

Arriving at School - Sidney Byrd - OSEU #6

There were a couple Indian boys waiting. That was the first Indians I saw. Oh, we talked a lot.

We talked to a lot of people. I was so glad I began. They both burst out laughing. They were Indians, but different tribes, so they couldn't understand what I was saying.

But each time I walked they would start laughing.

I couldn't imagine. Finally, one of them had me sit down. I was wearing my shoes, but they were the wrong foot on the wrong shoe, and I was walking like a duck. He brought me to the disciplinarians office.

That's what they were, disciplinarians.

I think now they called advisors or counselors, but you know they were called disciplinarians. My uncle had taught me what to say. You know, I stood there. He said, what is your name?

Sid Bird, sir.

Where are you from?

Porcupine, South Dakota, sir. How old are you? First grade, sir. How old are you? First, and I remembered, six years old, sir.

What grade will you be in?

First grade, sir.

Another boy apparently did the same thing. He said, where are you from?

Joe White Eagle.

What is your name? Winnebago, Nebraska. We learned by rows and had to respond.

They marched us, they made us take off, they zipped off all of our hair, removed all of our clothing, marched us in our nakedness into some jail cells. These were metal stalls.

I thought, now I'm gonna be sentenced to death for the rest of my life. Steel stalls, standing in our nakedness. And then we were made to turn some knobs.

Water came out of the wall. I never bathed in a creek in that home. In the wintertime, I bathed in a number 12 wash tub. So this was only, you could regulate the force of the water, the temperature of the water, by regulating.

Then they made redskins out of us.

Took a long handle brush, soaked us down and scrubbed us. Our skin turned red.

Scrubbing it. Made to rinse off, you know, turn the knobs, and then they gave us towels. They dried ourselves off. We were given Army uniforms.

Six years old. Army uniforms. Looked like soldiers, little boys.