

No one will be punished

by BRIAN LOCKHART

The recent discovery of a grave site at a formal residential school in British Columbia has sent shock waves across the country.

If the information we have received is indeed correct, over 200 children were buried in unmarked graves near the school.

This practice was apparently common as many of the schools did have nearby graveyards where students were buried in unmarked graves and simply forgotten. Forgotten, that is, by the people who ran the schools. They were not forgotten by their parents, siblings and friends.

The number of students who died while attending residential schools is debated. The lowest estimated figure is around 2,500, with other estimates being as high as 6,000. The official register claims the number is 3,213.

We will never know the true number. Records were not properly kept or later destroyed.

What is known, is that several thousand children who should have never died at all, lost their lives for a number of reasons.

Researching how these children died in such numbers reveals there were several different reasons but almost all the deaths were due to being at a school without adequate facilities.

When you place a bunch of children in a communal setting with inadequate care, you have a situation just waiting for disease to happen. Many of the schools did not have adequate plumbing, ventilation, sewage or medical care. If a communicable disease did make its way to the school, it could spread quickly and with deadly results.

Not everyone who worked at the schools was indifferent. During the 1918 flu epidemic, one school principal in Alberta, in desperation wrote to the Ministry of (what was then) Indian Affairs, saying 'we have no isolation ward and no hospital equipment of any kind. The dead, the dying, and the sick and the convalescent were all together.' He referred to the conditions as 'criminal.'

Around 900 of the students died from tuberculosis, and 150 died from influenza. In most of the other cases, no cause of death is known or recorded.

Can you imagine your child dying, and not being told by the hospital what caused the death? And furthermore, being told not to worry about a funeral because they had already taken care of burial and tossed your child in hole in a vacant lot?

I've read a few other reports from people who had horror stories of being at some of these schools. If the reports are true, there should be some Catholic priests in prison.

Put aside for the moment, the fact that children should have never been forcibly removed from their families in the first place, and concentrate on what happened at these schools.

Of course, not everyone who worked at the schools was a bad person. I'm sure many had their student's best interests at heart and did a good job.

However, some people at these schools should have never been in charge of any institution that housed children.

If some of the more graphic reports available are true, then criminal activity did take place and should be investigated.

This school system did not end all that long ago. A historic plaque outside the B.C. school said that particular school operated until 1977.

If that's the case, there must be quite a few people who worked there that are still alive.

I remember pretty much every teacher that taught at my elementary school. If there was a particular teacher or person working there who abused me, you can bet I would still remember their name and what they looked like.

And I'm sure students who were abused in some of these schools also remember.

Unfortunately, anyone who did commit abuse will never be punished for it.

It's already been years and even if there was a push from a former student who was criminally abused, and tried to do something about it, nothing realistically would happen.

By the time the government formed an inquiry, which they would do, then sub-committees, and steering groups, and advisory groups, and more committees, then held meetings on it, it would be too late.

All that would happen is there would be one of those horrendous conferences, meetings, inquiries, or what you want to call it, where a bunch of people sit around a big table with a name plate and a microphone, and offer their 'findings.'

Then someone would 'take it all under advisement.'

Some crimes do go unpunished.

The chances anyone being held responsible for abusing students at residential schools slipped away a long time ago.