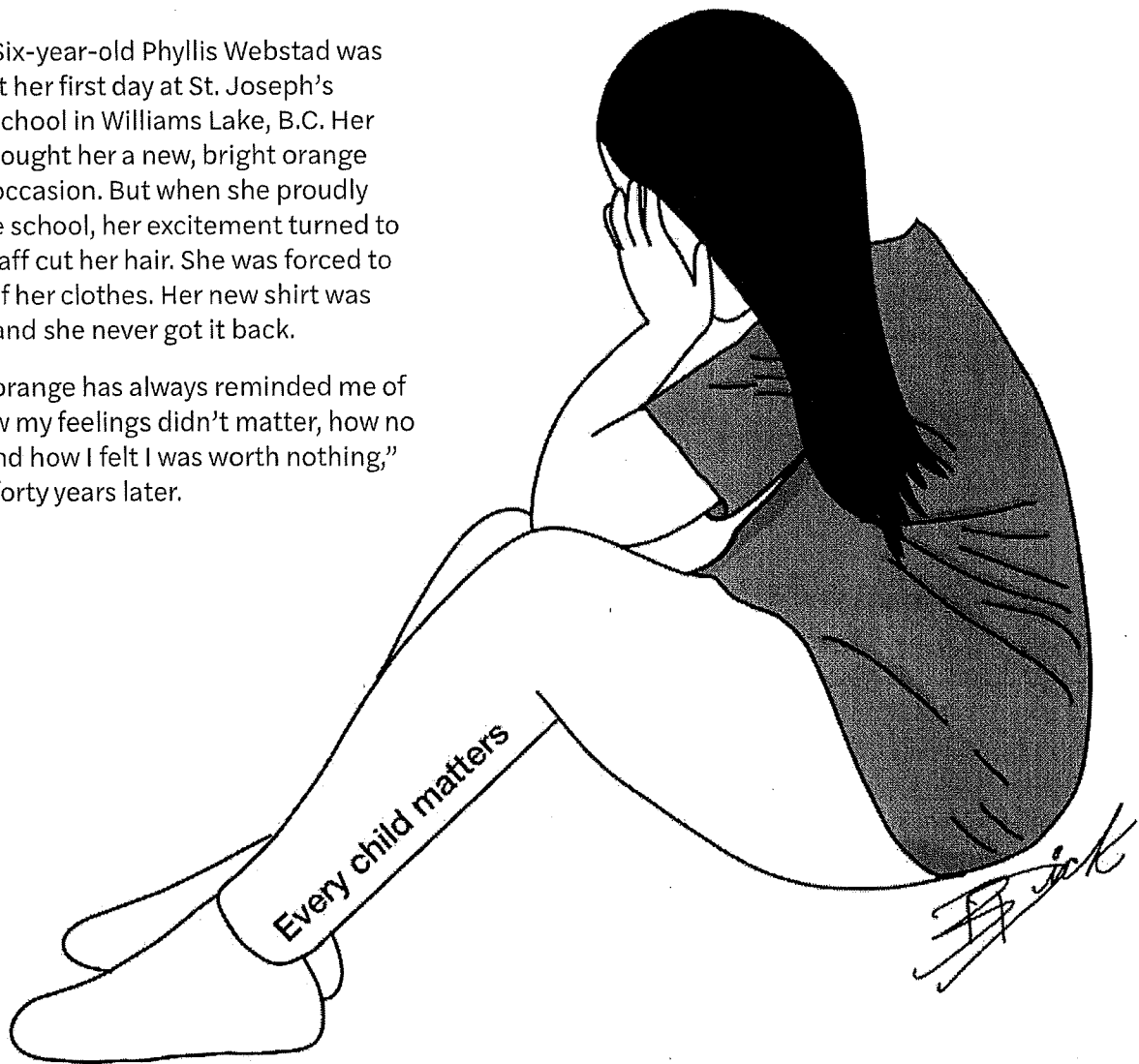


Orange Shirt Day

It was 1973. Six-year-old Phyllis Webstad was excited about her first day at St. Joseph's Residential School in Williams Lake, B.C. Her granny had bought her a new, bright orange shirt for the occasion. But when she proudly arrived at the school, her excitement turned to terror. The staff cut her hair. She was forced to change out of her clothes. Her new shirt was taken away, and she never got it back.

"The colour orange has always reminded me of that, and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared, and how I felt I was worth nothing," said Phyllis, forty years later.



Phyllis' Story

I went to the Mission for one school year in 1973/1974. I had just turned 6 years old. I lived with my grandmother on the Dog Creek reserve. We never had very much money, but somehow my granny managed to buy me a new outfit to go to the Mission school. I remember going to Robinson's store and picking out a shiny orange shirt. It had string laced up in front, and was so bright and exciting – just like I felt to be going to school!

When I got to the Mission, they stripped me, and took away my clothes, including the orange shirt! I never wore it again. I didn't understand why they wouldn't give it back to me, it was mine! The colour orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared.

One child's story

Between the late 1800s and 1996, the federal government forced many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children to attend residential schools. They had to leave the warmth of their families and live at the cold, overcrowded schools.

In many cases, children and parents did not see each other for years. Students were treated poorly. Many were abused. This went on for **generations**.

Phyllis Webstad first told her story about her experiences at

residential school at an event in Williams Lake, B.C. in 2013. People who heard her speak were deeply moved – and the idea of Orange Shirt Day was born.

September 30 was chosen as the date because September is when Aboriginal children were taken from their families to attend residential schools.

The day honours the tens of thousands of residential school Survivors. It acknowledges the painful experiences they had at the schools. It also provides an

opportunity for people to talk about the schools' impact.

Today, Phyllis' orange shirt symbolizes what Indigenous students, families, and communities lost because of residential schools. Time with family. Parental care. A sense of self-worth and well-being. Language and culture. Freedom.

When people choose to wear an orange shirt on Orange Shirt Day, they are sending the message that "every child matters."

Shining a light on a dark chapter

Jane Philpott is Canada's Minister of Indigenous Services. Carolyn Bennett is the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs. Last year, they released a statement about Orange Shirt Day. It read, "On September 30 we urge everyone to not only wear orange but also to take this opportunity to learn more about the **legacy** of Indian Residential Schools, to read the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission's** Final Report and Calls to Action.

"All Canadians have a role to play in **reconciliation**."

Meanwhile, Phyllis Webstad is thrilled that the younger generation is learning about the past. "That was my dream – for the conversation to happen annually about residential schools," she said.

"I am blown away and I am humbled and honoured how it has taken off."

Did you know?

The Canadian government is creating a new **statutory holiday** to remember the **legacy** of residential schools. The holiday is also meant to encourage people to think about ways to work towards **reconciliation** with Indigenous Peoples. One date that has been proposed for this new holiday is September 30th.

Definitions

generation: the average length of time between the birth of parents and the birth of their children

legacy: something such as a tradition or problem that exists as a result of something that happened in the past

reconciliation: the reestablishment of a broken relationship

statutory holiday: a public holiday; a holiday that all workers are entitled to

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC): a three-person panel established by the federal government in 2008 to find out what happened at Indian Residential Schools and inform all Canadians