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JOHN RENNISON THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Survivors John Elliott and Blanche Hill-Easton arrive on the red carpet at Theatre Aquarius on Sunday for a screening of "The Nature of Healing," a documentary about the Mohawk Institute Residential School.

Murderer's hope for early parole may not be faint

Robert Badgerow able to apply for rarely used clause that allows some killers a chance at early freedom



SUSAN CLAIRMONT
OPINION

There was no faint hope for Diane Werendowicz as she tried to make the short walk home from a night out with friends.

There was no faint hope when she was grabbed off the street, dragged into a Stoney Creek ravine and raped. Or as she drew her last breaths with her purse straps wrapped around her neck. Or as her half-naked body was weighted down in a creek.

There is, however, a faint hope for the man who raped and killed Diane.

Robert Badgerow will get yet another chance at freedom — how many is this now? — when he goes before a jury in January for a rare "faint hope" hearing.

SEE BADGEROW, A2

'Nature is healing'

Director Faith Howe says 'the story led the way' and she followed as new documentary explores Mohawk Institute survivors' journeys

KATE MCCULLOUGH
THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

The long driveway leading to the main entrance of the Mush Hole was a gateway "to hell."

"What went on there was pure evil," narrated survivor Bud Whitey in a documentary about the horrors he faced at that residential school.

The Mohawk Institute Residential School was a "prison for children," added survivor Jimmie Edgar in the documentary about survivors of the Brantford-

area institute.

Soft twinkle lights illuminated a small Theatre Aquarius auditorium Sunday afternoon, as about 100 people gathered around small, round tables draped in red cloth, for an "intimate" screening of "The Nature of Healing." In the moving, three-part documentary, survivors of the Mohawk Institute share the abuse they suffered and their journeys to come to terms with it.

The documentary, first screened in Beverly Hills in March, is set to hit screens across the province in the coming weeks.

"It's not an easy thing to do, but I think it's something that's really necessary," survivor Roberta Hill said of the documentary. "When you see that on the film then you realize, here's real people. This is what happened to them in their childhood."

At least 15,000 children attended the former Mohawk Institute, one of the country's oldest and longest-running residential schools. Survivors say they experienced emotional, physical and sexual abuse at the hands of staff, and were stripped of

“When you see that on the film then you realize, here's real people.”

ROBERTA HILL
SURVIVOR

Distracted driver fined over crash that killed cyclist on Linc overpass

Man was 'looking for his cigarettes' before striking 52-year-old

MATTHEW VAN DONGEN
THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

The distracted driver who struck and killed cyclist Brian Woods on the Mountain must pay a \$12,500 fine and perform 100 hours of community service after pleading guilty to careless driving causing death.

That penalty is simply not enough, said several grieving friends and family members in court Monday.

"Put yourself in their shoes," said David Shellnutt, a lawyer acting on behalf of some of Woods' children. "You hear that (fine) amount, some community service, and you've just

lost your father? I think that would feel so inadequate to most people."

Woods, 52, was cycling to work on Upper Wentworth Street near the Linc overpass when he was fatally struck from behind by a van early on the morning of July 5, 2022. He was one of a dozen vulnerable road

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HONORARY DEGREE



Ellen Johnson Sirleaf receives an honorary doctor of laws degree from dean Pamela Swett, left, and chancellor Santee Smith at a McMaster University convocation held at FirstOntario Concert Hall on Monday. Sirleaf was Africa's first elected female head of state, serving as president of Liberia from 2006 to 2018. She was a co-recipient of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts to further women's rights.

BARRY GRAY
THE HAMILTON
SPECTATOR

Survivors

CONTINUED FROM A1

culture, language and identity. The Indian Residential School system has since been recognized in Canada as genocide.

"There is a place I know far, far away, where we get mush and milk three times a day," narrated Edgar, now a poet.

"O Canada, do you think we should be proud?"

First-time director Faith Howe said she knew the minute she heard Edgar's poem, "Grandmother's Voice," that it should narrate the documentary, threading together survivors' stories of healing and pain.

Whiteye described on screen being raped many times while at the Mohawk Institute.

The first time, the boiler operator he thought had become his friend invited him into the dark, steamy room to see the machine that heated the building.

"I got to trust the guy," he said.

Survivors described getting strapped — sometimes until his abuser sweat, remembers survivor John Elliott — eating gruel, which ultimately gave the institute its ominous nickname of Mush Hole, and being forced to work.

Siblings were separated, boys on one side of the building, girls on the other.

Roberta Hill said her mother thought she and her siblings were dead. Residential schools stole not only from the kids who attended them, but from parents, grandparents and communities.

"There's a big impact," she said. "It's not just us."

Silence was a way to survive. Survivors went on to have careers as nurses, painters and teachers, and to raise families. Many didn't talk about their time at the Mohawk Institute.

Roberta Hill said she didn't tell her sisters she was sexually abused until they were in their 50s.

"That's not something you talk at the kitchen table," she said.

But things started change. A historic class-action lawsuit got more survivors talking.

"You realize you're not alone," she said.

But the healing journey is neither swift nor linear, and is ongoing.

"I'm not afraid of the memories anymore. I've managed to get through them ... that's what you need to do," said Blanche Hill-Easton, who was at the Mohawk Institute from 1943 to 1946.

"I always say, our people need to thrive, not just survive. And that is my motto."

Director Howe initially set out to tell the story of Hill-Easton, who returned to school in her 80s to complete a Mohawk language degree.

From there, she was introduced to survivors from Six Nations to Sarnia to Sault Ste. Marie. They told her about their plans to build a me-



Survivor Roberta Hill speaks on Sunday after a presentation of 'The Nature of Healing,' about surviving the Mohawk Residential Institute.

JOHN RENNISON
PHOTOS
THE HAMILTON
SPECTATOR



Sherlene Bomberry speaks after a viewing of 'The Nature of Healing.'



Survivor Blanche Hill-Easton at the screening at Theatre Aquarius on Sunday.



Roberta Hill smudges herself as she arrives for the screening of the documentary.

memorial park, and the story evolved from there.

"The story led the way," she said. "While I'm listed as director, this story directed me."

A place of gathering

The creation of the Mohawk Village Memorial Park, a five-acre expanse

dedicated to all the children that attended the institute in its 140-year history, is part of the healing journey.

"Nature is healing," said survivor Dawn Hill.

She said they hope it will be "a place of gathering we didn't have before" with an area for ceremo-



Faith Howe, director and producer of 'The Nature of Healing,' wipes a tear while listening to survivors speak after the screening of the documentary on Sunday.

nies, language and education. "This is now going to be everything they tried to take away," she said. Proceeds from Saturday's viewing — \$2,000 — were given to survivors to support the project.

A pavillon was built in 2019 and a circle garden in 2020. When completed, the park is expected to have walking paths, a pond, play structures for kids and a fire pit that they hope to use in the future for events.

"There's still lots of things to be done," Dawn said. "We'd like to see it done before we all kick the bucket."

KATE MCCULLOUGH IS AN EDUCATION REPORTER AT THE SPECTATOR. KMCCULLOUGH@THESPEC.COM