

## A DAY TO LISTEN - HARRIET VISITOR

Bozhoo. My name is Harriet Visitor and I am the niece of the late Chanie Wenjack. I sit on the Downie Wenjack Fund as a Board Member. I liaison for my mum and her sisters. As soon as I was born, I was impacted by an unseen brokenness that was brought upon me. And to this day I am learning to undo and change in myself and my children. I'm an educator and I see that my son is the why I teach and my daughter has become the how I teach.

When the announcement came of the findings of 215 children at the Kamloops Residential School, it totally floored me. I was speechless. I was in pain and it was so difficult to teach the next day. I couldn't see my students' faces, but I could definitely see their hearts. And it was so hard to teach. When I was trying to process what I was feeling myself, I felt the enormity of what my fellow educators across Canada were feeling. Then I knew that my students needed to hear me speak about it. And on the first day, I couldn't. And I understand how educators feel in teaching the residential school history when I've had to share my late uncle Chanie's story in September, Secret Path Week, Orange Shirt Day. The reactions of my students are always heartbreaking for me when they realize that I'm part of this story. They express sadness. They often come to me and I acknowledge and I spend time talking to them about our sad history.

My uncle Chanie's story is just one of 150,000 stories, and I tell them I understand what our story is. I understand and see how painful our story is. But as I look out to my students, I also see our future. And I see that it's my responsibility to walk with you because you're going to continue our story. And I always think about that when I'm teaching whatever I'm teaching my students. But after the findings of those children, it became very difficult during that time.

There's a long road ahead of us in terms of Canadians learning to understand. That's different from learning. We all learn. But learning to understand is another step beyond just learning. And in our Indigenous families and communities, it is a long road for us to undo and change what has happened to us. As I look out at my students that I teach, I am reminded of my mother on one side in the stories of residential school Survivors. And on the other side, I have my students. And I tell them, I know our story is painful and I call it a story because I tell them, you're going to finish our story. I'm going to walk alongside you in our story, for a time, and then I'll leave. But you're going to continue our story. You are our future. But when I look at our story, I tell them, I know it's painful. I feel the pain. I know you feel the pain, too. But when I look out at you, I tell myself, we're strong. We are a strong people. We are resilient. Why? Because you're here. You're our future. You're going to continue our story, and I want you to remember that. Remember, you come from strong, resilient people.