

Adoption of Indigenous Brothers and the 60s Scoop - the Good and the Bad! by George Guimond



In 1979, we adopted two native boys. We wondered if we were guilty of what had become known as the 60's scoop.

"The sixties scoop is a term that refers to the Indigenous child removal system in Canada that spans the late 1950s to the present day. Thousands of Indigenous children were adopted into white settler Canadian families, with most of those adoptions taking place in the 1960s and 1970s. Children were apprehended in large numbers (... to assimilate them into white culture). Some First Nations communities lost virtually all their children in certain age groups." (Ohpikiihaakan-ohpihmeh - Raised Somewhere Else, A 60s Scoop Adoptee's Story of Coming Home by Colleen Cardinal).

In 1979, my wife Sherrill and I listened to a radio article calling for couples to adopt an older child. Would-be parents willing to adopt older children were hard to find. We responded to the call and applied to adopt. Social Services quickly contacted us with a proposal to adopt two siblings, native boys - ages 6 and 7, who they felt should remain together. The boys had been in the foster care system for 3 or 4 years, living short-term with several foster parents. We understood that native communities were not interested in taking on older (native) children. At one point, the boys were being considered for transfer to the USA. The biological parents, afflicted with serious addictions, were living in the province but were not able to care for their boys and were known to have abused them. One was diagnosed with fetal alcohol syndrome. Eventually, the courts removed them from their home to become state wards, but Social Services was ill-prepared to deal with older children's adoption.

Our willingness to adopt an older child morphed into an instant family with two highly energetic boys. Was our adoption another example of the 60's scoop? We do not think so because the boys seemed so happy to finally have a home with us, and we were happy to give them that home. There was no other intention but to create a loving family. On their first day in their new school, when asked to give their full names, the boys proudly gave their new adoptive name even though another child in the classroom (a cousin) declared that their last name was their biological name. The boys did know their birth parents and other relatives who lived only a short 2-hour drive away but now they were part of this new family.

There was both good and bad in this story. Support from Social Services for fledgling adopting parents was not there; we were on our own. We made many mistakes. With support, the boys were able to connect with their native relatives and were exposed to their Indigenous culture. Sadly, one of our boys, after living in our home for over 10 years, ran away, returned to the reservation, became an alcoholic and estranged from our family. But, after many years, we, along with our adopted girl at 8 years of age, were reunited during the holidays. It was a wonderful gathering full of rekindled love.

Sherrill and I feel sad that so many children of the 60's Scoop remain broken people today. We understand that it was a misguided concept that now needs reconciliation. We are forever grateful for our beautiful family that is, we believe, 'scoop free'. We made many mistakes for which we regret to this day. We were

simply parents looking for older children who needed us as much as we needed them. We only hoped that we were doing the right thing.