

# PHYLLIS WEBSTAD'S STORY: *The Original Orange Shirt*

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 color 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.

I was 13.8 years old and in grade 8 when my son Jeremy was born. Because my grandmother and mother each attended Residential School for 10 years, I never knew what a parent was supposed to be like. With the help of my aunt, Agness Jack, I was able to raise my son and have him know me as his mother.



I went to a Treatment Centre for healing when I was 27 and have been on this healing journey since then. I finally get it, that **the feeling of worthlessness and insignificance, ingrained in me from my first day at the mission, affected the way I lived my life for many years.** Even now, when I know nothing could be further from the truth, I still sometimes feel that I don't matter. Even with all the work I've done! I am honored to be able to tell my story so that others may benefit and understand, and maybe other survivors will feel comfortable enough to share their stories.



Phyllis Webstad is **Northern Secwepemc (Shuswap)** from **Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation (Canoe Creek Indian Band)**. She comes from mixed Secwepemc and Irish/French heritage, was born in Dog Creek, and lives in Williams Lake, BC. Phyllis is married, with a son, a step-son & 4 grandchildren. As **Executive Director of the Orange Shirt Society**, she tours the country raising awareness about the impacts of the Residential School system. She has published 2 books, the "**Orange Shirt Story**" and "**Phyllis's Orange Shirt**" for younger children.

She holds diplomas in **Business Administration** from *Nicola Valley Institute of Technology* and **Accounting** from *Thompson Rivers University*. Phyllis also received the **2017 TRU Distinguished Alumni Award** for her unprecedented impact on local, provincial, national and international communities through the sharing of her orange shirt story.



Every year on September 30th, people across Canada wear orange and participate in **ORANGE SHIRT DAY** events to recognize and raise awareness about the history and legacies of the Residential School system in Canada. Orange Shirt Day originates from the story of **Phyllis Webstad** from the **Stswechem'c Xgat'tem First Nation**. In 1973, on her first day at St. Joseph's Residential School in Williams Lake, BC, Phyllis's shiny new orange shirt was stripped from her, never to be seen again.

40 years later, on **September 30, 2013**, Phyllis spoke publicly for the first time about her experience; thus began the Orange Shirt Day movement.

The Canadian government designated September 30 **NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION**, beginning in 2021. This responds to *Truth and Reconciliation Call to Action 80*, which states that the federal government will work with Indigenous people to establish a statutory day to “**honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process.**”

Wearing orange is a way to show your support for Survivors and their families and acknowledge the legacy of residential schools.

*“When you wear an orange shirt it's like a little bit of justice for us Survivors in our lifetime, and recognition of a system we can never allow again.”* ~ Phyllis Webstad

