

The story behind Orange Shirt Day: by Phyllis Jack of Dog Creek BC

Phyllis went to the Mission school for one year. She was 6 years old. Her family never had very much money, and there was no Social Assistance, but somehow her granny managed to buy her a new outfit to go to the Mission school.

She remembers going to Robinson's store and picking out a shiny orange shirt. It had eyelets and lace, and she felt so pretty in that shirt and excited to be going to school!

When she got to the school, they stripped her, and took away her clothes, including the orange shirt!

She never saw it again, except on other kids. She didn't understand why they wouldn't give it back to her, it was hers! Since then the colour orange has always reminded her of that. She says, "her feelings didn't matter, and no one cared how she felt like she was worth nothing".

Now, she finally gets, that the feeling of worthlessness and insignificance, ingrained in her from her very first day at school, affected the way she lived her life for many years. Even now, knowing nothing could be further from the truth, she still sometimes feels that she doesn't matter. She is honoured to tell her story so that others may benefit and understand, and maybe other survivors will feel comfortable enough to share their stories.

She says, "I want my orange shirt back!" Phyllis' orange shirt is a symbol of so many losses experienced by those who were sent to Residential Schools over several generations. Losses of family, culture, language, freedom, parenting, self-esteem, and worth were experienced by everyone. Let's not forget the children but honour them on September 30.

Orange Shirt Day is an affirmation of our commitment to ensure that everyone around us matters.