



# **Broken Circle: The Dark Legacy of Indian Residential Schools: A Memoir**

*Theodore Fontaine*

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## **Broken Circle: The Dark Legacy of Indian Residential Schools: A Memoir** Theodore Fontaine

Theodore (Ted) Fontaine lost his family and freedom just after his seventh birthday, when his parents were forced to leave him at an Indian residential school by order of the Roman Catholic Church and the Government of Canada. Twelve years later, he left school frozen at the emotional age of seven. He was confused, angry and conflicted, on a path of self-destruction. At age 29, he emerged from this blackness. By age 32, he had graduated from the Civil Engineering Program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and begun a journey of self-exploration and healing.

In this powerful and poignant memoir, Ted examines the impact of his psychological, emotional and sexual abuse, the loss of his language and culture, and, most important, the loss of his family and community. He goes beyond details of the abuses of Native children to relate a unique understanding of why most residential school survivors have post-traumatic stress disorders and why succeeding generations of First Nations children suffer from this dark chapter in history.

Told as remembrances described with insights that have evolved through his healing, his story resonates with his resolve to help himself and other residential school survivors and to share his enduring belief that one can pick up the shattered pieces and use them for good.

## **Broken Circle: The Dark Legacy of Indian Residential Schools: A Memoir Details**

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# **From Reader Review Broken Circle: The Dark Legacy of Indian Residential Schools: A Memoir for online ebook**

## **Tanya says**

I've read quite a few books on this topic, and this one is excellent. Theodore perfectly explains the paradox of today's Native Canadian in a way I think most people outside of his culture and experience can truly grasp. He discusses his childhood in the residential school system, the abandonment issues it created, the abuse he witnessed and endured, and the role it played in his life of failures and triumphs. He also talks about his own path to healing and the insight he has gained from the process.

Broken Circle should be mandatory reading in Canadian history classes across the country.

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## **Liz says**

A sad commentary on a piece of our Canadian history. Remarkable story full of healing and hope, despair and reconciliation. Fontaine is incredibly honest and forthright in telling his story of the abuse he suffered in residential schools, yet he is incredibly forgiving in the telling. I kept thinking how I really 'had no idea'!

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## **Mariana says**

Canadian Obijway Indians were made to feel inferior and Catholics priests and nuns ran Residential schools and abused the kids. This is a survivors memoir and contains great sketches of Canadian Obijway life in the 1950's.

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## **Lisa says**

I appreciated this memoir of life before, during, and after living at the Fort Alexander Indian Residential School. Most accounts we get of these institutions are third-hand and seem as though they were long ago and far away, but Fontaine's story takes place throughout the 50s and 60s. He describes traumatic experiences that, while horrible, don't seem the litany of awful events that perhaps we were expecting. However, the sum of the impact of a variety of types of dehumanizing experiences - from sexual abuse to physical abuse to completing physical labor on the farm to being punished for speaking Ojibway - did lasting psychological, spiritual, physical and emotional/mental damage. When Fontaine describes his life with his family, it is serene, peaceful, and loving, and when he describes life at the residential school as harsh, dehumanizing, reinforcing his otherness, and abusive on every level. He also describes the way in which he felt abandoned by his parents, which he also believes was an intentional strategy to get him to blame his parents for his predicament, despite his love for his family. His mother believed would make her children like those of the 'white ladies' she cleaned for, until much later, when we realize that the sum total of the efforts actually damaged the minds of these youth almost beyond total recovery. Fontaine was able to have a successful career in civil engineering due to his skill in hockey, but part of that was good fortune, and all of it in spite of his residential school education, not because of it. I appreciated Fontaine's clean writing style, his emphasis

on getting his story out, his need to break the silence and alleviate the shame, self-doubt, and fear that accompany this sort of truth-telling. It's also significant that First Nations people were not considered fully human before the law until 1960. And First Nations people, like so many oppressed peoples, still are in constant struggle to uncover, defend, and nurture their own humanity.

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### **Larissa says**

I believe this book should be required reading for every high school student in Canada. And if there was a way to mandate it, every citizen in Canada.

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### **Sinéad says**

Despite having read so many accounts of the experiences of survivors within the Residential School system, I am never left untouched by another account. The profound pain, disconnection, confusion and abuse these children were subjected to is impossible to become desensitized to. Fontaine's account is all of these things, and more. His prose is simple but his message is so deeply important. A life tormented by institutionalized assimilation against his core identity, the cultural violence of trying to split a child from who he really is, the sexual and physical violence that shaped a boy into an abuser and an addict; all of this is Fontaine's reality and the reality of so many survivors.

These cycles of dysfunction, instilled and reinforced by the Canadian Government for more than a century have left such a devastating impact on Indigenous community and family structures, relationships, languages and culture. Fontaine's own experiences exemplify those of many who have struggled with the burden of colonialism, and the after-effects for future generations.

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### **Chelsey says**

I felt that there was not a lot of content about the behaviors at the residential school. I expected to learn more about how these schools were run. Instead, this was more about the whole life of a young child and very little about the actual school.

I also felt that the writing did not flow well and the experiences were not laid out in any discernible way.

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### **Thalia says**

This is a tough subject. And one that doesn't get a lot of acceptance. Sadly that's just the very thing that needs to happen. I believe this was a horrible thing that happened and I believe it's my responsibility as a Canadian (and a Catholic) to learn more about this. Fontaine is brave to write this memoir. I think he does a fair job of a tough thing. I do wish, however, that he was more in your face about it and was better at conveying the ripple effect of the abuse. It doesn't hit as hard as it could. I also have to wonder at some of the previous reviews of this book. One can only assume they didn't like what the author had to say (and mixing that up with a poorly written book, when it's actually the case of a poor excuse for a reader), rejected it as the truth

or didn't actually read it. One star? Whatever.

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### **Lydia says**

This very well written book is written about something that happened in my lifetime, and it brought back some memories of the fifties, and our perception and judgements about 'Indians'. Much of what Mr. Fontaine wrote about resonated with me, since there are some experiences and memories that one has of one's childhood, which are very similar, even though in a completely different setting than what he experienced. This topic has been very much discussed in the past number of years, and it's good to read one person's memoirs.

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### **Heather says**

I really enjoyed this book as Fontaine recollects many great times with his family. Reading about the traditions and experiences with loved ones was a gift and lifted me up. Through all the bad, Fontaine is able to go back to what life was like before all the hurt. He's very brave for looking his demons in the face and working to come out the other side. Miigwetch for sharing your gift of this book.

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### **Elsie Klumpner says**

I bought this book in Vancouver, B.C. It's a wonderful story of Native Canadian culture and family life. The writer is a survivor of the criminal, sadistic the Indian Residential School program in Canada. They also existed in the United States. Of course, certainly parts of the book dealing with the sexual, emotional and physical abuse the young residents of these schools endured. Fontaine deals with this head on, but also includes the wonderful story of his early family life and his courageous journey to recovery as an adult. I recommend this to anyone who wants to know more about Native life.

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### **Wanda says**

Theodore Fontaine takes us to a place that many of us do not want to go. It is factual, raw and needs to be shared. I commend his personal courage, strength and honesty in writing this book. His memoirs have led me to seek deep within myself and admit that I have held gross misconceptions for the majority of my life. I need to be true to myself and admit that I have been mislead. I have started to revisit my misunderstandings and create a new belief system with regards to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. I hold a new respect and admiration, while it is difficult not to bare shame and guilt for the sufferings of all who were impacted by the Indian Residential Schools. I am grateful and honored to have Mr. Fontaine's memoirs serve as a guide to my need for more awareness and understanding. Megwich.

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### **Pooker says**

I read this book in one sitting and appreciated the motivation, courage and effort involved in the writing of it. It added to my understanding of what happened to the people forced into the residential school system and the effects on them and their families and culture. Particularly interesting to me was the author's insights into how residential school survivors became victims of "Stockholm Syndrome" (before that term was coined) - how they saw their "keepers" as saviours and blamed their parents for abandoning them and themselves as worthy of abandonment.

I do share Mr. Fontaine's view of apologies and had the same thoughts as he when Stephen Harper delivered the apology on behalf of Canada on June 11, 2008 - that an apology makes the apologizer feel better and frees them from the burden of their guilt at wrongdoing; it does not make the person to whom the apology is owed feel better. But, at least, the apology validates the fact that the apology is owed.

I got the sense that the writing of this book was not something instrumental in the author's own healing process; but that he had written it to give others validation of their own experiences, knowledge that they are not alone and, hopefully, the courage to persevere.

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### **Mandi says**

This memoir really exposes the harsh truths behind Residential School survivors. I feel these are the stories that are important to hear, even though unimaginably difficult to share.

This was a very dark time in Canadian history that cannot be ignored. It's important to understand and hear these experiences to prevent these mistakes from repeating.

Fontaine has endured a long healing journey. This memoir was no doubt a significant section on not only his own path, but for other survivors battling with their inner demons.

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### **Cynthia F Davidson says**

I think it is crucial that more of these stories come to light & I'm grateful that Theodore Fontaine had the courage to relive these experiences while taking the time to write them down.

Although my First Nations friends are Migmaw (aka MicMac) their treatment at these residential schools mirrors this account, and worse. Bearing witness is the beginning of healing, and this book is a good example of that necessity.

I've already passed on my copy to my friends on a reserve in New Brunswick because their relatives are currently involved with the Truth & Reconciliation Council which has been videotaping survivor testimonies as part of the ongoing process of fully addressing these issues.

The saddest part of the 'dark legacy' of residential school abuse is the inter-generational trauma. This 'dark legacy' is being passed on to the future generations. In the absence of healing these wounds, the victims become offenders themselves.

When one's trust is shattered in childhood, and you've been stolen from your family & your people - in a tribal society which is based upon family & shared identity - everything in your psyche is undermined and you no longer fit into your family, your former community, & the settlers also reject you. Where do you

'belong' then? This story made me wonder what kind of families the perpetrators - the priests & nuns - came from...

I would have given this book more stars if the author had delved deeper into this aspect of the larger story. Of course you need to heal before your pain subsides enough to comprehend the larger context of the crimes done unto you, yet this too is part of the communal healing process, after the individual portion is underway. The way the settlers raised their own children often left a lot to be desired. Children as young as 7 & 8 were shipped off to boarding schools all the time by the British, for instance, during their empire building & ruling days. Treatment like that hardened their hearts & laid the psychological groundwork for later pathological, colonial behavior.

It might help readers on all sides of this issue to understand how tragic this legacy is because it was done by & to the settlers children too. This undermined their emotional development, which is one more reason why the bureaucrats (former boarding school pupils themselves) lacked the compassion & insight required to stand up against this unhealthy practice of sending young children off to residential boarding schools. None of this lessens the pain but if we don't want to repeat such 'dark legacies' we must grasp just why these practices were so insidious. If you haven't seen the film Rabbit Proof Fence, check it out, for an Australian version of this dark legacy of forced residential schooling. There are other fine Canadian films on this subject too.

I salute Fontaine's initiative & hope it encourages others to testify to the truth of what was done to them, in print, so their stories can live on & educate the rest of us, for decades to come.

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