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Heritage Woods student starts Orange Shirt Day

In disbelief at how First Nations students were treated at residential schools

Grant Granger / Tri-City News
SEPTEMBER 25, 2018 03:29 PM



Heritage Woods Grade 11 student Chloe Goodison has started an Orange Shirt Day at her school to raise awareness of the treatment of First Nations children at residential schools in Canada in the 20th century.
Photograph By GRANT GRANGER

When Heritage Woods secondary student Chloe Goodison was in Grade 7, she read a book, Indian Horse, that shocked her with a jolt that reverberates four years later and might resonate with her for the rest of her life.

The novel, by Ojibwa author Richard Wagamese, is about a boy raised in the 1950s who survived the residential school system to become a pro hockey player. The story was fictional but the trauma represented was not. In the book, Saul Indian Horse is taken from his home to a school where his clothing and his language were stripped away — treatment suffered at residential schools across the country before the final one closed 22 years ago.

“I was just in disbelief that our country allowed that to happen and it’s not being spoken about,” says Goodison, 16. “I’d never learned about it. It’s such a crucial part of our history.”

It inspired the teen, whose heritage is Scottish and English, to find out more. She took an online course on Indigenous history. Her parents took her to hear speakers on the topic. One of the books she came across was The Orange Shirt Story by Phyllis Webstad, who was sent to a residential school, St. Joseph’s Mission, near Williams Lake.

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“There were so many things taken from her there,” says Goodison. “She was stripped of her name, her identity, her clothing.”

Before Webstad was sent, away her grandmother took her to the store and told her she could pick out one item. She chose an orange shirt. But when she arrived at the school, she was told to take it off and never wear it again. That’s why in 2013, Webstad created Orange Shirt Day to be held every Sept. 30.

“They took away her rights, her freedoms were stripped away,” says Goodison. “I’ve always been in awe of her.”

Goodison says Webstad is an inspiration by emphasizing the importance of reconciliation to bring people together and acknowledge what happened so it isn’t repeated. She says her generation needs to learn about the history so it can understand and change the ignorant views toward indigenous people.

Goodison wanted to take action but didn’t know how so she went to Kelly Powell, who teaches leadership at Heritage Woods. They brainstormed and decided to create an Orange Shirt Day at the school, joining Coquitlam's Dr. Charles Best secondary in holding the event.

“Honestly, it was so inspiring,” says Powell of Goodison’s fervour. “It’s not often you get a student who comes to you so passionate with an issue.”

Goodison has been selling T-shirts with an Indigenous drawing and the words Every Child Matters during the lunch hour. The proceeds will go to the Orange Shirt Society. So far, mostly teachers have been buying the \$15 garments but she’s hoping when her fellow students hear the background behind the movement at a school event that will be held Friday they’ll join in too.

She believes it’s her generation that will be tasked with carrying out reconciliation in the future since the school and where they live are on unceded First Nations land.

“It’s in our hands to change it and work toward reconciliation,” she said.

It’s a passion that has her contemplating carrying on into the future possibly working in the social justice field.

“I think about it a lot,” says Goodison, who has considered becoming an aboriginal rights lawyer. “I have to admit that does sound kind of nice.”

• Information is available on: Orange Shirt Day at orangeshirtday.org; The Orange Shirt Story at medicinewheel.education/product/the-orange-

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S	M	T	W	T	F	S	
28	29	30	1	2	3	4	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	
26	27	28	29	30	31	1	
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	

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