effective means of communication between boys and girls, nor between children and staff. As a matter of fact, even within gender groups, there were isolating factors like dialect differences in the Native language and the fact that youngsters tended to stick with those from the same community, leaving some alone who did not have settlement friends. Male and female staff did not meet together on any regular basis, and often seemed to be at odds over such issues as rules of behaviour and standards of tidiness.

Quite aside from communications within the hostel, there was little communication with the children's families unless there were serious problems. Report cards were sent home, without covering letters regarding general well-being, and some parents were illiterate and unable to understand the reports. Also, there was ongoing hostility between the 'town kids' and the 'hostel kids', with very rare friendly mixing between the two groups.

All in all, this was an extremely isolating situation for many children. Perhaps because of that, there was a lot less overt rebellion and noising acting-out than I would have expected under the circumstances. The prevailing mood seemed one of boredom and resignation, punctuated by occasional noisy episodes in the middle of the night.

"SHADES OF THE PAST"

Many times I was told that the situation was better than it used to be 'under the nuns'. The evidence most often cited was that no one got beaten any more. In fact, there was a rule forbidding corporal punishment, but I was told that the senior boys were instructed to spank the little ones so the CCWs would not get into trouble. This illustrates a puzzling element in hostel life as I observed it: the nuns were gone, prayers were not said several times daily and very severe punishments seemed to be a thing of the past. Native CCWs were doing the job; yet hostel life was an unhappy experience for many children. Under close examination, old patterns echoed on and the influence of the nuns was still felt in the texture of daily life.

The building itself resonated with memories of past events in the childhood experiences of staff members. It was physically quite unchanged, except for being mostly empty. Some of those children who had cried themselves to sleep in the dorms, had had their hair cut in the now empty haircutting rooms, and had washed in the hated communal showers, were now the CCWs who took care of the children I met, trying

to avoid the remembered abuses but in many ways following the patterns that they had grown up with.

One example was the lack of affection and personal commitment to individual children. There were several glowing exceptions, a young male CCW in particular, but most of the staff treated the job as a set of tasks to be done, rules to be enforced, and time to be put in, and did not appear to be very personally involved with the children. Several CCWs, as a matter of fact, were blatantly irresponsible; these came to work late, inebriated, or not at all. One need a number of children identified was for a 'trust bond', or for CCWs who cared more.

Another example was the absence of Native culture; though all the children (but one), and all the staff were Native, there was no Native drumming, dancing, singing, meditations, story-telling, handicrafts, outdoor activities, nor encouragement to speak the language. I heard it spoken only a few times in the hostel by staff persons, never by children. There did not appear to be a policy against these sorts of activities, which had been overtly forbidden prior to the Native administration, yet their absence was as total as if the nuns had still been there.

Separation from families and the home communities was still deeply felt. Many families requested that their children return home in the middle of the school year, or kept them home after the Christmas visit. While at the hostel, the children had difficulty making phone calls home because of skimpy allowances (which were usually spent on cigarettes); the families often could not afford calls. There was no encouragement for children to write home, and in any case, many of the parents would not have been able to read letters. Neither school staff nor CCWs made a practice of communicating with the families.

The children generally were at home for only a couple of weeks at Christmas, and the two summer months, thus missing the vital fall hunting and winter trapping activities. There was thus a break in family relationships and skill-building activities. This was not as extreme as in the old days when children might not see home for fifteen years at a stretch, but still a significant separation in formative years.

There was lip service given to rigid schedules, with definite times set for church attendance, meal times, showers, homework, weekly cleanup, dishwashing, free time, curfew and 'lights out'. Especially among the girls' staff, it was expected that these be adhered to; reprimands were quick and public. I heard girls being screamed at in the halls, and once the youngest girl was screamed at and told to go to her room in the midst of all of the other children in the dining room, because she hadn't finished her meal. Girls were frequently grounded or lost privileges.

Despite the talk about expectations and the noisy, angry reprimands, the reality was that this mostly was noticeable when a particular shift was

on duty, headed by the oldest CCW and a younger one who said she'd spent the longest with the nuns and was the only one who really knew how to run the place. Even when they were on duty, there was a lot of quiet subversion of the rules, such as children failing to turn up for meals, or going AWOL in town. When other shifts were on, things were much more lax, especially when the CCWs themselves were absent or in a bad frame of mind.

Among the boys' staff, much less attention was paid to the rules, but there seemed to be a much better sense of caring. The head male CCW was burning himself out trying to keep an eye on the boys' well-being, even when off-shift. The most senior boy was extremely attentive to the younger ones and consciously tried to be a positive role model. But some other male staff did the bare minimum, and the boys' physical and recreational needs were not being met.

The first impression, therefore, was of a great deal of value being placed on routines and regulations, but further observation revealed that these were not effectively put into practice. There seemed to be an uncomfortable interaction between the values the nuns had inculcated, and the ability to carry out the nuns' practices, especially as there was universal rejection of the kind of inhumane punishments the nuns had used to enforce the system. Neglect, rather than abuse, seemed to be the actual outcome.

An unfamiliar diet was another item of general similarity between modern hostel life and life under the nuns. Then, and now, the menus were set according to external standards that did not take into account the type of diet the children are accustomed to. In the old days, fish, beans and cabbage seemed to predominate, being cheap and available. The fish came from local sources; the vegetables were grown on Church land with labour provided by the children (Cooke and Piche 1984:25; Native Informants 1987). In 1987 the menus followed Southern patterns, with moderate meat portions and lots of vegetables (however, milk was rarely provided and white bread always).

In the outlying camps and settlements, Native people ate (and still eat) an almost entirely meat diet, the meat being mostly from wild game such as moose; little else was eaten except bannock. As the meat was from animals that browsed freely and almost the entire animal was consumed, the wild meat diet has been found to provide adequate vitamins and other nutrients (Carson 1989:Personal Communication; Young 1988:67-68). At the hostel, the abrupt change to a different diet was and is a difficult transition, and the children I observed sometimes ate the meat and the least nutritious parts of the meal, leaving the vegetables aside.

Another similarity between the church and Native administrations was the general form of organizational structure. These children came

from communities where people organized themselves in a fairly egalitarian way, using a consensual mode of decision-making and problem-solving. In contrast to this, the mode of the hostel was, under both administrations, hierarchical. Children have always been in a powerless position, ranking lowest and answering to support staff and CCWs. The CCWs were organized in two groups under male and female CCWs, who in turn answered to the Administrator, who answered to an Education Committee of the Council of Chiefs. There was no mechanism for inclusion of ideas or shared problem-solving between levels in the hierarchy (Native Informants 1987).

In summary, the children were 'warehoused' in an institutional setting where the rules and the physical environment were much the same as under the nuns. The children were low-key and compliant except for occasional acts of resistance and intermittent episodes of curfew-breaking, drinking and getting into trouble. The staff, although Native, operated within a set of rules and expectations that were not in accord with Native customs or traditions; patterns that they were familiar with but were unable to enforce consistently.

MAKING SENSE

The conundrum in this situation was that with Native staff and administration, the children remained isolated from their families and native culture, lacked personal support, developmental and recreational activities, were poorly taken care of in terms of diet and other personal needs, and had to operate within a very 'White' organizational structure. These problems were in less extreme form than in the old days, but they did continue; a qualitative change in the style of care-giving had not taken place.

The cultural programs that were attempted years ago when the running of the hostel first passed into Native hands did not have a long-term impact on patterns of life in the hostel. It seems that the Society members burned themselves out attempting too much too fast, and did not have the needed management skills for running a large institution. Also, the cultural content was almost always outside the actual hostel setting, at the land-skills camps, so it was not incorporated into hostel activities or routines. Inclusion of elders and visiting families in the hostel was tried for only a brief time, and did not alter hostel life in any positive significant way (Native Informants 1987). One factor in the lack of provision of supportive, positive child care was lack of training in basic parenting skills and the principles of institutional child care. Staff members themselves almost all recognized this lack, and a number of them

were eager for training. Some suggested in-house workshops, and training programs as part of a training plan that could give them an opportunity for certification.

Some of those who did not show as much enthusiasm were able to identify problems the children were experiencing but were not personally committed to child care as a career. The practice of hiring almost any Native person for the town who happened to be looking for work at the time when positions were open led to the involvement of people who did not have any real interest in the job except as a form of employment. Some of those people had severe personal problems, and were unable to function adequately on the job. Many people identified the need for counselling and support programs for the CCWs themselves, as well as for the children.

It seemed likely that one very powerful influence in this continuing process was the early socialization experienced by the care-givers and administrators themselves. Even though the experiences in the old days were described by many informants as traumatic, they constituted the only model of institutional child care in the awareness of the local Native people, and for a few, their only home life. Of course there were no models for this form of child care in Native traditions.

The institutional patterns may have been all the more vividly seared into their minds due to 'brainwashing' effects. Religious cults achieve brainwashing by abrupt changes in living conditions, separation from familiar sources of personal support such as family, community and friends, and deprivation along with, or prior to, introduction of new values and beliefs, validated by authority figures. Certainly all of these things operated in the old days, and frequent admonishments that priests and nuns were "next to God" (as several informants related) must have given added psychological weight to the assumed validity of the value system and practices encountered by those institutionalized children.

It is accepted in the child abuse literature that there is a tendency for abused persons to abuse their own children in turn, despite conscious intentions (in many cases) to avoid passing these behaviours on the next generation. Although this was not a family situation, it was a familiar one to the CCWs and childhood memories run deep in the behavioural patterns we bring into similar situations as adults. The same is true for parents who were neglected as well as those who were abused as children. It would not be surprising for that mechanism to have been operating at the hostel.

So the hostel *was* haunted. The nuns were still there, in the memories and psyches of the grown-up children they had supervised. The unchanging sights, smells and sounds of the place evoked the past.

In 1987 there seemed to be an honest and strong recognition that hostel life entailed problems for the children. Only one staff member really resisted the review process; a few took little initiative to be involved, but co-operated if meetings were called, or if I took the lead to find them. Many told me of their own stories of hostel life with deep emotion, and appeared to have genuine concern about the situation. A number of CCWs were conscientious about doing the job as they knew it, and were disturbed by the impact of problems the others were having. A few really went out of their way to be affectionate and supportive with the children.

But the structure remained largely unchanged, both the physical structure of that huge, half-empty building, and the structure of the rules, routines and organization. Probably some of the nuns also had been kind and had held out the hand of friendship in whatever ways they could. But neither they nor the Native staff were able to break out of that restrictive framework.

The bones of the ancestors had been disturbed and babies' cries were heard in the dark. In the haunted hostel, memories of the nuns shaped the ordering of the days, and the nights were troubled.

EPILOGUE

The hostel has been closed down permanently. The children are in boarding arrangements with families in town. A worker keeps in contact with them to help iron out any problems they may be experiencing. The number of children being sent to town for schooling has increased somewhat (Native Informants 1987), but no thorough study has yet been done to assess the safety and well-being of the children in this new arrangement. An informant with the Council has said that it is felt that the boarding system is better for the children than the hostel was.

CONCLUSION

Raising children in institutional settings is problematic in itself; such places cannot duplicate family living. However, imaginative ways of setting up family-like groupings with 'house parents' could conceivably have been worked out at the hostel.

Several factors mitigated against this: almost all of the staff had lived in the hostel as children, so had been socialized and influenced by nuns, who in turn had brought their convent experiences into the situation; the claim that violent abuse was no longer taking place tended to obscure the

reality that little qualitative change had taken place in the daily life of hostel children; with no traditions in the Native culture for housing large numbers of children away from their families, the only available model tended to be followed in its overall pattern if not in every detail; staff members were often hired by availability rather than by demonstrated commitment to, or skills with, the care of children. Therefore, some unsuitable or uncommitted persons were on staff. None of the staff had training or qualifications for the difficult tasks they had been hired to do.

The error made at the time of construction, with the disrespect shown the Native burials, created a permanent problem; the negative feeling about the building itself did not encourage positive creative solutions for living within its walls. The building itself, White in design (as well as paint colour), symbolized in its shiny bareness and divided spaces the emotional aridity of what was known to be possible there.

I believe that creative solutions were never going to be found within those haunted walls and halls. Getting out was necessary; a ceremonial to settle the spiritual disaster would probably bring some peace. Now that the hostel is closed, continuing planning and experimentation may be embarked on around the issues surrounding the education and housing of out-of-town students in that part of the North.

An important lesson to be learned from this (among many others), is the power of places as well as of human interaction. Buildings and environments are evocative and emotionally powerful; they can shape our behaviour by providing scenery and backdrops for familiar performances to be played out.

It is also important for Canadians to realize the immense destruction that the institutionalization of Native children has done to the emotional lives of individuals and families. Roman Catholic nuns were not the real villains here; the Canadian government allowed, encouraged and supported Indian residential schools that were run by Anglicans and other denominations as well as Catholics. These were overtly designed to de-Indianize the Indian. The results of that experience have yet to be dealt with and healed. It is little wonder that problems continued at the hostel. Hopefully the ghosts can be exorcized, the wounds healed and new beginnings made for today's northern Native school children.

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