

A DAY TO LISTEN - THERESA HALL

My name is Theresa Hall from Attawapiskat First Nation and now live in the Thunder Bay, Ontario. I'm a former survivor of the St. Anne residential school at Fort Albany, along the coast of James Bay. I attended the school for six years. I also attended another residential school at Fort George, Quebec for three years. I was the first female Chief in my community to be elected by my people when I returned home. But the majority of my life I've lived off reserve.

When I heard the discoveries of the unmarked graves of the 215 students of Kamloops Residential School, it triggered my mind of the experience of the residential school, and being away from home. I know that I have hurt at Fort Albany, at St. Anne's residential school where I attended, that there were people that said students that never returned were suspicious of their death and they even found some bones near the barn where the residential school is situated. But the person who found the human bones gave them to the local priest.

The individual who found the bones was hoping that they would be reported to the police, but that was never done. We never heard about it again afterwards. So when I heard about the undocumented graves and I thought, wow, maybe that's what happened, definitely they need to do the very same thing, identify the areas, maybe you can find unmarked graves as well at the St. Anne's residential school. I know the colonizers, the settler government stole our land using the doctrine of discovery to justify their means to steal our lands. And as a result, they enriched their lives with the resources they mined from our our land while our people are in poverty. Live in third world conditions here in Canada.

Even in Attawapiskat, where my home is, we don't have any water. They can't drink from the tap because it's contaminated. It's not healthy. Our children get sick. Our babies get sick as a result. They get rashes as a result of bathing in that water. If the discovery that was done of the 215 undocumented graves, if it had been any other nation other than indigenous, police would be right there investigating. And eventually that investigation charges would be laid. I don't see any of that happening here. You know, it's one thing for the government to apologize for the atrocities that were done to us at the residential school and then promote reconciliation. I don't believe in the reconciliation any more after the discoveries were done, because there is no concrete evidence that they want to share the resources of our land that some of that land be returned to our first nations. Until then, our people will remain in poverty. And it's tragic. It's tragic what's happening, what has happened to us and yes, we are resilient. Like I said, I was appointed to the Justice of the Peace and I served in that fashion, in that role with honor. I wanted to be a role model for my children so that my children could also aspire to a higher goal, higher education. I believe I've done that.

And for my grandchildren and my great grandchildren as well, that when I hope someone documents our history, the histories of people who have aspired regardless of what was done to us, and when people tell us to get on with our lives, we can't. We can't do that because there will be more. I'm sure there'll be more discoveries of unmarked graves once every every residential school territory or the land that

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surrounded the residential school is investigated. Just like what they did at Kamloops Residential School using the latest technology. Fort William First Nation set up a teepee where we can go and pray for the souls of those 215 individuals, students. My family and I went, my daughter, my granddaughter, and prayed. Using our tobacco praying to the creator that the souls of those 215 students move on in peace now that their graves have been found. I hope there will be closure for those families. Miigwetch.