

# Re-Writing/Righting History Through Storytelling: Memory, Identity, and Trauma of Forced Child Removal in Contemporary Indigenous Fiction

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J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Double Major MA Study Programme in English Language and Literature  
(Teaching English and as a Foreign Language) and Pedagogy

Tajana Marinović

**Re-Writing/Righting History through Storytelling:  
Memory, Identity, and Trauma of Forced Child Removal in  
Contemporary Indigenous Prose**

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Sanja Runtić, Full Professor

Osijek, 2020

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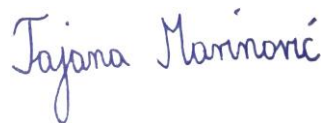
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## **Abstract**

The history of American Indian boarding schools had been mostly unknown until a few decades ago. A recent upsurge of writings on this topic across the United States of America and Canada has brought to light the inside perspective, making the damaging effects of the cultural reprogramming through education that affected thousands of Indigenous children for over a century visible and clear. This thesis explores the issues of alienation, trauma, memory, and identity crisis resulting from the forced removal of Indigenous children and their exposure to mainstream education in off-reservation boarding schools during their formative years. It analyses Debby Dahl Edwardson's novel *My Name is Not Easy* (2011) and three nonfictional texts – K. Tsianina Lomawaima's *They Called It Prairie Light* (1994), Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton's memoir *Fatty Legs* (2010), and Laura Tohe's *No Parole Today* (1999). All of these texts re-write/right the history of the boarding-school era by emphasizing the assimilation policy as the central component of Indian residential schools' programme. They reveal not only the negative but also the positive side of the students' experience as well as the fact that these schools frequently became sites of resistance and resilience in which the disciplinarians' rules were subverted and Native identity maintained through students' mutual support, friendship, and solidarity. Although the students sometimes managed to claim the power of the boarding schools for themselves and even though, despite the government's efforts to destroy their connections to the tribal communities, many of them returned from school even stronger and with the knowledge of many new skills, effects of the boarding-school trauma and discrimination are felt even today as the lingering issues of depression, suicide, and substance abuse continue to plague Native communities. The final part of this paper looks into those issues and explores the possibility to alleviate them by incorporating cross-cultural knowledge and Indigenous teaching methods in contemporary mainstream school curricula.

*Keywords:* Native American boarding schools, *They Called It Prairie Light*, *Fatty Legs*, *No Parole Today*, *My Name is Not Easy*, Native American children, identity, memory, Indigenous education, resistance



## Introduction

Four decades ago, not much was known about Native American traumatic boarding-school experience. At the end of the twentieth century, many authors started writing about Native American boarding schools, especially the authors whose ancestors attended boarding schools or who attended boarding schools themselves. Their works provide an insight into American Indian boarding-schools – government or church-operated educational programs that affected every Native American child in the period between the 1860s and the 1970s.

The theoretical part of this paper explains the organisation and the reasons behind the establishment of the boarding schools. It also brings to light the trauma and memories Native American students experienced in boarding schools. Their memories emphasize the importance of friendship, culture, and identity.

One of the books analysed in this paper is *They Called It Prairie Light* (1994) by K. Tsianina Lomawaima, which consists of interviews with former students of Chilocco Indian Agricultural School. Lomawaima demonstrates how students resisted the school program in many different ways. Former students who were interviewed recall their experiences at Chilocco that are quite positive because every student of Chilocco left the school with at least one important lesson. By following the stories of former students, Lomawaima came to a conclusion that Chilocco was an Indian school because those students made it their own. Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton's memoir *Fatty Legs* (2010) emphasizes the importance of believing in Native identity and strength within oneself. The main protagonist, Olemaun (Margaret), shares her story of attending a boarding school in Canada at a young age. Her story is filled with many negative experiences, but it also emphasizes the power of her spirit that helped Margaret teach her disciplinarians a lesson. The other two books analysed in this paper, Debby Dahl Edwardson's *My Name is Not Easy* (2011) and Laura Tohe's *No Parole Today* (1999), also bring to light the power of students in boarding schools who resisted even when they obeyed the rules, no matter how ironically that sounds. All of these books are testimonials to the history of Native American boarding schools that must not be forgotten.

The concluding chapter describes the effects of the boarding-school era that are visible in today's Native American communities. Although these boarding-school programs are now part of history, this does not mean that they did not leave any scars and trauma among Native American people. This paper argues that in order to help the descendants of boarding-school

generations, today's schools need to improve their curricula with programs and projects that include Native American culture as an educational component equally important to both Native and non-Native students.

# 1. Native American Society

## 1.1. Native American Traditions

Every family or community has certain beliefs and values which have a great impact on everything in its everyday life. Native Americans deeply cherish their traditions, which represent a strong connection to their ancestors. The tradition of *pow wows* is a great way for the whole tribe and community to celebrate something important in their lives, but also to celebrate their families and their culture (Alvarez Kleinsmith). One of the most important dances in Native American culture is the *stomp dance*. The dance is called stomp because the dancers are moving in a circular way around a fire stomping (Alvarez Kleinsmith). The dance is usually danced during the crop season, when the dancers pray to their spirits so they can have a good crop season, but also thank the Earth on the gifts they are given, such as the sun and water. Alongside different types of celebration and dances, Native Americans also have rituals which include singing and celebrating women (Alvarez Kleinsmith). Every ritual is performed in the form of a prayer, which shows their strong connection to their religion. Every part of Native American culture portrays the identities of Native Americans and their unique way of living and respecting nature. Native Americans assume that “nature has a delicate balance” which people cannot control, so they need to be in harmony with nature through their rituals, which in turn contributes to natural harmony (Toelker 21). According to McPherson, “Unlike most Anglo-Americans, who separate themselves from a world they divide into animate and inanimate objects, the Indian worldview sees the land as an interconnected whole – with rocks, trees, animals, water, clouds, and a host of other participants in a circle of life. Human relationships exist with non-human entities, bonded by a mutual respect for the role each plays as a part of nature” (4). Alaska Natives, for example, show “a sophisticated understanding of interrelationships among natural phenomena, an ecological perspective” which represents their respect for nature and everything nature provides them with (Ross 197).

Native American tribal ceremonies are considered sacred, and the participants in rituals are considered sacred beings (Talamantez 341). Dance rituals are considered to be really important in Native cultures because they show their gratitude by dancing, but they also send prayers to their spirits through dancing. Some of the participants of dance rituals among the Tao tribe believe that the world will come to an end if they do not dance (Talamantez 343), which reflects their great respect towards the natural world. Since outsiders are not too

familiar with different rituals among Native American tribes, Native Americans are often discriminated because of their different beliefs. Women in Native American cultures who perform in certain ceremonies and dream about those ceremonies are considered to be “especially knowledgeable” (Talamantez 345). Through different ceremonies girls and young women are believed to become goddesses through the “unity of divinity and humanity” (Talamantez 345). Every ceremony celebrates life and empowers people’s desire and will to fight and survive. Songs that are sung during certain rituals represent prayers just like dances. Native Americans strongly emphasize the importance of community, so every dance includes a great number of people dancing, but also watching: “This process of working together within the group implies a knowledge of the conventions and aspirations of the group as it expresses itself in terms of the community and it often exemplifies the group’s vision of the future” (Talamantez 353).

Native American rituals represent their reverence of spirits, which is the essential part of their religion. They highly respect spirits of their community members and pray for each other when they are struggling in life. Native American people respect their community members because they are all part of one big family: “For many Native people, whether the issues revolve around our personal well-being or the well-being and continuance of our peoples, our distinct and evolving spiritual traditions remain the base of what we do as conscious human beings” (Hernandez-Avila 349). They show their respect towards other tribes both for the strength and beauty of certain traditions and different kinds of pain throughout history (Hernandez-Avila 349). By honouring the spirits of every community member, they honour the wisdom and authority of both women and men (Hernandez-Avila 349). Native Americans live in “a world of storied experience” and “in conversation with the spiritual” (Ridington 468). Therefore, they are quite shocked when people who do not understand their culture regard their spirituality as primitive (Ridington 469). In addition, Native Americans resent being interrupted by someone who does not understand the importance of silence in their narrative (Ridington 468). Since communication and storytelling are important parts of living in a tribe, Native Americans’ culture and their tribal world are brought “into being through discourse” (Ridington 468). In that sense, discourse imparts the essence of Native spirituality (Ridington 469).

## 1.2. Traditional Native Education and Upbringing

According to Trafzer et al., “Indian people argue that education, schooling, and the pursuit of knowledge have always been part of their lives and cultures” (5). Although the knowledge Native Americans provide for their children was not considered valuable enough, and perhaps still is not, their ways of teaching their children had desirable effects among their communities. In a traditional Native American family, every member of the family had a particular role in imparting knowledge. Knowledge was being imparted through oral tradition and diverse practical instructions by tribal elders, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and storytellers (Trafzer et al. 5). Elder teachers taught children many different subjects, such as botany, geology, geography, dance, art, architecture, music, and astronomy (Trafzer et al. 5). Consequently, “Traditional American Indian settings continue to emphasize the importance of elders as the keepers of sacred ways, protectors, mentors, teachers and supporters” (Robbins et al. 78). Native Americans are known to be good listeners, so through listening to members of different tribes and communities they learned from each other (Trafzer et al. 5). The relationship between tribal elders and children is respectful, and elders always place the emphasis on the importance of relationship, and not on the domination (Robbins et al. 78). Native Americans’ willingness to always learn something new has encouraged them to adapt to new surroundings, to grow, and to expand their “ways of knowing” (Trafzer et al. 5). Among Native Americans, “children are rarely discouraged from testing the limits of their physical ability ties,” and by constantly testing those limits, children “learn their own capacities for pain and endurance,” which surely helped them while attending boarding schools (Stern 507). Traditionally, Native Americans did not keep their knowledge to themselves; they shared it with other tribes and clans (Trafzer et al. 5). Their knowledge and diverse experiences worked well for them since they lived and survived according to their ways, without any help of non-Indian newcomers (Trafzer et al. 5).

Each Native group developed a “body of sacred and practical knowledge” that formed the foundation of their culture (Trafzer et al. 5). Oral tradition handed down from generation to generation is an important way of teaching children in Native American cultures. Through oral tradition, children learn about the creation of their tribe, the laws according to which they would live, and the “governance of families, clans, moieties, and tribes” (Trafzer et al. 5). Traditionally, Native American children’s first teachers were members of their family who taught them many different skills: “A Native American child reared traditionally is virtually never alone, and this provides a living sense of being part of a larger and more important

group” (Toelken 21). Men of the family, including grandfathers, fathers, and uncles, taught boys how to, for example, track, hunt, and clean different types of wild animals (Trafzer et al. 5-6). On the other hand, women in the family, that is, mothers, grandmothers, and aunts, taught girls how to till the soil and grow a host of “nutritious and unique American” crops, including tomatoes, corn, avocados, potatoes, and many other different types of vegetables (Trafzer et al. 6). The adult members of the family taught children how to make medicine out of various plants, how to prepare animals for food, but also how to build themselves a house of their own and how to cherish life by praying, singing, and dancing (Trafzer et al. 6).

“In the cold winter months when winds blew snow and freezing weather, the children gathered their blankets around a fire and prepared to listen and learn” (Trafzer et al. 6). After elders gave lessons for a certain amount of time, they stopped with their lessons and asked one of the children to repeat the story to determine if a child had acquired a certain type of knowledge (Trafzer et al. 6). The previous example of teaching children among Native American communities shows that their ways of teaching their children are similar to the contemporary ways of teaching. In contemporary education, students are also asked to demonstrate their knowledge through an oral presentation or through a written task after lessons have been delivered in class. However, elders in Native families also used storytelling as an educational tool, telling different stories to younger generations in order to help them better understand the “philosophy and values” of their tribes (Meisch 6). Children learned many important lessons through oral tradition until the arrival of “non-Native educational institutions that rapidly and widely influenced Indian education” (Trafzer et al. 6).



## 2. The Boarding Schools

### 2.1. The History of Native American Boarding Schools

The boarding-school system had appeared in the colonial period of American history (Trafzer et al. 4). The first Indian boarding school was created in Cuba in 1568 (Trafzer et al. 4). Before any other nation, the Spanish nation viewed Indians as uncivilized people, that is, savages. Based on “facts” provided by a Spanish priest, “one Spanish soldier reported that Indian people were ‘stupid and silly’ and had no respect for truth” (qtd. in Trafzer et al. 4), which was far from accurate. Indians were viewed as people who were incapable of learning, and according to the opinions of white society, they were in desperate need to be educated and civilized. Every European ethnic group, especially Spaniards, thought of itself as superior over Native Americans (Indians): “This view of European superiority and Native American inferiority set the stage for the first Spanish boarding school for Indians and others that would follow” (Trafzer et al. 4). Spaniards and other Europeans assumed incorrectly that Native Americans had no systems of education, no religions, no methods and techniques to advance knowledge, and also no effective ways of teaching their children (Trafzer et al. 4). Native Americans were largely portrayed as a coherent race, not as individuals (Ruffing Robbins 149). However, these assumptions were entirely at fault since Native American children were much more educated about life and were respected as important parts of their community before they entered boarding schools.

At the time the first boarding school in Cuba appeared, Roman Catholic orders established missions with a goal of converting “Native neophytes” to Christianity by separating children from their families both physically and geographically (Trafzer et al. 7). The priests of Roman Catholic Church established schools within the missions in which they “indoctrinated young neophytes” into new ways of thinking, believing, and acting, that is, new ways of living (Trafzer et al. 7). After Spaniards founded their first boarding school, many European countries followed in their steps, including France, Russia, and Great Britain. After the French established Quebec in 1608, Jesuit priests also followed the pattern of assimilating Native American children into the Catholic faith and white society (Trafzer et al. 7). This became “a well-established pattern during the colonial period” (Trafzer et al. 7). Dr. Eleazer Wheelock, headmaster of the Moors Charity School established in 1754 (today’s Dartmouth College), removed Native American children from their families and homes so they could go to boarding schools where they would be isolated in order to better assimilate

with “civilized” Anglo-American children (Trafzer et al. 7). Boarding schools established by Catholic missionaries “represented the first assimilative attempts to remove Indian tribes from their tribal and family members” in order to educate them in their own ways so that they could be a part of the lowest society class among Anglo-Americans (Deyhle and Swisher 114). According to Trafzer et al., “Christianization and civilization through education became the foundation of Indian education as conceived by non-Indian policy makers in the United States and Canada” (8). American presidents Washington and Jefferson believed that full assimilation of Indians into white (Anglo-American) society was inevitable (Trafzer et al. 7-8). Native Americans were considered to be useful only if they received low-level training in “agriculture, mechanics and domestic skills,” so that they could work in the lowest positions within white society (Trafzer et al. 9). In addition, the boarding-school system enabled the federal government and missionaries to take Native American children away from everything that connected them to their native ways of living in a slightest way (Meisch 1).

During the late eighteenth century, many different tribes, such as the Cherokees, Choctaws and Seminoles, developed their own public schools in which their Native children could be educated (Trafzer et al. 9). In Native American schools, children learned how to read and write in their native languages. Native American tribes controlled their system of education in 1818, when government officials decided that they wanted to control the education of Native American children. Anglo-American reformers believed that Native American children could become useful if educated in a specific manner:

Reformers within the House Committee on Indian Affairs urged their fellow lawmakers to put into the hands of their [Indians’] children the primer and the hoe, and they will naturally, in time, take hold of the plough; and, as their minds become enlightened and expand, the Bible will be their book, and they will grow up in habits of morality and industry, leave the chase to those whose minds are less cultivated, and become useful members of society. (Trafzer et al. 9)

On March 3, 1819, the Indian Civilization Act was passed by the Congress. Under the terms of the Indian Civilization Act, federal government had the right to remove Native American children from their tribes and families in order to educate them to be more civilized and useful as members of the Anglo-American society (Trafzer et al. 10). Many boarding schools were under the control of the federal government and the Catholic Church because they were mission schools. Both members of the Catholic Church and the federal government aimed to solve the “Indian problem” by implementing Native American boarding-school education

(Trafzer et al. 10). By the year 1824, there were twenty-one Indian boarding schools in the United States, mostly “operated by Christian missionaries,” with an enrolment of eight hundred students (Trafzer et al. 10). Anglo-Americans conceived of Native American families as unstructured, permissive, and negligent, so the school administrators were eager to put “discipline, order and precision into the lives of every Native pupil” no matter his/her age, personal differences, and physical deficiencies (Trafzer et al. 18).

Commissioner of Education, John Eaton Jr., suggested that Indian boarding schools primarily focus on agricultural and vocational training alongside basic academic subjects such as reading, writing, and simple arithmetic (Trafzer et al. 12). Eaton believed that Native American children were not “inferior in intelligence” and that they could learn some useful lessons inside a boarding school, which they could later on share with their tribal elders when they returned to their families (Trafzer et al. 13).

Captain Richard Henry Pratt agreed with Eaton only to some degree. He agreed with the idea of Native American children being put in a boarding school, but he did not agree with the idea that they are capable of grasping any intellectual ideas. Pratt said that it was a great mistake to believe that Indians are not born savages in the “surrounding of savagery” where they grow to possess “a savage language, superstition, and life” (Trafzer et al. 13). Pratt’s idea of education of Native American children was to segregate the children from their families and cultures in order to gradually assimilate them into a “white man’s world” in a “controlled fashion” (Trafzer et al. 13). This agenda came to life at his own Carlisle Indian School and “became the fundamental basis of the off-reservation American Indian boarding school system” (Trafzer et al. 13). Pratt’s plan was to replace Indian savage language, primitive superstitions, and uncivilized ways of living with work ethic, Christian values and beliefs, and civilized ways of living in a white man’s society (Trafzer et al. 13). His famous quote: “Kill the Indian, save the man” became the main goal of the missionary boarding schools in order “to civilize Indigenous people in the United States” (Meisch 4).

Ever since the first boarding school was founded, the schooling system involved three main actors (Feir 436). The first actors were the church organizations, mainly the organizations under the leadership of the Catholic Church, and they were the primary sources of the boarding-school funding for a longer period of time (Feir 437). The second actor in the schooling system was the federal government, which also provided some funding, but more importantly, “developed regulations and enforced attendance” (Feir 437). The third actor in the boarding-school system were the parents and the families of children who attended

boarding schools, whether they sent their children to a boarding school voluntarily or under the pressure of the government (Feir 437).

## **2.2. Children within Boarding Schools**

After many boarding schools followed the path of Captain Richard Henry Pratt, a new goal was set for Indian education. Not only were Indian students exposed to English language in order to learn basic academic skills but they were also forced “into domestic sciences, trades, and agriculture, fields that whites believed would make Indian students useful” (Trafzer et al. 16). Alongside taking away their country, the government was forcefully taking away Native American children from their families, which resulted in parents and families being quite furious because their children were far away from them and from their natural state of being (Trafzer et al. 16). Drawing on common stereotypes of Native Americans as “child-like figures in need of white guidance” to become civilized and properly educated (Ruffing Robbins 156), the goal of every Indian boarding school operated by the federal government and Christian missions was to “strip American Indian children of their language, customs and religion, and prepare them for menial jobs in mainstream society” (Surface-Evans 574).

A great number of children had suffered separation anxiety when they left their homes and went alone into the unknown. The children missed everything. They missed their parents, grandparents, siblings, their homelands, their different kinds of food, but above all, they missed their native languages and traditions, which were a strong part of their identities (Trafzer et al. 16). However, some students actually grew to like their boarding schools because of all the valuable lessons they had learned there (Trafzer et al. 16). Besides, many students were not able to adjust to their “old life” after they had finished or abandoned the boarding school. Since the students had spent a lot of their time attending the boarding school, they lacked language skills in their native language, they had different ideas about the world, had mixed religious beliefs, and as a result, they were not fully accepted into their tribes (Trafzer et al. 16). In some cases, students criticized their families and relatives’ ways of living because they did not have basic sanitation facilities, did not eat enough of the nutritious food, or did not have a nice piece of furniture (Trafzer et al. 16). In many different ways, “the boarding school experience changed the lives of thousands of American Indian children” (Trafzer et al. 17). Many former students of different Indian boarding schools stressed that boarding schools did not even try “to understand Indian communities, culture or learning

styles” (Robbins et al. 70). One of the former students of an Indian boarding school, Mary Crow Dog, said that boarding schools were a curse on many Native American families for generations since they contributed to losses in culture, language, community roles, relationships, and many other traditional practices (Meisch 7).

As soon as the children left their tribes and families, white society began the process of transforming them from “savages” to “civilized” humans, and the children became aware of those intentions as soon as they entered a boarding school, an “institution designed to assimilate Indian children” (Trafzer et al. 17). The first thing Native American children faced when they entered the boarding school was the process of stripping them of their identity. School superintendents, matrons, and even teachers stripped the children and took their jewelry, clothing, blankets, and ornaments – everything that was in a slightest way a part of their culture (Trafzer et al. 17). They cut their hair because they thought it was too long, filthy, and full of bugs (Trafzer et al. 17). Before the children even figured out how to act in such an unknown and strange place, “the process of taking away the child’s outward appearance as an Indian person” had already begun (Trafzer et al 17). The process of stripping Native American children of their identity by assimilating them into a world where they were all required to be the same and to do what they were told was humiliating and disrespectful. As soon as Indian children were dressed in their school (military) uniforms, they learned to live a life according to strict rules such as responding to bells and whistles (Trafzer et al. 17). Although “the outward transformation occurred immediately as Indian children lost their clothing and hair,” the reconstruction of their identity was a much more complicated task for the school officials which often proved impossible to achieve (Trafzer et al. 17).

Children attending boarding schools were subject “to the repression of any previous cultural ties such as their names, languages and religion” (Martinez 200). Pratt argued that Indians needed a civilized name in order to function properly in a white man’s society, so children were forced to change their native names by selecting one from “among several Judeo-Christian names for males and females” (Trafzer et al. 15). Military-style training and various kinds of corporal punishment were routine in Native American boarding schools (Martinez 200).

### **3. The Organization of Native American Boarding Schools**

#### **3.1. The Boarding-School Classes**

Every boarding school had a similar program. The emphasis of the education in boarding schools was on the acquisition of basic academic skills and vocational training in different professions, usually concerning agriculture. Students usually spent half of their day learning and doing academic work, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, and the other half of the day they would spend learning various trades and “working for the benefit of the school” (Trafzer et al. 25). The curricula at the boarding schools were directed towards developing skills in domestic work, which were not really useful and applicable to a life in a reservation (Meisch 6). Moreover, according to Simonsen, “unpaid domestic work, no matter how Christian and moral, had no value in the marketplace and therefore failed not only Native Americans, but the ‘civilizers’ themselves” (226-27). Although the reformers wanted to educate Native American children to become proficient servants for Anglo-American society and to learn the value of money by selling their hand-made products, Native Americans were often trained only in skills the school needed to persist. By doing that, the reformers moved away from the main goal of boarding schools, leaving Native American children educated in even less useful skills and leaving white society without proficient low-class servants and income providers.

Boarding schools were against tribal ways of teaching children different lessons, so they did not allow a “community-oriented” education to happen inside the school (Meisch 6). Native American children were not used to the dominant society’s ways of teaching, so they had to adapt and learn a new, unknown language in order to be able to accomplish something during the process of their “education.” Curricula of many boarding schools “conflicted with traditional educations” of Native American children, especially the education about plants, animals, and places, everything that was not a part of boarding school classes (Trafzer et al. 25-26). Even though it occurred in the century of intellectual thinking about domestic science and social evolution, the emphasis of boarding-school education was on commercial capitalism (Simonsen, 226). The government focused on industrial training schools, which failed to provide programs for (Indian) leaders and ensured that the students of boarding schools were being trained for an economy and marketplace that did not and would not exist (Carney 1057).

### **3.2. The Importance of Religion**

One of the main goals of Native American boarding schools was to Christianize Native American children as they were considered to be “little savages.” Many boarding schools were operated by the Catholic Church, so the teachers were nuns and priests. Those teachers highly emphasized the importance of religion in educating Native American children. Before every class, students said the prayers they had never heard of before they entered boarding schools. Students who were respecting the rules of the school and who were doing everything they were told to, were considered God’s children. Their teachers (priests and nuns) told them that, as a result of their good behaviour, there would be a place in heaven for them, although many of those children were still, in secret, cherishing their own religions and praying to the spirits of their ancestors. The use of native languages by children in boarding schools was highly forbidden, and it was punished (Deyhle and Swisher 115) because only English language was considered to be God’s language.

Some boarding schools emphasized the importance of religion more than other schools. One of those schools was St. Boniface Indian School, which was completely directed towards living by the rules of the Catholic religion. Before every class, the nuns, who were also the teachers, pointed students to look towards the cross inside the classroom and give their prayers to the cross (Rathbun 155). Their prayers were followed by a signal, the ringing of a bell or a whistle, upon which they faced the American flag and saluted it (Rathbun 155-56). Before every kind of activity, the students were given commands and signals, so they would know what they had to do. The commands in this particular school were given by nuns and priests (Rathbun 155): “Students prayed upon awaking, before breakfast, during classes, and at lunch and dinner. As the sun set each night over the mountains and hills to the west, nuns forced students to remain silent in observance of the bells for St. Angelus” (Rathbun 156).

Priests and nuns from across America came to St. Boniface “with the intention of furthering the Christian faith among the Indian people of southern California and civilizing their ‘heathen’ charges” (Rathbun 156). The officials (priests and nuns) who operated St. Boniface viewed Native American people as “primitive Christians with heathen or unorthodox beliefs and practices,” and they believed that Native Americans needed their help to become civilized and good Christians (Rathbun 159). The boarding schools under the operation of Catholic missionaries, such as St. Boniface, viewed Native American children and their people as ignorant people who “stood in the way of (Christian) light” (Rathbun 159). Unlike the other boarding schools, where students had to attend religious services at least on

Sundays, the priests at St. Boniface performed mass every day before breakfast throughout the week (Rathbun 160): “Children had to line up in front of the church and await at the priest’s invitation to enter. Once inside, nuns forced boys and girls to sit on separate sides of the church” (Rathbun 160).

Some students enjoyed following the rules of the Catholic religion, but many students disliked “mass and the layers of religious education at St. Boniface” (Rathbun 161). Native American children were treated like “neophytes at a Spanish mission” who were expected to do all the daily work in order to maintain the mission’s population, but also to make improvements to maintain the mission’s stature as “a showplace for God” (Rathbun 165). Neither the Indian nor the non-Indian students of St. Boniface appreciated the central theme of the school – “to root out and threaten children with sin and damnation” for each kind of disobedience (Rathbun 171). Many boarding schools operated by priests and nuns viewed every violation of the school’s rules as a sin, and those “sinful” children were strictly punished.

### **3.3. Gender Roles**

The separation between boys and girls in every boarding school was of great importance. Boys had more free time, and they could spend it without constant surveillance, unlike girls. Girls were always monitored by nuns and matrons to prevent them from acting improperly. Accordingly, the lives of female students and male students at boarding schools differed a lot. In St. Boniface Boarding School, the separation was even stricter since it was operated by the Catholic Church. Since priests and nuns did not pay that much attention to boys as they did to girls, boys “often fell in with the wrong crowd” (Rathbun 168). In addition, male students had the chance to “serve the church officially as altar boys and acolytes,” but girls were not allowed to serve in either capacity, which mirrored the gender gap imposed by the Roman Catholic Church worldwide (Rathbun 162).

The priests wanted to enforce moral behaviour between boys and girls, even among children of primary-school age (Rathbun 168). During the Spanish missions in California, priests and nuns placed boys and girls in different buildings of the school property. Girls between the ages of twelve and eighteen were placed “in a dormitory called *monjario*,” which was dark, dirty, and full of different kinds of bacteria and viruses, which caused the deaths of hundreds of young Indian girls (Rathbun 168). Separate living areas for female and male



students were created, so boys and girls could not be in any kind of close contact. Girls at St. Boniface School had a separate dormitory building and a play area surrounded by a huge concrete wall, so the nuns could easily watch every step made by every girl (Rathbun 168-69). Male and female students were forced to occupy entirely separate and different worlds (Rathbun 169). Boys and girls rarely saw each other since the girls were under constant surveillance of the nuns. The boys even had the chance to resist and disobey some of the school rules since they were not constantly controlled. The girls played in “a separate playground behind a block wall, sometimes trying to sing loud enough for the boys to hear” (Rathbun 169). Girls were occupied with many different chores, which kept them in the kitchen, the laundry room, or the sewing room, where their improprieties were continually corrected by the nuns (Rathbun 169).

The career skills learned by both girls and boys were out of date and prepared them for only “low-status and menial jobs” in the white man’s society (Surface-Evans 577). In every Native American boarding school, girls were trained in domestic science (sewing, nursing, cooking, doing laundry), so that they could work as domestic servants in Anglo-American society (Surface-Evans 577). The position of women in different tribes from which the female students came was quite different and diverse unlike the position of young women at boarding schools. For example, in the Anishinaabe communities, from which many MIIBS (Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School) students came, women of the tribes kept their own councils and “were keepers of traditional knowledge and lands associated with wild rice harvesting” (Surface-Evans 579). Unlike the girls at MIIBS, boys had a lot more freedom, which they enjoyed by roaming around the school grounds and hunting and fishing in the forest near the school (Surface-Evans 583). According to Surface-Evans, “spatial distinction between male and female students . . . was a symbolic representation of the subordinate role of females within Western society and yet another expression of patriarchal colonization” (583). Boys at Bethel school, Alaska, which did not have rules as strict as other boarding schools in the United States of America, learned “home building, sled and net making, fish canning . . . and the fashioning of lassos for reindeer” (Ducker 75). Just like in other boarding schools, girls acquired knowledge in sewing, baking, washing and other domestic skills (Ducker 75).

The “cult of true womanhood,” dating back to Martin Luther, defined good women with characteristic traits of “purity, piety, obedience, domesticity, selflessness, sacrifice, personal cleanliness, meekness, reverence of motherhood, and dedication to family” (Paxton 177).

Girls at boarding schools were educated to become good mothers and good wives through learning domestic skills. Yet, the schools did not educate them in domestic skills to share that knowledge with their own families at home, but to become proficient house servants for Anglo-American families. Estelle Reel, Superintendent of Education for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, declared that Indian girls should become proficient in domestic skills, such as sewing, cooking, and doing laundry, before allowing them to practice playing an expensive instrument such as the piano, which they will probably never own (qtd. in Paxton 179). Sherman Institute educated girls in skills such as colour schemes, proper arrangement of pictures, and housekeeping, out of which many proved useless for both economic and cultural survival because many students subsequently returned to “socioeconomically depressed government reservations” (Paxton 184).

### **3.4. Rules and Punishments**

Disobeying any of the school rules was strictly punished, so the students would not do the same mistake again. Children were pushed to obey school officials’ instructions both inside the school and outside the school (Trafzer et al. 20): “When students spoke their own languages, lied, used obscene language, fought, stole, destroyed property, acted stubbornly, or misbehaved, teachers, disciplinarians, matrons and superintendents could inflict corporal punishment or imprison the child” (Trafzer et al. 20). Every disobedience of the school rules was considered sinful and viewed as an alienation from the civilized ways of living. As mentioned previously, students at boarding schools suffered harsh punishment for engaging in any form of cultural practices or speaking their native languages (Evans-Campbell 2). Different ways of punishment were inflicted on students in the boarding schools, such as withholding food from them, restricting their privileges, forcing them to mop floors, clean filthy bathrooms, and perform distasteful jobs (Trafzer et al. 20). As a way of punishment, in particular for speaking their native language, teachers made students stand in the corner, lie on the floor in front of their classmates, kneel on the floor, and clean the space between bricks with a toothbrush (Trafzer et al. 20).

According to the experience of one of the female students (Martha) at St. Boniface boarding school, punishments for being stubborn and rejecting the commands were quite harsh (Rathbun 161): “The nun slapped Martha for refusing to wash the underwear of other students at the school, so Martha slapped a nun. A priest then whipped her, but she refused to wash any clothing in the school’s laundry” (Rathbun 161). Students’ reports of child abuse

and different forms of neglect were a common issue in many boarding schools (Evans-Campbell 2). Parents of children who went to boarding schools were not aware of the punishments their children received. The previously mentioned student of St. Boniface, Martha, told her parents that she would not return to the school because of the ways she and the other girls were treated there, and her parents transferred her to another school (Rathbun 161). However, many parents were not aware of the punishments their children received because they had no chance of hearing from them. As a result, their children suffered in silence. Priests at St. Boniface boarding school expected their students “to follow a rotating cycle of chores to maintain the school’s population,” including cleaning the dormitories, washing floors and bathrooms, washing clothes and dishes, and taking care of animals on the farm (Rathbun 166). Although some of these jobs were not as explicit as other punishments, they were even worse because the priests used children for manual labour from which they earned money to fund the school.

### **3.5. The Resistance**

Students of Native American boarding schools showed their resistance in many different ways. Their acts of resistance included performing their traditional rituals in secret, hanging out with their crushes when they had the chance to, speaking their native languages in secret, and many other activities which showed the resilience of their identity, which was kept through different forms of resistance. Students of boarding schools “resisted many aspects of the boarding school environment and often defied school officials,” finding innovative and different ways of dealing with arrogant administrators and school officials, abusive rules, and severe punishments (Trafzer et al. 22). The most powerful acts of resistance were the ones that included doing something traditional which was strictly forbidden. When students first came to the school, they often cried and sang songs in their native languages to comfort themselves (Trafzer et al. 22). Also, as soon as they got the chance, students ran off to riverbeds or orchards near the schools, where they danced, drummed, sang, and talked to each other about their tribal lives, “all in their own language” (Trafzer et al. 22). In order to perform their cultural practices, students sometimes hid away from the school and school officials “in order to build fires, smoke tobacco, cook foods, and share in their cultural traditions, thereby preserving their identities as Indian people” (Trafzer et al. 22).

The students gave Indian nicknames to the school employees they disliked the most (Trafzer et al. 22). Students also “cut classes or feigned sick,” pretended to be ignorant when

the school administrators ordered them to do something, or “played pranks on school officials” with the intention of humiliating them in a similar way they humiliated them (Trafzer et al. 22-23). Yet, the best-known act of resistance was running away from the school (Trafzer et al. 22). Many students managed to run away despite the high fences, barbed wires, locked doors, and guards all around the school (Trafzer et al. 23). Even though many students were returned to the school after they had been caught, some of them managed to get away (Trafzer et al. 22). The most common and subtle forms of resistance from the students included refusing to eat the food from the school kitchen, “ingesting toxic substances,” and continuing to speak their native languages (Surface-Evans 584). Forms of resistance among students at boarding schools ranged from small and harmless acts to “extreme and destructive measures” (Surface-Evans 584). Resistance of the students at boarding schools was a result of assimilatory policy which continually produced resistant students as their answer to the school organization and “educational” goals (Deyhle and Swisher 154). Students engaged in many different activities, from innocent plays and pranks to “more politicized acts of cultural solidarity and institutional resistance” (Wallace Adams 56). Throughout all of these activities, they always managed to find ways of making boarding school life quite bearable and sometimes even enjoyable (Wallace Adams 56).

Many students from boarding schools who adjusted to the ways of living in a school with strict rules and who learned different vocational and academic skills “saw redeeming value in the boarding school experience” (Wallace Adams 36). Many children willingly went to the boarding school so they would be able to read and speak in English with the support of their tribal elders, who thought that their children “should learn the white man’s wisdom” (Wallace Adams 38). Resistance of those children who willingly went to the boarding school might not be as powerful as the resistance of the other children, but they also cherished their traditional values while learning many new things at boarding schools. Boarding schools thus became places where the construction of identity was even empowered by disobeying some of the rules and where Indian people proved “both more receptive to learning and more resilient in culturally contextualizing that learning than policy makers ever imagined” (Ellis 66). Becoming good students at a boarding school was also an act of resistance because Native American students proved to their school officials and the federal government that they were capable of learning many different things while not alienating themselves from their traditional values.

## **4. Storytelling in Native American Cultures**

### **4.1. The Power of Storytelling**

Storytelling and oral presentation are of great importance in Native American cultures. Tribal elders tell their children different stories from which they learn many valuable lessons about life, their culture, and their traditions (Meisch 6). Traditionally, Native American children learned through different ways and because of that, learning at boarding schools represented a challenge, but also a struggle for them. Tribal elders had different ways of teaching their children with the emphasis on oral presentation of many important lessons (Trafzer et al. 6).

Storytelling is a practical way of learning about life experiences of one's ancestors among many Indigenous peoples (Iseke 559). According to Iseke, "storytelling provides opportunities to express the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Indigenous languages and nurtures relationships and the sharing of Indigenous knowledges and cultures" (559). Stories shared among Indigenous communities are considered sacred (Iseke 559). Through storytelling and oral traditions, Indigenous peoples have conveyed diverse important lessons from generation to generation (Iseke 559). The stories shared need to be respected because once they are told, stories become more vulnerable and endangered (Iseke 559). As a result, traditional stories convey important cultural messages, which is the key reason why they are shared. Tribal elders share their stories and experiences on the basis of their knowledge and experience collected throughout the years (Iseke 561).

Apart from their educational component, the "oral narratives tell us about the storyteller's past and present, about the storyteller's ideas of community and individual experience" (Bruce 59). In Native American communities, storytellers have a certain amount of responsibility because they are carrying on their "family stories" (Bruce 59). Bruce recalls how one of her Native American students emphasized that the stories they tell about their lives and their ancestors represent them and serve them as a means of sustaining their family and tribal connections (56): "Storytelling helps us face the past and take responsibility for the actions of others who have gone before us. Storytelling frees us to move beyond and to imagine peace in the world" (qtd. in Bruce 59).

## **5. Memory, Identity, and Trauma of Attending Native American Boarding Schools**

### **5.1. *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* by K. Tsianina Lomawaima**

*They Called It Prairie Light* (1994) is a non-fictional account of Chilocco Indian Agricultural School, which educated hundreds of Native American students from across the U.S. Lomawaima “grounds her study in government and school reports and in later secondary sources, but the book is essentially a presentation and interpretation of interviews the author carried out in 1983” (Coleman 572). The school, operated by the federal government, had its own rules students needed to respect and follow. Throughout this book, many students discuss their experiences, which range from highly positive to negative. Each Native American boarding school was organized in a similar way, but what actually made such a school an institution were students attending it.

According to Lomawaima, her book “is a story of Indian creativity, adaptability, and resistance to the federal agenda of transformation” (14). It shows how boarding schools usually achieved something they did not expect to achieve. They strengthened tribal identity among their students, although their primary goal was to alienate students from their traditions and beliefs (Lomawaima 19). Chilocco, like many other boarding schools, used military methods to educate their students, which discouraged “individuality or creativity” since their main goal was the complete opposite of producing independent citizens (Lomawaima 19). According to Superintendent Leon Wall, Chilocco’s name was a “white man’s mixture of two Indian words” (Lomawaima 49). The two words were the Cherokee Tsalagi and the Choctaw’s Chilukki with the meaning of “Cave people” (Lomawaima 49). The name of the school shows a lack of respect for the entire Native American community since white people considered them to be “savages” (Trafzer et al. 4). Many students adapted pretty well to the school organisation. Through the process of education, they achieved their own personal goals, such as learning how to read and speak in English, and acquired many different vocational skills despite the school’s organisation brimming with the idea of Native Americans being incapable to learn. In that sense, Native American students in boarding schools subverted the dominant educational system for their own ends. According to Lomawaima, “Chilocco students defined successful adaption to the boarding school in terms

of their own experience, creating an honor code of admirable behavior that stressed peer group loyalty in kinship terms: “We were brothers and sisters” (20).

Before the children entered any of the boarding schools, including Chilocco, many of their parents “resisted having their children taken away” (Ruffing Robbins 147). On the other hand, some parents did not have much choice since they were living in poor conditions, and they could not afford taking care of so many children, so the children who were at school age went to a boarding school (Wallace Adams 40). Noreen, a member of Potawatomi nation who entered Chilocco in 1932 at the age of 12, recalls the reasons she and her brother attended Chilocco:

At that time, the three oldest girls went to Chilocco. My brother went to Haskell. It was a case of economics, actually. And of course in this little town that we lived in, Washunga, Oklahoma [which is no more], I don’t even believe there was a school there, it was just a little teensy country town north of Kaw City, Oklahoma. \* We only went [to Chilocco] because my folks couldn’t afford to send us to public school. I think that was one of the criteria then, that you had to be in that sort of position to go to a government school. So, in a way, it’s a good thing it was the way it was when I went, because I couldn’t have afforded, my folks couldn’t have afforded to keep me in clothing, like that. (Lomawaima 96)

Noreen also mentions the fact that she would not have been wearing nice clothes had she not gone to Chilocco, which was sometimes one of the reasons parents sent their children to a boarding school – to save them from poverty (Ellis 69). Adolescents and some children who were “intellectually curious” wanted to go to school because they wanted to learn something new (Lomawaima 98). The other children wanted to escape strict discipline and responsibilities at home, such as taking care of their younger siblings or working on a farm (Lomawaima 98). Every student at Chilocco had his/her own reasons why he or she had come to the school, and those reasons affected their experience of the school. Lomawaima notes that “[o]nce a family began a tradition of going to Chilocco or Haskell or another Indian alma mater, younger siblings and younger generations looked forward to their own school experiences” (100). Even though different generations went to the same boarding school, their experiences varied because the school’s organization was not always the same.

The first day at school made quite an impression on many students. They were fascinated by the size of the school’s buildings, crowds of children and young people from dozens of tribes coming to the same school, but also by the “speedy induction into military discipline”

(Lomawaima 112). At the beginning of the Chilocco school program, students were recruited for a five-year program (Lomawaima 78), which caused them to feel lonely and scared because they had never been away from their families and tribes. One of the students of Chilocco, Maureen (1931/14, Choctaw), had a vivid recollection of the feeling of homesickness when she first came to the school: “I guess one of the earliest recalls I have was of the homesickness I had after I’d been there a few days. At the beginning of every school year they inoculate you, and they lined us up just like they do in the Army, I used to say, like cattle, and I remember I had five inoculations. \* And I was so homesick, and sick, I just thought I would die” (qtd. in Lomawaima 114). Alongside being separated from their families, students who went to boarding schools with their siblings faced another, even more painful, separation from their siblings. Albert (1926/13 Cherokee) remembers how he was worried whether his little sister would be okay since they had never been separated before:

My sister was only nine years old, and her first time away from home, and she was crying, and she cried and cried and cried, and I wasn’t gonna leave. The matron tried to get me to leave, and I was the only one there with my sister, and I felt protective. Well, finally I left; naturally I didn’t stay all night [in the girls’ dorm], but I went over to Home 2 [the boys’ dorm]. . . . The first thing [in the morning] I did was to go back over and try to find my sister, see whether they kidnapped her or what. (Lomawaima 116)

Since students got scared as soon as they saw what the school officials were trying to do by separating and isolating them from their families and siblings, they always found a way to look after their siblings and friends despite the school rules. The students at Chilocco cherished the importance of family and close relationships as part of their identity despite the government’s efforts to isolate them from everything concerning their tribal ways of living.

Just like every other school, Chilocco’s program emphasized military training whereby students had to follow strict rules in order to become “civilized” and avoid punishments. One of the former students from Chilocco, Juanita from the Cherokee nation, who entered Chilocco in 1929 at the age of 12, recalls her daily school routine: “You got up early in the morning and got dressed, went down in the basement and had roll call, and marched to the dining room. And then from the dining room we went back to our rooms and we went on our way. There were schedules all over the place. [Laughter] You had to have a schedule or you never would know where you belonged” (qtd. in Lomawaima 84). Juanita confesses that many students could not adapt to the outside world because there was no bell ringing or



whistling after they left school (Lomawaima 84). Forcing students to follow military rules, which included marching to the dining room or to the dormitories on the sign of whistles or bells, proves once again that children in Native American boarding schools were educated in skills they could not use in the outside world, which only made the world of adults harder for them (Carney 1057).

Chilocco was officially an agricultural school because “agricultural education was an incidental by-product of the work students did to keep the school self-sufficient” (Lomawaima 65). Students across the U.S. and Canada worked for the benefits of the school since that was the only way the school could fund itself (Rathbun 166). Since Chilocco was an agricultural school, the school officers emphasized the importance of acquiring agricultural skills. In 1906, every student at Chilocco was assigned a garden plot he/she needed to take care of by applying his/her newly acquired agricultural skills (Lomawaima 66): “Boys worked together in small groups to gain experience in a wider range of agricultural vocations. They could choose among feed crops (wheat, corn, oats, barley, or rye) or livestock, dairy production, poultry production, vegetable gardening, or fruit production” (qtd. in Lomawaima 67-68). Industrial education in Native American boarding schools was not organised with the intention of training students for mass-production and factory-style production, but with the intention of training them for “small-scale, industrial craftsmanship” in skills such as blacksmithing, harness making, carpentry, and masonry (Lomawaima 158-59). Students were not really trained in useful trades, but in the ones that were important for the lower working class of the dominant society: “Federal boarding schools did not train Indian youth for assimilation into the American melting pot, but trained them in the work discipline of the Protestant ethic, to accept their proper place in society as a marginal case” (Lomawaima 238).

Male students, who worked in small groups and were assigned their own little farm, worked really hard, so the products of their work were visible at school. For example, they milked the cows on their farms, from which they used the milk for making dairy products to feed all of the students. Most students appreciated the skills they acquired at Chilocco, including Albert (1926/13, Cherokee) who confesses:

I’ll never know whether I volunteered or was assigned the Dairy Barn, that was another rude awakening! [Laughter] I found out later that that was probably the least desired assignment as far as vocational was concerned. Really it wasn’t that bad. . . . it was a lot of fun, but it was a lot of hard work. . . . We milked forty-five cows, I believe, twice a day. We also fed ’em, put up feed and mended the fences,

separated the cream, they had automatic milkers incidentally, and I guess the prize job down there was being a milker. . . . They put us in a dormitory of our own, and the night watchman would wake us up at 3:30 in the morning and we'd milk the cows. (Lomawaima 178)

Ira, who came to Chilocco from the Cherokee tribe, recalls how he did not remember learning anything at the school concerning academic classes, but instead only learned how to work (Lomawaima 181).

Matrons and disciplinarians were in charge of the students. They “organized Chilocco students through military protocol” (Lomawaima 120). Students’ perceptions of matrons and disciplinarians at the school ranged from extremely negative to highly positive “affirmations of friendship, or at least mutual respect” (Lomawaima 122). Students’ experiences highly depended on their relationships with their matrons and advisors, and that is why some of the students recalled school times as positive and useful, and some students as a darker period of their lives. Irene from the Potawatomi nation (1929/15) recalls how one of the matrons, Ms. McCormick, helped her in learning useful lessons and how she is thankful for those lessons:

Have you heard the name Miss McCormick? She was my matron. [Laughter] And she, she was good, I, I appreciate what she done for me and I've heard a lot of people that went there, especially as she got older, that oh! go like this when they mention Miss McCormick, but it was a better school when Miss McCormick had her authority with it. So I appreciate that, I was glad it was, I was from a good family and, I was happy to be among good rules and I knew what it was to be disciplined. (Lomawaima 128)

Irene, in particular, had come from a good family where she obeyed the rules, and she was used to that kind of behaving and living. That kind of family highly affected her experience at school. Students who did not have much discipline at home or who were living by some different rules could not adapt to the boarding-school life as easily. Juanita (1929/12, Cherokee) was not fond of the disciplinarian for the boys, Harry S. Kellar: “I couldn't stand that man [Kellar]. . . . I don't think he liked Indians, he used to sit up in the balcony [during the social dances in the auditorium], and blow that whistle . . . you know, you had to dance this far apart. Boy, he'd blow that whistle and you had to sit out the rest of the dance. If he thought you got too close” (qtd. in Lomawaima 132). Juanita's aversion towards Kellar is

probably a result of the constant surveillance, especially when the girls wanted to spend time with the boys, and that was highly forbidden by any matron or disciplinarian.

When students came to Chilocco, they encountered one of many challenges – the food they were supposed to eat. According to Papanikolas, “food was important to ethnic people – not only for sustenance and well being; it was synonymous with necessary, elaborate hospitality” (143). However, the food Native children were given in boarding schools was nothing like the food they had at home, which was tasteful and diverse. The food at the school was plain and distasteful; it only served students to quench their hunger. Many times, students could not even eat the food, so they went to sleep hungry. When they could not bear the hunger anymore, they forced themselves to eat the distasteful food and eventually got used to it. The food at schools was often insufficient or spoiled, and students had to force themselves to eat it (Jacobs 219). Noreen (1923/12 Potawatomi) recalls the meal time at the school:

The food was horrible . . . it was terrible! Yeah, hardtack, you know, and stuff like that. But we wouldn't always have hardtack, sometimes we'd have bread. Course Chilocco had its own bakery . . . and it wasn't too bad. It was tasteless, but it was at least bread. And we'd make sandwiches, out of beans and, beans [Laughter]. \* You had to eat fast because [the matron] tapped that bell, you started to eat and when she tapped that bell you had to quit regardless. (Lomawaima 147)

It is ironic how the school's main goal was to educate Indian children to become civilized, but the school's disciplinarians used bells even to mark the start and the end of the meal. This caused students to eat as fast as possible so they would not remain hungry until the next meal, which was in order after all the hard work they had to do. The students were treated as cattle since they were supposed to do everything the disciplinarians ordered them to do as soon as they heard a bell ring or a whistle. This was in stark contrast to the reservation routine, in which every member of the tribe knew his/her role (Meisch 4), and the meal time was a chance to spend time with the family and enjoy the homemade food. On the contrary, teaching students to do everything on a certain signal, which does not exist in the outside world, was useless and inexplicable and only emphasized the authority of the school officials.

Lomawaima reveals that “Chilocco's domestic training for girls was even less attuned to reality than its agricultural/vocational training for boys. In part, it was in step with the unreality of the times, as patriarchal American society envisioned women's place in the home” (190). Domesticity classes prepared the girls to work as employees or servants of white women in society's upper class, not to become more independent after they left school

(Lomawaima 190). Alongside teaching the girls domestic skills, the school's matrons and teachers also focused on "improving" their physical appearance because their physical bodies appeared "uncivilized" to the white society (Lomawaima 192). Lomawaima emphasizes that whereas the boys in the school were required to take care of the large farm, the girls had the task of feeding and clothing eight hundred to a thousand students (197). Cora (1929/12, Cherokee) recalls how the girls at Chilocco spent their days working in the mending room, mending sheets and clothes since that was a part of their education in domestic skills (Lomawaima 198). Lomawaima notes that "the exigencies of mass discipline and the excessive student labor required for institutional self-sufficiency did as much, if not more, to develop these qualities as any educational curriculum did" (285). "Surveillance of female students" by their matrons went well beyond the spaces of classrooms (Lomawaima 211). Unlike the girls, boys had more freedom and were not under constant control during their work and classes. Matrons even inspected the girls to determine whether they "had donned all the required undergarments" since "clothing was a clearly marked terrain of power in the boarding school, especially in the girl's dormitories" (Lomawaima 211-12). One of the rules was for all of the students to wear the same uniforms that differed only according to gender. The girls had to wear "black cotton stockings, heavy bloomers, and long underwear in winter," which were provided by the government (Lomawaima 212). The boys were allowed to wear sneakers if they had the money to buy them, but the girls were not allowed to wear anything the government did not provide (Lomawaima 213). Forcing the girls to only wear the clothes provided by the government was a way of stripping them of their identity and facilitating their assimilation to the white society. Florence (1933, Choctaw, ninth grade) describes:

One thing I think that figures in prominently into this lack of warmth I'm talking about, is the loss of individuality, that comes from that damn G.I. issue striped denim drawers, gray sweaters. If we were going to have sweaters, why did they all have to be gray? In that cold climate, you know? . . . That was just some of the kind of things that, well, it was just, I guess some kind of a feeling, at least on the people who controlled the purse . . . to encourage submission. I don't know what else you'd call it. (Lomawaima 217)

Although both genders were treated in inappropriate ways, the girls were treated even more poorly, which caused them to resist in their own ways, unknown to their disciplinarians. Since the girls had to wear their bloomers under their home clothes, and the matrons inspected the

girls as they left the dorm for the dance to see if they had their bloomers (Lomawaima 220), the girls who did not like wearing those bloomers seized every opportunity to take them off. Coleman (1937/14, Delaware/Isleta) recalls how his sister and the other girls outwitted the matron by secretly taking off their bloomers:

[She] would require those girls to wear their bloomers to the dance. She had inspection, as they went out they had to pull their dress up to show that they had their bloomers on. And so, then they just march on out. Well, almost all those girls had their own panties, and it just irked them to wear those bloomers. So they came up with a deal where they would take their bloomers off and hide 'em behind the hedge there, and then when they'd come back [to the dorm], why they'd get their bloomers, and go on in. . . . A whole bunch of the girls were doing that. (Lomawaima 220-21)

As Lomawaima explains, “the bloomer story has a symbolic resonance for alumni because it marks a milestone in their memories, of student triumph over a uniform(ed) existence” (236). This story also emphasizes the importance of group solidarity, but also of *trixing*, a student slang word “for elaborate joking and prank playing within and between groups and gangs and between students and staff” (Lomawaima 236). *Trixing* was of great importance for the students because it was the way the students showed that they were intelligent enough to outwit their disciplinarians and claim the power of the school for themselves.

Lomawaima describes the typical punishments for the students, which included, among others, keeping the dorms spotless, scrubbing bathroom toilets, washing the floors, and “waxing long wooden hallways” (251). In addition, “serious offenses such as drinking, stealing” or running away from the school were punished with incarceration and a diet including only water and bread (Lomawaima 251). Lomawaima contends that “both offenses and punishments reflected the federal obsession with disciplining the body in order to discipline the mind” (251-52). Noreen (1923/12, Potowatomi) recalls one of the ways the students were punished for disobedience:

And if anybody was bad in the mess hall, the whole school, the whole room, the whole three companies in each building had to stand for an hour, without moving. . . . If they'd have on that certain dress that was striped, you'd stand there and I was always in the back row looking straight forward, you could see all these stripes.

Many of the girls would faint and have to be carried out. Revived and brought back to stand in line again. (Lomawaima 253)

Boys who were disobedient and who broke the rules “earned special work details in the dormitories and restriction of social privileges” (Lomawaima 257). Punishment for the boys included “extreme punitive measures: the rock pile and the beltline” (Lomawaima 257). Robert (1933/15, Creek) recalls how the boys who did not clean their room properly or who were late to class had to work for two or three hours at the rock pile, grinding big rocks into little ones (Lomawaima 259). Curtis (1927/9, Creek) recalls how brutal the punishment of running the beltline was: “If you got into so many demerits they would also make you run a beltline. You’d line up, a whole big line of guys on either side and they’d take off their belts, and you had to run through the line, and they’d belt you with a belt as you go through. That was another form of punishment for demerits and that could get, for some of the smaller kids, that was kind of brutal” (qtd. in Lomawaima 261).

In order to accommodate themselves, students resisted in many ways. Boys “slipped out of dormitories after bedcheck, stole chickens and eggs and bread and whatever else was handy for private feasts in the catalpa grove” (Lomawaima 269). Girls hung out in the dorm rooms after lights went out, “telling ghost stories and piling into bed at the hint of the matron’s presence” (Lomawaima 270). Both groups had their own activities through which they showed their resistance. Curtis (1927/9, Creek) recalls how they disobeyed the rules when the night had come and they enjoyed it: “They decided they would put some of these horses out on the Indian schools and the reservations. . . . They sent us some of ’em. We would go out in the pastures at night and catch these saddle horses, and ride ’em bareback, take a rope and just loop it around their chin and their lower lip to hold the horse with, and ride bareback” (qtd. in Lomawaima 277).

Students spent their free time together away from “the watchful eye of the school staff” (Lomawaima 296). They created their good times themselves, which made them strong enough to go through the years of schooling at Chilocco. Marian (1934/18, Creek) remembers how the girls spent their free time in the dormitories since they were not allowed to go outside without the control of their matron:

Well, for fun, we were fixing up ourselves. [Laughter] We were doing our hair, we had to pass the bobby pins around, and you did your hair. When are you going to do your hair? I’m going to do my hair Thursday. O.K. then, I’ll do my hair Friday, and we’d use the same bobby pins. And we sewed, we made our own little clothes,

and we finally got to where we could wear our own home clothes. And we played cards, and we danced and we sang. (Lomawaima 299)

Unlike the boys, the girls had restricted freedom, so they made the best of their free time when the matrons were not closely watching them. The boys spent their free time quite differently. Francis (1931/16, Cherokee) recalls how the boys spent their Saturday nights: “We used to slip off to Ark City on Saturday nights, go listen to the big bands. I was in pretty good with the night watchman, I used to take turns for him, he was the one that checked the beds, so I could go to town and stay ’til one o’clock. All I had to do was tell him where I was going and when I’d be back” (qtd. in Lomawaima 306). Student solidarity was “the most influential and enduring social relationship embedded in the structure of school society” (Lomawaima 298). Students at Chilocco recreated their family ties with their friends, who were often the only support they could find in such a place. Students also managed to perform their traditional dances and songs away from the control of disciplinarians. As girls did not have as much freedom as the boys, they performed their traditional dances and songs in the basement. As Mary (1937, ninth grade, Cherokee) recalls: “[after discussing the boys’ stomp dances along Chilocco Creek] The only time [the girls] ever, we’d do it in our basement, in the dorm. Some of those girls could do pretty good leading and singing, you know. Us greenhorns, we’d just get right in there and . . . I don’t know if everybody did that or not, but we did, in Home 3” (qtd. in Lomawaima 314).

According to Lomawaima, every student at Chilocco “took something immutable and everlasting with them,” whether they valued their education at Chilocco or looked back at the school experience with resentment and regret (355). Florence (1933, seventh grade, Choctaw) recalls how the most important thing she remembers from the years of her schooling is friendship: “The thing that I remember most about it, and I think it’s probably the most valuable thing I learned, or the longest lasting, is the value of friendship. [We] were very close friends. And you never forget, you’re always concerned about them, even though you don’t see them often. You can still keep in touch” (qtd. in Lomawaima 356). In spite of everything that they experienced at Chilocco, the students are grateful for their friendships and valuable lessons from the school. Alice (1925, seventh grade, Cherokee) also agrees with Florence by saying that “the greatest value that the Indian schools had over the public schools was the social development of the students” and not the academic and vocational programs (Lomawaima 361-62).

Lomawaima emphasizes that many factors, such as students' skills, beliefs, family background, and "a myriad complex of genetic, familial, and cultural heritage" had shaped the students' school experience (364). She also emphasizes that the students managed to celebrate their personal successes and creativity when they left school despite the limitations and repressions they encountered throughout the years of schooling (Lomawaima 365). Many positive experiences the students had shared are viewed as a result of their strength and ingenuity (Lomawaima 365). Marilyn Watt, one of the reviewers of Lomawaima's book, notes that this book "is a valuable contribution to our understanding of Indian boarding school life" since many former boarding-school students openly shared both their negative and positive experiences of attending Chilocco (627). Lomawaima describes the book as "a tribute to the resilience of children, to the bonds of friendship, to creativity under duress, and to the loyalty of many lifetimes" (368). She emphasizes that Indian children "were not passive consumers of an ideology or lifestyle imparted from above by federal administrators" but that they actively created their own both educational and social process (Lomawaima 370). At the end of the book, Lomawaima maintains that Chilocco Indian Agricultural School was an Indian school because "Indian people made Chilocco their own" despite the school being an assimilatory institution with the main goal of erasing Native American children's identities (371).

## **5.2. *Fatty Legs: A True Story* by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton**

Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton's *Fatty Legs: A True Story* (2010) is a memoir about an Inuit girl named Margaret who went to a boarding school in Canada at the age of eight. Many children were forcibly taken to the schools, but Margaret wanted to go to school because her older half-sister went there. Residential schools in Canada were organized in the same way as boarding schools in the United States of America, so their main goal was to "strip generation after generation of children of their culture and skills" (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 86). Students like Margaret who went to different boarding schools had to remain strong so they could endure their stay in schools. Children in boarding and residential schools "regularly opposed the everyday violence and humiliations," and so did Margaret (Marshall 85).

At the beginning of the book, Margaret, the main protagonist, reveals that while going to the market in the city, she often stayed mesmerized by the size of the school and by the



physical appearance of all the teachers (matrons and priests) who seemed mysterious and interesting: “I was mesmerized on each trip by the spectacle of the strange dark-cloaked nuns, whose tongues flickered with French-Canadian accents, and the pale-skinned priests who had traveled across a different ocean from a far-off land called Belgium. They held the key to the greatest of the outsiders’ mysteries—reading” (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 3-4). Margaret was curious, and that was one of the main reasons she wanted to go to school. The other important reason for her interest in attending a boarding school was her desire to learn how to read. Her older half-sister went to the boarding school, and she could read in English, so she read to Margaret from her book *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 4). Margaret’s sister Rosie tried to explain to her what would happen if she went to the school:

“They cut our hair because our mothers weren’t there to braid it for us.”

“I don’t need my mother to braid my hair. I can do it myself.”

“They’d cut it anyway. They always cut the little ones’ hair.”

“I’m not that little.”

“They don’t care. They don’t have the patience to wait for you to braid your hair. They want all of your time for chores and for kneeling on your knees to ask forgiveness.”

“Oh, well. It’s only hair.”

“It isn’t just your hair, Olemaun. They take everything. . . .”

(Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 6)

As much as Rosie tried to convince Margaret not to go to school, she was not less persistent in making that happen. Rosie was one of the students who had severely negative experiences from the boarding school because she could not find anything to comfort herself in an institution that stripped children like herself of their Native identities (Trafzer et al. 17). Many times, Margaret’s father refused sending Margaret to the school because he knew what would happen to her (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 8). Yet, Margaret would not give up on the idea of going to a boarding school so she could learn how to read. Eventually, she again asked her father to enrol her in the school, and he accepted her decision while providing her with some valuable lessons about the school’s organisation: “He crouched to my height. He picked up a rock with one of his hands and held it out to me. ‘Do you see this rock? It was once jagged and full of sharp, jutting points, but the water of the ocean slapped and slapped at it, carrying away its angles and edges. Now it is nothing but a small pebble. That is what the

outsiders will do to you at the school” (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 13). Margaret was just a little girl, and she could not understand how going to school could be such a bad experience, so she said to her father that she would keep out of trouble so no one could tell her to kneel and beg for forgiveness (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 11). Margaret believed that the teachers at the school would see that her spirit was good (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 11), but many did not.

As much as Margaret’s mother did not agree with Margaret’s decision, she bought her a warm pair of grey stockings, a hair comb, and a toothbrush so she could properly take care of herself when she went to school (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 20). When the time came for Margaret to go to school, she was not so excited anymore:

The school was beginning to look less inviting. I wondered how I would ever feel safe enough to sleep in such a large place. I was used to staring at the glowing coals of my father’s pipe, from where I slept under his bed, until I drifted off. It suddenly sank in. My family would not be staying with me. How would I fall asleep without that smoky red glow? (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 25)

As soon as Margaret realised that she would be alone at the school without her parents and her family, she started regretting her decision, but there was no way back. Not long after she came to the school and learned basic school rules, one of the nuns showed animosity towards her with no apparent reason. Because of her crooked nose, Margaret called her *Raven* (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 28), demonstrating that giving the school officials, especially the mean ones, a “derogatory or funny nickname” gave students some kind of “psychological satisfaction” (Wallace Adams 57). The first step of uniformity was to dress all the girls in the same clothes, but since Margaret was bigger than the rest of the girls her age, her clothes did not fit her. However, nobody was bothered by that, especially the nuns: “I hated my new clothes. I was much larger than the other girls my age, and the clothes did not fit well. The shoes pinched my feet. The bottoms were hard and stiff. They did not form to the shape of my foot like I was used to, and there was no padding inside of them” (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 34). On their arrival in the boarding school, children had to dispose of anything that connected them to their native ways of living: “They had us exchange our warm, comfortable kamik and moccasins for outsider-shoes, and issued each of us a short-sleeved blouse and two pinafores, one navy blue and one khaki. But the worst were the scratchy canvas bloomers” (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 32). In addition, all of the children in boarding schools had

to change their Native name into a Christian one (Landis 126). As a form of uniformity, Olemaun was given the name Margaret by one of the nuns (the Raven):

“And who do you think you are?” she asked me in my own language.

“I am Olemaun Pokiak,” I told her, puffing my chest.

“We use our Christian names here. And we speak English.” She narrowed her eyes. “You are Margaret,” she said, switching languages.”

(Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 35)

The first day of school started with cleaning the school, and Margaret was punished by Raven because she was sitting. She was sitting because her clothes were uncomfortable, and she could not work in them: “She shoved a dusting cloth in my hand and pointed to the rows and rows of books at the back of the class. The other girls were dismissed to get ready for dinner, but I had to stay. By the end of my first day, the only books I had touched were the ones I dusted” (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 39). Already the first day of school was not what Margaret was expecting, and she soon realized that she would have to learn by herself in order to gain the desired skills: “My stomach ached with hunger and my mind ached for knowledge” (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 41). The Raven used every opportunity to humiliate and punish Margaret: “. . . my older classmates cried with laughter as they left the room. Later, I stopped Agnes in the hall. ‘What did the teacher say that made the others laugh at the end of class?’ I asked. ‘She said that cleaning the boards should be no problem for you, because you are so tall your stockings won’t even stay up’” (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 48). Yet, Margaret was eager to learn how to read despite the nun’s punishments and offenses. She did not allow the Raven to move her away from her spirit and identity in her process of achieving the academic skills:

The Raven thought she knew a lot, but she cared more about making us do chores than about teaching us. She said that chores were part of our education. For some reason, she seemed to think that I needed more of an education than the others, and as the weeks went by, I was forever mopping the floors, tidying the recreation room, and emptying the honey buckets. I wasn’t sure what she meant to teach me, but I had something to teach her about the spirit of us Inuvialuit. (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 49)

Margaret was a good student “despite the Raven’s cruelty”:

I looked at it as a game and practiced harder at reading, writing, and arithmetic than any other girl in my class. Not only did I enjoy proving my teacher wrong, but I figured I had to learn as much as I could that year, because I planned to leave on the North Star with my parents the next summer and never return. While my schoolmates played cards and made dolls during their recreation time, I chose to read. (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 52)

Margaret showed her strength by claiming the school's power for herself. Many students of different boarding schools mastered the English language; they even became writers (Trafzer et al. 25), and Margaret was one of them.

Margaret was not able to go home because a smallpox epidemic came to the school, so she stayed there and helped those in need (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 57). While working in the hospital, Margaret read many books because that was the only thing she was able to do, and she just kept practicing her reading skill despite the tough times she was going through (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 57).

Every time Margaret did something the Raven did not approve of, and that was often, the Raven would punish Margaret with anything that came to her mind (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 65). At one time during the school year, everyone was getting a new pair of stockings, including Margaret. Everyone got a nice black pair of new stockings, except for Margaret: "I closed my eyes again and slowly opened them wider and wider. I looked to the other girls and examined their stockings, and then turned back to my own. The Raven had played a heartless trick on me. Embarrassment and anger swelled in my heart. These stockings could never have belonged to a fancy lady from Toronto" (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 66). The Raven had given her a pair of red stockings to humiliate her, and so everyone could make fun of her. Later on, she was given the nickname *Fatty Legs* by one of the Gwich'in girls, Katherine, who was the Raven's favourite student (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 68). While working in the laundry room, Margaret decided that she had had enough of the Raven's punishments and humiliations, so she thought of a way to get rid of her red stockings: "I stripped off the stockings, and in one quick motion, shoved them into the blazing fire beneath the vat. The hideous things sizzled and crackled in the fire as they shrank before my eyes and vaporized into a thin wisp of smoke. I smiled with satisfaction. I would not be bested. The Raven was about to find out what I was made of, and was she ever in for a shock" (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 70). After that, Margaret was allowed to put on the gray stockings her mother had bought for her (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 73). The

Raven wanted to punish Margaret once again because she did not have her red stockings, but another nun, sister MacQuillan, stepped in front of the Raven and did not allow her to hit Margaret (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 74). The Raven was not allowed to “educate” Margaret the way she wanted anymore: “The Raven thought she was there to teach me a few things, but in the end, I think it was she who learned a lesson: Be careful what birds you choose to pluck from their nests. A wren can be just as clever as a raven” (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 74). Soon after that, Margaret got a letter from her father, who told her that she could finally come home (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 76). Before Margaret left the school to go home, sister MacQuillan told her: “You are a strong child. You will go far in life” and gifted her a copy of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 76): “‘You will be very missed, Olemaun.’ She had called me by my name—the name I had not heard in two years. Hearing it now brought tears to my eyes. / ‘Qugyuk,’ I said, pointing to her. It was the name I had always associated with her: Swan” (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 77).

Olemaun/Margaret’s testimony shows how she managed to preserve her identity throughout many negative experiences she encountered attending the boarding school. She achieved her goals; she learned how to read, so she could read the *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. She taught herself how to be strong and how to never let anyone prove her that her spirit is bad or heathen. Eventually, she was the one who taught the nun a lesson. Even though she had suffered in silence for many years, she made the best of her school years and proved everyone that “the spirit of . . . Inuvialuit” (Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton 49) is much stronger than the boarding school system.

### **5.3. *My Name Is Not Easy* by Debby Dahl Edwardson**

The main protagonist of Dahl Edwardson’s novel *My Name is Not Easy* (2011) is Luke (Aamaugak), a boy from the Inupiaq nations in Alaska. The novel covers the time period from 1960 to 1967. The title of the book follows Luke’s story about changing his name when he entered the Sacred Heart Boarding School. Just like every other Native American child entering a boarding school, Aamaugak (Luke) was also forced to change his name so he could better fit into white man’s society. According to Native traditions and beliefs, Native American children found a certain strength in their names, which represent their identity, and so did Luke: “Teachers only know how to say easy names, like my brother Bunna’s. My name

is not easy. My name is hard like ocean ice grinding at the shore or wind pounding the tundra or sun so bright on the snow, it burns your eyes. My name is all of us huddled up here together, waiting to hear the sound of that plane that's going to take us away, me and my brothers" (Dalh Edwardson 3).

Luke was about to go to school with his two younger brothers, Bunna and Isaac. They were not excited about going to the school, but that was the government's decision. Luke did not like the idea of going to the unknown, especially when he heard many negative things about Catholics and their schools:

When you don't know, you feel uneasy about what you might find out there, which is how I'm feeling about Catholic school right now. Uneasy. Wondering if it's gonna be good or bad or both messed up together. I never met them Catholics, yet, but I heard about them. If you give them a kid 'til the age of seven, they got 'em for life. That's what Catholics say. I watch Isaac scuttle across the floor, an uneasy feeling stirring in my stomach. Isaac is only six. (Dalh Edwardson 4)

As a result of many different factors, such as family ties, traditions, and skills learned at home, every child that went to the boarding school experienced the transition from "reservation life to institutionalization at boarding schools" differently (Trafzer et al. 17). Yet, every one of them had to endure both the process of forced assimilation and "separation from family and community" (Evans-Campbell et al. 2). Before going to school, Luke's mother reminded Luke to look after his younger brothers: "Mom says we're Eskimo and Eskimos know how to survive. She says we have to learn things, things we can't learn here in the village. Mom does not cry, and neither do we. Take care of your brothers. I hang on tight to those words as I sit down inside the plane" (Dahl Edwardson 7). Describing the traumatic experience on his arrival in the Sacred Heart school, Luke admits that he felt as if he could not breathe in such a place:

Sacred Heart School is gray and shadowy, crouching in the trees like a big, blocky animal. I don't like the look of those trees, either, especially not in the dark. They're black and grasping, and they make strange flapping noises, like something mean's leaning over you, trying to suck the wind right out of you. How could a person even breathe here? Back home, it doesn't get dark so early in the day this time of year, either, which make this place seem really wrong. (Dahl Edwardson 17)

Since Luke's brother Isaac was too young to attend the boarding school, the school officials placed him with a foster family instead of sending him back home. Isaac's brothers did not know how to keep him with them and how to tell their mother that he will not come back home:

Isaac is trying to pull away from him, all right, but he's too little. And I'm trying to run after him, but that old nun is clutching me now, her skinny fingers sharp as steel. "That's enough," she says. "He'll be fine." Her voice sounds just like a seagull, a seagull circling above someone's meat rack, getting ready to steal. We watch as the car drives off, Isaac's face pressed up against the window, his eyes pleading, me standing there. Helpless. What am I going to tell Mom? What the heck am I ever going to tell our mom? I was supposed to take care of my brothers. (Dahl Edwardson 21)

As previously mentioned, Native children needed time to get used to the food at the boarding school since it was tasteless and often insufficient for the need of the students (Jacobs 219). Luke is also concerned about the safety of the food served in the school: "Don't touch the meat," I whisper. Bunna is really hungry, but he's scared enough to pull his tray back quick when I whisper it. I'm not sure what made me say it—I just don't trust this place, not even the meat. Especially not the meat. Who knows where it comes from?" (Dahl Edwardson 22). Indians and the Eskimos<sup>1</sup> did not agree that well in the Sacred Heart School. They had their own groups where they only spent time with the children from Indian tribes or Eskimo tribes. That was the result of many stories the children heard back at home, just like Sonny did (an Indian boy who did not really like Eskimos):

You don't quiet down, them Eskimos gonna catch you when you go outside to pee and chop your head right off. Play kickball with it. That's what Sonny's mom used to tell them when they got too wild back home. And when you're a little kid needing to pee and it's dark outside, talk like that can scare the pee right out of you. But when you're a big kid at Sacred Heart School and you know your grandfather and his brothers used to kill Eskimo trespassers . . . well, that kind of talk just makes you tough. And Sonny was plenty tough. (Dahl Edwardson 31)

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<sup>1</sup> The author of the novel uses the term Eskimos for the members of the Inuit community. Today, the term Eskimo is considered a derogatory term for a member of the Inuit community.

When the students were in some kind of trouble, they found their ways to help each other despite their differences. Sonny helped Amiq when he most needed help. Amiq was an Inuit boy the same age as Sonny, and they did not like each other at all until one day, soldiers came to the school to do some tests on the students (Dahl Edwardson 114). Those tests included Inuit children drinking radioactive iodine-131, and many children knew nothing about it, except for Amiq. He assumed that iodine-131 was something poisonous, and he decided not to allow those soldiers inject something like that in his body (Dahl Edwardson 123). As he wanted to run away from the line of Eskimo students waiting to be tested, he got caught, but Sonny saved him (Dahl Edwardson 124). Sonny saw Amiq got scared because he was speechless and pale, like never before: “Amiq was standing by the entrance to the dorm wing. He was acting funny, tucked up inside the dorm hallway, his back pressed up against the wall, not moving. Not hardly breathing, even. Not acting at all the way that little loudmouth usually acted” (Dahl Edwardson 124). When the general saw Amiq away from the line, Sonny decided to help him so he would not have to drink iodine-131:

Amiq stood there by the wall, practically gasping. Like a fish out of water.

“This one’s no Eskimo, sir. He’s my brother . . . my kid brother,” Sonny added for emphasis, grinning down sweetly at Amiq. Even though they were about the same age, Amiq was still nearly a head shorter than he was.

Amiq was starting to revive now, and Sonny half expected him to get mad about being called a kid—and by Sonny, too—but instead he just grinned up at the general with that big, goofy grin of his.

“Yes, sir,” Amiq said. “Just waiting here for my big brother.” He gave Sonny a look.

(Dahl Edwardson 125)

Like *They Called It Prairie Light* and *Fatty Legs, My Name Is Not Easy* demonstrates that friendship inside boarding schools was of great importance and that the students were most thankful for the people they met in schools and whom they befriended (Wallace Adams 56). Even though Sonny and Amiq were from different tribes, they never hesitated to help each other in need because that is what their cultures had taught them.

Every time a student spoke his/her Native language, she/he received different kinds of punishments (Ellis 75). Luke recalls his first punishment after speaking Inupiaq: “I have never in my whole life been spanked, and I’m wondering what’s so bad about Inupiaq that they have to make your hand sting for speaking it. I can still feel those Inupiaq words, warming the back



of my throat, only now it feels like the sounds got twisted around somehow. Like if I try to say a word, it's gonna come out bent" (Dahl Edwardson 38). Father Mullen punished any form of fighting in the school with his two-by-four wooden ruler inside his office. Father Mullen was above all of the priests and nuns working in the school. Once he caught Sonny and Amiq fighting and called them into his office, where they received their punishments:

Before they could even move, Father flew to the corner and grabbed the two-by-four. Sonny felt the force of it cracking against Amiq's bones as if against his own. But Amiq just stood there, his back bent to Father's blows, staring at the door to freedom, smiling. Amiq and Father were both in their own narrow spaces, both seeing only what they wanted to see, but Sonny saw it all—the bent back, the crazy priest, the smile stretched so tight across Amiq's face, you could probably snap it like slingshot rubber—and something else, something in Amiq's eyes—a look no two-by-four could ever touch. And even though Father couldn't see it from where he stood, you could tell by the way he was swinging that paddle that he knew it was there. (Dahl Edwardson 64)

Sonny's side of their punishment story emphasizes the strength those children at Sacred Heart School had. When he mentioned that Amiq's look was something that could never be touched by any kind of ruler, he brought to light the importance of Amiq's spirit. No matter how many punishments he received, he would never become something he was not and would never forget his Inuit roots. Every time a student disobeyed any of the rules, Father Mullen blamed heathen nature of those children for that. In order to become God's children, the students received punishments until they started obeying the rules and acting like God's children:

It's the sound of Father Mullen's voice, rasping like bees as he tells them both that they're nothing more than dirty little savages and there's no way in Hell either one of them could ever—ever—get into Heaven. Nobody cares what happens to them except for Father, he hisses, because their people, their Native People, are as loose as rabbits with their kids. Father is swinging that two-by-four back and forth like it's a hammer, and the pain bites harder with each swing as he sinks his words—sharp as nails—right into them. All of them are doomed to Hell, he says, nearly out of breath—all of them: Sonny and his uneducated heathen mother along with Amiq and his no-good, drunken dad. (Dahl Edwardson 135)

Many students received “humiliating and painful” punishments for not respecting the rules, which included “being shackled to a ball and chain, forced to stand on tiptoe with arms outstretched, whipped across the palms of the hand, and made to kneel on two-by-four boards for extended periods” (Ellis 76). Punishments were ways of teaching children how they should not behave.

The most important act of resistance in this novel is definitely the article that the students of Sacred Heart School published without the permission of their teachers. One of the best students in Luke’s class was Junior. Junior liked to write, so he decided to write an article about nuclear bombs, but Father Flanagan refused to publish it in the school’s newspaper. After Father Flanagan rejected his first article, Junior thought about what else he could write, and he came up with a great idea:

The human family—he’d heard that phrase before, too. Suddenly the idea of people just trying to feed their family took on new meaning. He thought about Project Chariot—the force of the blasts shooting out into the ocean, where people catch whales to feed all the families. And he thought about the ice cellars where they stored whale meat and maktak for the whole community family, and about the bomb shelters where people were going to hide from the bomb that threatened everybody—the whole human family. (Dahl Edwardson 207)

Junior remembered to write about the importance of families, iodine-131, and the project that included nuclear bombs (Dahl Edwardson 209). Amiq remembered Luke’s little brother Isaac and wrote something similar to an advertisement he thought could help find Isaac (Dahl Edwardson 212). The title of the article was “From the Ice Cellar to the Bomb Shelter: Seeking Missing People,” and it was signed by Aamaugak, “a student at Sacred Heart School in Alaska” (Dahl Edwardson 213). When Father Flanagan read the article, he was furious, and he asked: “Who was Aamaugak?” However, all of the students said that they were all Aamaugak and that all of them had written that story (qtd. in Dahl Edwardson 213). The boys, Luke, Junior, Amiq, and Sonny, gathered their entire class and went to the notary public, where they got their paper notarized and official (Dahl Edwardson 225-26). They all signed affidavits with their legal names, and Luke was especially proud:

He lifts the pen and leans forward. LEGAL NAME, the form asks. Legal name? He puts the pen right there on that line and signs his name, his real Iñupiaq name, the one he left behind: Aamaugak. He hears the sound of it as the pen scratches the

paper, the sound of his mother's voice, a warm, guttural buzz in the dusty darkness of Johnson's Lodge and Bait. Sometimes there's nobody going to give you permission. Sometimes you just have to take it for yourself. (Dahl Edwardson 226)

With official affidavits, the article was published. With the help of the article, Luke found his brother Isaac and brought him back home to their mother. When they came home, they could finally breathe properly and speak in their Native language: "All that matters right now is that I'm home and Isaac is finally home, too. And being home is good because I can lean back in my chair and say, 'Where's the seal oil?' saying it in Eskimo like I never even left, never even went to Sacred Heart School where they don't know nothing about seal oil, not in any language" (Dahl Edwardson 242). Luke emphasized that their (Native children's) spirits could never be destroyed and that they will claim the power of the schools for themselves and come home even stronger and "full of new ideas":

But never mind, because when the time comes, we're gonna shake everybody's ears off; that's what I think. Shake them good with the sound of all us kids come home, full of new ideas, loud as engines revving. The future may be slick with Latin words and loud machines and the kind of laughter that burns your throat, but it's gonna take off like a shiny new snow machine, ready to go anywhere. Everything, both good and bad, all messed up together. That's what I think. (Dahl Edwardson 243)

#### **5.4. *No Parole Today* by Laura Tohe**

As the author herself said, her memoir *No Parole Today* (1999) is dedicated to all those students who survived boarding schools everywhere. Through her book, Laura Tohe shared many of her experiences and memories from the boarding school. Her experiences are usually positive because she made them positive through her stories and poems. Every story in this book has its own message for everyone who reads it. The stories of former boarding-school students are powerful because they show that the students of boarding schools made those schools their own. Stories and poems in this book describe students having fun in school, sneaking out of the dormitories, going to the first dance, everything that made a boarding school their own school, a Native American school. Those children prevented the removal of their ethnic identity by always cherishing their values and beliefs, wherever they were. By

sharing these stories, Laura Tohe gave voice to every student of boarding schools who might have not had his/her chance to speak up and share his/her stories.

Since the organisation of boarding schools was the result of General Pratt's policy, the author begins the book with a letter for Pratt: "The assimilation policies you put in place to turn Indian people into civilized white American citizens, who would dress, worship, think, and hold the values of the dominant culture, still affect us today" (Tohe ix). She also mentions how her parents and grandparents are also survivors of the boarding schools Pratt established (Tohe ix). Tohe emphasizes that assimilation made Native people ashamed for what they were, where they came from, how they spoke, how they dressed, and for their families, among many other things (x).

At the end of the Introduction, Tohe makes a powerful statement, telling Pratt that his assimilation process failed and that Native Americans are still strong despite everything:

I voice this letter to you now because I speak for me, no longer invisible, and no longer relegated to the quiet margins of American culture, my tongue silenced. The land, the Diné, the Diné culture is how I define myself and my writing. That part of my identity was never drowned; it was never a hindrance but a strength. To write is powerful and even dangerous. To have no stories is to be an empty person. Writing is a way for me to claim my voice, my heritage, my stories, my culture, my people, and my history. (xii)

Tohe emphasizes the importance of storytelling and how she shared her experiences through many different stories that will never be forgotten. Those stories are a part of Native Americans' identities.

In the Prologue, Tohe shares her grandmother's experiences from the times when she went to a boarding school (xiii). Alongside many negative experiences, her grandmother recalls how they used to have fun despite the conditions they were in:

We made sock balls. We unraveled socks and made balls. We used to darn socks for the boys and we'd unravel the worst ones and put rubber bands inside it to make a ball. We used to keep bumblebees for pets. We'd tie a string around it and tie it somewhere outside. After school we'd go back and find it. Then we'd untie it and let it fly around. We had lots of fun playing with our bumblebee pets. (Tohe xv)

Students found joy and satisfaction through many different school activities, which made their boarding-school life easier to endure.

The chapter “Our Tongues Slapped into Silence” describes how the government punished every single utterance in Tohe’s Native language:

Miss Rolands, an alien in our world, stood us in the corner of the classroom or outside in the hallway to feel shame for the crime of speaking Diné. Other times our hands were imprinted with red slaps from the ruler. In later classes we headed straight for the rear of classrooms, never asked questions, and never raised our hand. Utter one word of Diné and the government made sure our tongues were drowned in the murky waters of assimilation. (Tohe 3)

Speaking their Native languages was strictly forbidden, whether the students were inside or outside the school building (Trafzer et al. 25). English language was the only language allowed to be spoken if students wanted to avoid punishments.

To their teacher, students were just “little checkmarks” besides their names (Tohe 5). The teachers showed no interest in students as individuals. They only saw them as a group of children in need of civilizing. Through her poem “The Names,” Tohe describes that as soon the students entered the boarding school, their Native names were not important anymore, just their stereotypical qualities as Native American children: “Suddenly we are immigrants, waiting for the names that obliterate the past” (Tohe 4).

Tohe’s poem “Joe Babes” describes one group of girls who represent all Native Americans in school. *Joe Babes* were everyone who left their homes in the process of assimilation:

Joe Babes, the ones named Jolene, Rena Mae, Juanita or Loretta. Some teased their hair into bouffant hairdos and wore too much makeup. Others wore outdated dresses and shoes, and washed their hair with detergent soap. These were the ones who stood in corners for speaking Indian until the government said it was okay. Then they sang in Indian Clubs and danced at pow-wows. Joe Babes were the ones that left the reservations for the cities, for the schools, for the jobs. We were the Joe Babes. All of us. (Tohe 8-9)

This poem represents the disobedience of Native American children in boarding schools, but more importantly, it shows their strength and tenacity in keeping their identities. *Joe Babes* were all of the students who were forbidden to speak their Native languages but also the ones

who later spoke freely in their Native languages and who proudly danced their traditional dances. *Joe Babes* drew the school's power towards themselves. Tohe also shares a memory about how students managed to outsmart the school officials by pretending to be sick and skipping school. The story is quite humorous, and it shows one of the ideas students thought of just to skip school:

Mae Jean's turn comes and she goes behind the curtain where Cauliflower Ears, the doctor, asks her, "Do you have diarrhea?" You say yes so they'll believe you're really sick. "What color was it?" This is tricky because you have to remember the last time you had it so you can tell him. In the meantime the rest of us are listening and laughing. Soon Mae Jean reappears from behind the curtain with a red face and "Bed Rest" written on her pass. She gets to pretend being sick for one school day." (qtd. in Tohe 22)

This story about pretending to be sick is similar to the bloomer story from Lomawaima's *They Called It Prairie Light* (219). Both of these stories portray students' intelligence in coming up with the ideas to secretly disobey at least some of the school rules. The outcome of these lasting stories shows how students managed to outwit their disciplinarians many times without them even knowing. These stories represent continuous, minor, but important acts of resistance.

In the chapter "So I Blow Smoke in Her Face," Tohe recalls how she disobeyed the rules at school even though she knew she would be punished (25). She remembers how one of the matrons at the school punished her for everything she could think of just to humiliate her: "She's always trying to catch me breaking the rules, and sometimes she makes me do extra work around the dorm if she sees me talking in the hallway, like the time she told me to mop up the water in the showers when it wasn't my detail, or the time she told me to sweep the porch after Edgar walked me back from the rec hall" (Tohe 28). Tohe got used to punishments, so she never took them personally, even though the matron's intentions were to humiliate her. Eventually, she got used to the scrubbing, sweeping, or cleaning every time her disciplinarian ordered her to. One time she explicitly showed her resistance because she would not allow Mrs. Harry to humiliate her anymore: "She's waiting there with hand on hip. The other girls are watching from their rooms, as if this were a showdown. She's ready to tell me off, to shame and humiliate me again. But I don't give her a chance, so I take a drag and blow smoke in her face" (Tohe 29). She was proud to be like her grandmother, fearless and free (Tohe 29), and she would not let anyone punish her for that.

Like the previously discussed texts, Tohe's memoir demonstrates that the "oppressiveness of the boarding school regime indirectly contributed to some of students' greatest satisfactions" (Wallace Adams 56) and made students rebel against the system. Tohe illustrates her and her classmates' acts of resistance through many of her stories and poems. She shows that their disciplinarians could not always treat Native students the way they wanted without them rebelling. Her book is also a testimony of those good and bad times she and her friends experienced while attending a boarding school. Just like Lomawaima showed that students of Chilocco made the boarding school their own (371), Tohe shows that she and her friends were what the school was made of, not the punishments and rules.

## **6. Effects of Forced Child Removal and the Boarding-School Era in Contemporary Society**

### **6.1. Effects on Culture and Identity**

The assimilation policy, established almost one hundred and fifty years ago, still affects Native American people in many aspects of their lives. Even though boarding schools no longer exist, and even some tribal schools have been founded, their stories still haunt Native American people. Many Native Americans that were part of the boarding-school system are successful and satisfied with their lives, but this is not thanks to the programs of the boarding schools. Discrimination represents one of the main problems Native American people face even today. According to Travis, the term “non-Native” in Alaska still implies that the dominant ethnic group, comprised of mostly white people, possesses different human qualities, which implies “a power relationship favouring Alaska non-Natives, while at the same time it tends to devalue the status of being an Alaska Native” (252). Seeing Native American people as a subordinate ethnic group goes back to the colonial period when the foundation of boarding schools had started, and this continues to happen even today. Frequently, Native Americans are being discriminated as a less important and less valuable ethnic group.

Although “American Indian children (and their parents) were active agents in resisting the dominance” of Native American boarding schools, they left the school with many scars and wounds (Surface-Evans 584). According to Meisch, different experiences Indigenous people had while attending boarding schools have contributed to “a myriad of detrimental, intergenerational effects” on Indigenous communities and their cultures, which sheds light on the issues those people face today (1). Many former boarding-school students share the opinion with Mary Crow Dog that white people should not be trusted, and nothing can change their opinion because they are aware of the humiliation their people have suffered. As a result, many former students became victims to alcoholism, domestic abuse, prostitution, and drug addiction (Meisch 3-5). Whitbeck et al. emphasize that the effects the boarding-school era has had on Native American communities are not “historical,” in the sense that they are now in the past and forgotten, but that the losses are ever present and represented by “the economic conditions of reservation life, discrimination, and a sense of cultural loss” (121).

According to Meisch, many former boarding-school children fit neither into Indian society nor in the white mainstream society (5). Students who came back home in the 1950s



faced struggles in readjusting to their tribal lives, which in turn affected the generations of their descendants. When children returned to their reservations, tribal elders mocked them for the lack of proficiency in their Native language and for their ways of dressing or behaving (Trafzer et al. 16). Something that was highly affected by the boarding schools are interpersonal skills of the former students (Meisch 5). Since the students at boarding schools were under constant control and military training, they did not know how to behave without orders and rules (Lomawaima 283). Meisch describes the case of a woman who recalls how her mother “lacked parenting skills because of what she had been exposed to herself at the boarding schools” (5). Meisch explained that the woman’s mother “expressed her love for her children through providing them with roof and food, but did not know how to do so else wise because her experiences at boarding school were absent of love, comfort, human touch, affection, and companionship” (Meisch 6). In other words, the “continual, persistent and progressive process of loss that began with military defeat” has prolonged until today, in the time when tribal elders feel weak against losing their grandchildren who are alienating from their Native traditions and languages (Whitbeck et al. 128).

Many young women who attended boarding schools have “related that they suffer from loss of cultural identity and experience their schools as ‘imposed’ systems” (Robbins et al. 70). Many boarding school survivors suffer from the “residential school syndrome” with effects such as “distressing recollections, recurrent distressing dreams of residential school, a sense of reliving the residential experiences, inability to recall important aspects of residential experience, diminished interest in participating in tribal activities, difficulty concentrating and exaggerated startle response” (Robbins et al. 70). The residential school syndrome also includes symptoms such as “deficient knowledge of tribal culture, deficient parenting skills and a tendency to abuse alcohol and drugs” (Robbins et al. 70). Of course, students who suffer from these symptoms and similar ones might not have had stable family ties and relationships or might have suffered strict parental discipline even before entering the boarding school (Robbins et al. 75), but attending the boarding school definitely contributed to the deterioration of their mental health.

According to Walters et al., substance use problems among many Indigenous Americans are “directly related to Alaska’s colonized status and associated environmental, institutional, and interpersonal sources of discrimination and stress” (105). Alaska Natives are at higher risk for detrimental health outcomes and substance abuse because of “lower high school graduation rates (66% versus 75%) and larger families (3.6 members versus 3.2 members)

than the population as a whole” (Walters et al. 107). Alaska Natives are also at a higher risk to poverty and “twice as likely to be unemployed” (Walters et al. 107). According to the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, American Indians and Alaska Natives had the highest rate in drug use out of “any racial or ethnic group (18.3%) and the highest rate of substance dependence or abuse (11.1%)” (Evans-Campbell et al. 3).

## **6.2. The Role of Education**

Native American students face many different challenges while attending contemporary public schools where they represent the minority. According to Turanovic and Pratt, school plays an important role in reducing the risks for the students’ behaviour problems and substance use (1334). Since students spend many hours a week at school interacting with their classmates, teachers, and friends, “schools play an important role in cultivating social skills, encouraging moral and character development, and teaching the ability to solve emotional and behavioral problems” (Turanovic and Pratt 1334). Since Native American students usually represent the school minority, teachers in those schools are not always prepared to adjust to Native American students who learn in different ways. As a minority group of students in contemporary schools, Native American students remain in the shade of the white students who comprise the majority of students in schools. In addition, many teachers lack knowledge about Native American ways of learning and living, and they usually follow the classic school curriculum that is based on “the traditional Western canon and the English language” (Jones and Ongtooguk 501) and does not emphasize the importance of minority groups and their learning skills. The teachers are thus “unable to create good student-teacher relations” (Deyhle and Swisher 154), which adds to the reasons why the Native American students are not able to learn properly in contemporary schools. According to Simi and Matusitz, “Native American students have a 38% graduating rate . . . a percentage lower than all other ethnic groups” as a result of outside pressures, academic assimilation or separation, social mixing, university dilemmas, and financial problems related to bank loans, scholarships, and grants (96-97). Because of these reasons, it is of great importance to understand the struggles and strengths of Native American people in the context of American history so they could better accommodate in contemporary schools (Simi and Matusitz 97). Martinez contends that many Native American students cannot connect their tribal ways of living and learning with their experiences in the classrooms (199). Students are not able to properly acquire specific and needed knowledge in contemporary schools since their Native ways of learning and acquiring

knowledge differ from those of the non-Natives. Every student perceives his or her educational process differently and acquires knowledge through different learning skills. Native American students use circular communication and prefer learning with the help of graphic, perceptual, and spatial material, not through oral methods and communication that are preferred among teachers (Simi and Matusitz 101). Many Native American students are field dependent, which means that they take signals from their surroundings and that they need “a visible foundation and member body” (Simi and Matusitz 101). Because of their way of learning, Native American students might face trouble in the contemporary school system since most of the professors have a linear teaching style (Simi and Matusitz 101). Therefore, teachers need to adjust to learning skills of Native American students in order to help them succeed throughout their educational process.

An important agency in the traditional ways of both teaching and learning are tribal elders. Since tribal elders are important figures in Native American culture and teachers of their tribal youth, schools that have a significant number of Native American students should seek advice from tribal elders so they could fit or adapt Native American culture into contemporary school context (McGregor 103). Teachers in contemporary schools should cooperate with tribal elders and follow their path in philosophies concerning different ways of both teaching and learning: “Then we must look within ourselves, within our communities and our nations to determine which values are important to us, the content of what should be learned and how it should be learned. This new direction must relate to theories firmly based on the traditions of Our People” (qtd. in McGregor 100). Teachers do not need to be cultural experts, but they need to be aware of Native American students in their classrooms and “build upon diverse student cultural backgrounds” (Martinez 202). For example, teachers need to ask their students about their “interests and culture, whether they dance or drum or do beadwork” (Flugaur-Leavitt 188). In other words, contemporary American schools need to include culturally based elements in their programs, such as “pedagogy that stresses traditional cultural characteristics and adult-child interactions, pedagogy in which teaching strategies are congruent with the traditional culture and ways of knowing and learning, and curriculum that is based on traditional culture and that recognizes the importance of Native spirituality” (Barton 5-6). With communities inside and outside the school that support and accept them, Native American children can experience greater mental wellness that will affect their personal and professional success (Gray et al. 254). Teachers need to work on their own “cross-cultural work” in order to make classrooms more comfortable for Native American

students (Ruffing-Robbins, *Learning from Natives' Cross-Cultural Teaching* 191). If teachers of Native American students and their classmates understood their ways of learning and living, Native American students would feel more comfortable while attending contemporary schools and would likely succeed to a higher level. Many former students of both boarding schools and contemporary schools who graduated became “Indian leaders who forged bicultural identities” (Warren 536). Teachers and classmates of Native American students should put their effort in helping Native students in the process of education while cherishing their Native culture. By doing that, Native American students will have a higher level of success in contemporary schools and prove that they can become successful while cherishing their Native culture.

## Conclusion

Boarding schools across the United States of America and Canada “educated” thousands of Native Americans. With the main goal of assimilating Indigenous children into the mainstream white society, boarding schools are an important part of history for many Native American generations. While attending boarding schools, Native children faced many challenges on their transition from the reservation life to the life in an assimilatory institution. As soon as children entered a boarding school, the process of stripping them of their identity began. Students of boarding schools were required to follow the rules and to never disobey the commands given by their disciplinarians. Despite that, they always found ways to show resistance and even enjoy their school time. By doing that, they were fighting to preserve their Native identities.

Boarding-school writings such as the texts analysed in this paper are an important part of re-writing and righting the history of American Indian boarding schools. These texts increase the readers’ awareness of the assimilation program that was carried out through educational institutions by revealing the experiences, both positive and negative, of former boarding-school students. Whether the students liked the school program or not, boarding-school experiences became a part of their history and their identities. All four of the analysed books bring to light the power of Native American identity to keep up even through the darkest of times.

Lomawaima’s *They Called It Prairie Light* brings the experiences of students at Chilocco to the readers in a remarkable way. By sharing their experiences, former students of Chilocco prove their strength and power despite the assimilation policy being the central part of the school’s program. While following the experiences of Chilocco’s former students, the readers also acquaint themselves with the functioning of Native American boarding schools. Throughout the book, Lomawaima emphasized that Native American students made Chilocco their own by secretly disobeying the rules and performing their Native rituals, which kept them closer to their Native identities. Her text also reveals that, regardless of their experiences, former students of Chilocco feel grateful for friendships and lessons the school provided them with.

Likewise, *Fatty Legs* and *My Name Is Not Easy* emphasize friendship and solidarity as an important part of the students’ boarding-school experience. Despite being away from their

families, the students knew that they could find support in their friends who were going through the same situations as everyone in the school did. Both texts employ the motif of Native American children changing their names in order to attend a boarding school. The power of Native names is clearly portrayed in both books since the main protagonists did not feel free and respected until they were called by their Native name, which was completely forgotten during their stay in the boarding school. Both texts also make use of the homecoming motif as an important component of their characters' resistance and the perseverance of their Native identity.

Tohe's *No Parole Today* is a memoir about the experiences she had while attending a boarding school. The author's experiences range from quite negative ones to extremely positive. Through her poems and short stories, Tohe not only invoked her personal tribulations but also gave voice to every Native American child who went through the Indian boarding school program. From the beginning to the end of her book, Tohe makes it clear that Native Americans are still strong and proud of their identity while never forgetting their painful history.

Despite the punishment and humiliation the students experienced, they always found ways to bring joy to their days in the boarding school. Bringing to light both positive and negative experiences of former boarding-school students and revealing their ability to have fun in those institutions despite their harrowing circumstances, these texts testify to the power of the students' spirits that is an essential part of Native identity.

Effects of forced child removal and the boarding-school era are still visible in Native American communities today. So is the discrimination against America's Indigenous peoples, which began many years ago, along with the colonising of their lands. Many issues faced by contemporary Native communities, such as high rates of depression, suicide, and substance abuse, are the result of both historical trauma and different kinds of discrimination against Native Americans. In addition, many contemporary Native Americans also struggle in school, trying to adapt to different ways of learning and teaching. Therefore, it is necessary to not only enhance non-Native teachers' understanding of Native cultures and ways of learning but also include the history of colonisation, oppression, and assimilation into mainstream school curricula, so that Native Americans can feel empowered and respected for everything their ancestors went through. It is only with the help of both Native communities and the dominant society that Native Americans can gain respect and take full pride in their identity both inside and outside of schools.

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