

An Easter Message from 60,000 slain children who await Resurrection

The Maintenance Man:

A Story of Canada's Homegrown Holocaust



At a time when Canada is doing its best to conceal and rewrite the truth of its biggest and oldest crime, this short story is offered as a necessary antidote.

The events and most of the names and characters in this story are true. The crimes against humanity that it describes are proven and continue today, targeting all of us.

The outcome of this nightmare lies in the readers' hands.

The Maintenance Man

by Kevin Annett



The paper wafted through the air and landed at his feet. He was too busy to notice it.

“Don’t forget, Alan, you’re still on probation here. We need the place spic and span for the inspector tomorrow. I want it done smartly, you got it?”

His supervisor’s voice echoed in his head as he swept the furnace room furiously. There was a recession on and lots of guys were waiting to take his job if he fouled up.

The maintenance man finally saw the paper as he was packing up. It was a single sheet filled with columns of names. He was about to toss it into the bin when he realized it could be important, and he might gain kudos from his new employer for finding it.

Alan Whitehead had worked the night shift at the school for only a week. He was new to Port Alberni after arriving from Calgary, drifting west in search of work.

“I couldn’t go much farther without hitting the Pacific, so here I am,” he had jotted on a postcard to his sister back home. “The pay is shitty, but the hours are good.”

He had never worked for a church before and expected everyone to wear the plastic smiles he remembered from Sunday school. Instead, the rest of the staff looked glum; everyone except the Principal, John Andrews, who reminded Alan of the sergeant-major in his Junior Cadets company back home.

Alan closed the door to the furnace room and pushed his cart down the cavernous basement hallway. In the distance came a sound that might have been an animal crying.

“You can expect to hear a lot of funny noises, especially at night,” his supervisor Edward Peake had told him on the day he was hired. “Lots of wolves and coyotes go wandering through here.”

Alan's job was upkeep, and he wasn't expected to clean the children's dormitories. That suited him fine. He was uncomfortable around Indians, even the young ones.

The cry sounded again. It was high-pitched, almost like a wailing. At the same moment, a door opened at the top of the stone staircase where he stood. Two heavy-set men he didn't recognize looked down at him. Between them rested a bulky sack. One of the men muttered something to the other and the door closed.

The incident spooked Alan, and he hurried down the hall. He tried burying his uneasiness in work. The sun took a long time to come up over the Alberni Indian residential school.

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"Have you ever noticed how miserly people are?" John Andrews asked his assistant.

"I'm not sure what you mean, Reverend."

"Oh, just look around, Plint! Everyone has their little slice of security and they'll look the other way from the worst evil to hold on to it. And thank God for that, eh?"

The United Church minister gave an ironic chuckle. Arthur Plint grimaced.

"I'm afraid I don't share your optimism, sir," he said nervously. "That new inspector asked me some pretty probing questions. It's like he knows what's going on here."

"Just part of the performance," Andrews chuckled. "He'll file his report and the Minister in Ottawa will note his concerns and nothing will change because it won't be allowed to. It's always been that way, as you know all too well, Arthur."

Plint gave him a sour look as Andrews continued.

“Remember that Indian Agent Ashbridge, years ago? He was the only one of them who’s ever caused waves. They threatened his pension and he clammed up. So have a bit of faith, Arthur! Even your indiscretions have gone unreported.”

“Be that as it may, sir,” Plint replied, his face reddening, “We can’t conceal these things forever. We’ve run out of space in the dumping grounds out back.”

“Then go deeper into the woods.”

“I thought of that, but Peabody says if we start burying them beyond the water pipeline, that will put them too near the Indian village. And we can’t start burning the bodies again. The smell is too obvious.”

“Not true,” said Andrews. “During a heavy rain, you can’t smell a thing. Just ask the Catholics. They’ve been doing it that way since the beginning.”

The Principal removed a cigar from his desk and smiled.

“Besides,” he said. “They’re only Indians. Who’s going to care?”

At that moment, Alan Whitehead sat in a café on River Road, staring bleary-eyed at a menu.

“Still on that crappy night shift?” asked the waitress, a young, single woman named Francine.

“Yeah, but it’s alright. Eggs over easy, toast and coffee. Please.”

“You’d never catch me up there at night,” Francine said with a slight shudder.

Alan stared out the window with a troubled look. He slowly unfolded the paper he had found and studied it again.

“Why’d you shave it off?” Francine asked when she returned, bearing his breakfast.

“Oh,” said Alan, hiding the paper. “It’s too hot in the furnace room. Got to let my face breathe.”

“You look good without it,” she said with an alluring smile.

Alan lingered in the diner after eating. Francine kept refilling his mug and smiling.

“Slow today, huh?” he said to her.

“Oh, it’s the strike at the mill,” she said casually. “But it’s sure nice to breathe clean air again.”

“Fran, how long you been here?” Alan asked, finger-drumming his mug.

“In the valley or at this dump?”

“I mean here, in town.”

“My whole frigging life. Dad was a stevedore.”

“You ever hear stories of what goes on up at the Indian school?”

“Yeah, sure. Some stuff. Why?”

“Like what kind of things?” he said, leaning closer.

“Oh, you know, the usual shit. Kids going missing or getting killed. Why?”

“I hear weird noises in there,” Alan answered. “And I found something.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah. Down in the furnace room. I think it was meant to get burned.”

He took the paper from his pocket and handed it to her.

“I couldn’t figure out what the numbers mean but look at all the ‘D’s’ next to the kids’ names.”

“Yeah. There’s lots of them,” observed Francine.

“Right, like nearly half. And look at how some of these kids got transferred to some place called ‘Camp Z’. And check this out.”

Francine’s gaze followed his finger.

“What’s a termination quota?” she asked.

They exchanged a look.

“Look, Al, I got work to do,” she said hurriedly. The woman didn’t speak to him again.

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The young Ahousaht girl named Sally George lay in the dormitory as still as possible. She knew the other girls were doing the same thing, even though an occasional sob sounded in the darkness. They had all learned how to survive one day at a time by remaining unnoticed, even as those around them disappeared forever. Just that week, a little boy named Archie had been clubbed to death in front of Sally by Mister Plint.

I am as invisible as the deer in the forest, she thought. Deer Woman, please help me!

Her expectant prayer disintegrated with the sound of heavy footsteps.

Two figures stood in the doorway as their flashlight beam scanned the rows of beds.

The youngest girls began to whimper. One of them tried ducking under her bed.

“Get her,” said a man. The other one hurried to the girl, who screamed hysterically.

The flashlight moved over the other beds like a poised eel.



*Vicky Stewart, age 9, beaten to death by staffer Ann Knizky
at the United Church Edmonton 'Indian residential school'
April 10, 1958*

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Alan tried to forget about what he had discovered. He stuck the paper in a book and tucked it high on a bookshelf at home. He barely made enough money to pay for his apartment and he wasn't going to jeopardize his job for anything.

He dwelled in the slum part of Port Alberni called “the Ghetto”, not far from the pulp mill. Most of his neighbors were native people a lot worse off than he was. They routinely ignored each other.

Alan became equally aloof at work, shutting out the distressing sounds and sticking to his chores. Soon, he had blunted his emotions and felt as dull as he did after smoking a pack of reefers. He became a pair of moving arms and legs.

Several weeks after he found the paper, he was summoned to Edward Peake's office.

"We need to clean out the furnace," declared Peake. "Too much cinder and slag buildup in there. You ever do something like that?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you'll have to learn. I want you to assist Tom Peabody with the job. Be sure to wear a mask and some good gloves. And you do whatever Tom says, you hear me? Follow his instructions to the letter, you got it?"

Alan nodded. Peake's steely eyes remained fixed on his.

Tom Peabody was a cantankerous old guy with a girth to match his voice. He had worked at the Alberni Indian school for nearly forty years. He kept to himself and drank a lot. He knew every inch of the school, including the parts where no-one else went, like the tunnel that ran through the hills to the nearby Tseshaht Indian village.

"Wasn't much older than you are, boy, when I started here," Tom bellowed as he escorted Alan to the basement bearing scrapers and shovels. "Good thing, too. It was the fall of '33 and I was starvin'. No Relief back then for single men."

The old guy's gruff manner reminded Alan of his father, long dead from a heart attack. Tom turned his attention to the open furnace. It had been cooling but still emitted waves of heat.

“Now you watch me and see how it’s done. And you empty that flue when I say.”

Soon, the air was filled with coal dust and both men were gagging. The thicker the dust grew, the harder Tom attacked the furnace with his tools like it was his worst enemy.

“Okay, now!” Tom suddenly yelled. “Empty the fucker!”

Alan yanked on the flue. Piles of coal dust spilled over its brim and into his boots. He could barely see through his dust-clotted eyes as he shoveled the residue into a trough.

Later, they sat in the courtyard. Tom puffed on a stogie, his face as black as a miner’s.

“Jesus, man,” coughed Alan. “How the hell do you do it?”

The other man shrugged and blew smoke towards the hills behind the Indian school.

“I built those water pipelines back there when that old bastard Caldwell was Principal. Laid ‘em out and everything.”

Alan pulled off one of his boots and emptied coal dust in a long stream. Tom laughed.

“Don’t sweat it,” he said. “We won’t have to do that again for a spell.”

Tom’s expression turned somber. He stared moodily at the hills.

“Well, I got things to do,” he finally muttered.

Alan sat for a while after the other man had left. He gazed down at the pile of coal dust at his feet and noticed something else. Carefully, he picked it up.

Time had aged it and flames scorched it, but it was unmistakably a piece of bone.

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The snow fell unusually hard that winter. Deep drifts blocked the coastal roads and bent the trees. A deceptive calm lay over the Alberni valley.

“But why me?” blurted Alan to his supervisor.

“Because we’re short-staffed and you’re all that’s available,” snapped Edward Peake.

“But it’s at Christmas, sir. I had the day off.”

“You’ll get a bonus.”

Alan swore quietly as he stood outside, staring at the snow burying the schoolyard.

He encountered Tom Peabody in the basement cubicle that served as their office. The old man was well into a bottle of Johnny Walker.

“Hey kid!” he slurred, raising one tired hand.

The younger man fell onto a chair morosely.

“What’s your beef?” Tom asked as he gulped.

“I’ve got to escort these little bastards to some church service on Christmas. On fucking Christmas Day, can you believe it?”

“Eddie Peake never misses a trick!” Tom guffawed.

“What do you mean?”

“He gets payoffs from the churches for deliverin’ the little savages to sing for the pew sitters. Been doin’ it for years, since old Caldwell and Plint started the practice.”

Alan stared at him in disgust.

“Does Andrews know?”

“Course he does, for God’s sake! More perks for everybody!”

Tom gave him a sober look and continued,

“But just between you and me, son, those kids have got to do a lot more than sing some fuckin’ hymns.”

Alan shook his head and sunk into silence. He spurned the bottle Tom offered him.

“Sometimes I feel like quitting this bullshit job,” he finally said to the older man.

“Why, for Chrissake? You won’t get anything else. The mill’s still not hirin’.”

Tom gave him an avuncular look. He scratched his white whiskers and reflected,

“It’s tough when you don’t know anybody. I was like that when I first got here.” He paused and said with a grin, “Maybe you just need to get laid, son. I can point you to a few places.”

“Yeah? Like where?”

“Hell, any of the squaws around here will blow you for a mickey of rye,” the old man smiled. “You can get anything you want in this valley. Even a kid, if that’s your fancy.”

Alan stared at him in shock. Tom’s smile faded.

“Okay, no offense,” he muttered. “Didn’t know if that was your thing or not. I only mentioned it ‘cause this place is sort of a clearin’ house for that kind of thing.”

Alan didn’t appreciate Tom’s remark until Christmas morning.

He arrived at the school just as a line of thin, sickly children were trudging onto a bus. They were better dressed than normal. A stern-faced, plump matron stood at the head of their line, barking instructions at the children. She would occasionally strike one of the children on their head with a thick, studded strap.

“Are you my help?” she barked at Alan.

“Yes ma’am.”

Her name was Miss Middleton. She scowled at him like he was one of her little charges.

“If any of them tries anything, use this on them,” she said, handing him a strap like hers. “But you keep it out of sight when we get to First United, you hear me?”

The rows of dark brown eyes stared at him in fear as he took a seat with Miss Middleton at the front of the bus. As the bus chugged down River Road towards town, one of the girls began giggling. The matron swung around and glared at the children.

“Miss ...” came a trembling voice.

Middleton strode back and soon began yelling.

“The stupid bitch wet herself,” she grinned when she returned. “She can sit in it.”

The bus soon came to a stop in the south end of town, in what passed for the affluent part of Port Alberni. First United Church’s parking lot was crammed to overflowing. Soft organ music wafted from the open doors as well-dressed white people smiled and hugged each other.

“Around to the back,” Miss Middleton ordered the bus driver.

As they unloaded the children and led them into the church basement, Middleton exclaimed to Alan,

“You should know I don’t hold to all this nonsense. It gives the Indians the wrong idea. The wrong expectations. Using them as farm hands and domestics, that makes sense. It funds our work and keeps them in line. But what’s to come of all this hymn singing nonsense? Next thing you know, they’ll be sitting next to us in church!”

A door opened and a tall man in a clerical collar entered. He surveyed the children with cold, calculating eyes.

“Are they all deloused?” he asked Miss Middleton.

“Yes, Reverend Howie.”

“They look consumptive.”

“We brought only the healthiest ones, sir.”

“Just keep them at a safe distance,” scowled Howie. “And once they sing their hymns, get them out of here quickly.”

As the matron led the children to the church sanctuary, she said to Alan,

“You’ll have to wait down here. You’re too scruffy looking and you’re not dressed for church. I’ll call you if you’re needed.”

When the opening music began upstairs, Alan started wandering through the basement. But the sudden approach of a man’s voice made him duck into a corner.

“I tell you, this isn’t the time!” said the man.

“When’s a better time?” replied another. “They won’t miss them. I’ll pay Middleton and Reverend Howie to fudge the head count.”

“It’s still risky,” said the first man.

“Do you want them or not?” snapped the other. “I’ve got other buyers standing by.”

“Yeah, yeah, okay. A boy and a girl, like I said.”

“Six hundred each. Now.”

“You said five hundred!”

“Price went up. The Principal’s getting greedy.”

“Jesus Christ.”

“Nope. He’s got nothing to do with it.”

The men laughed.

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The dream was recurring. He was standing on the summit of a mountain, looking west towards the Pacific Ocean. As twilight emblazoned the land a brilliant gold and red, a chorus of voices arose and swarmed all around him. The voices were of a strange, guttural language, but he seemed to understand them. Then a native girl dressed in white stood before him.

“I’m buried in between the walls,” she said, her deep brown eyes pleading. “Help me.”

Alan always awoke at that point in his dream, sweating and sobbing.

One morning, he was about to tell Tom Peabody about his dream when a heavy packing crate they were lifting intervened. It nearly struck both men as it crashed to the ground.

“Jesus!” exclaimed Tom Peabody, sprawling on the concrete. “Thanks for the shove!”

Alan looked at his torn hand and wiped away blood. He had cut it badly when he pushed his friend out of harm’s way.

“Let’s get you fixed up,” offered Tom, standing slowly and nodding at the wreckage strewn about the yard. “This shit can wait.”

The sun was out, and melting snow ran in streams down the yard. A sound of children reciting the Twenty Third Psalm echoed in a dull refrain.

Alan nursed his bandaged hand and grimaced in pain as they sat in the First Aid room.

“Let me handle that shit out there, son. You take it easy.”

“I thought there was a nurse here,” Alan said sourly.

“Oh Jesus, the bitch only comes by every month or two, during inspection.”

“But what if one of these kids gets sick or hurt?”

“Won’t matter. Those Indians have got a higher tolerance of pain, just like animals.”

Alan stared at him in confusion.

“You got to live here awhile to get to know ‘em,” continued Tom. “It’s like what I told that pastor with the bleedin’ heart: you can’t change ‘em, those savages.”

“What pastor?”

“Over at St. Andrew’s. A reformer type. Got into big scraps with Andrews all the time,” Tom said. “I liked him, if the truth be known. A young guy, like you. Name of Carl Abbott. Used to drink with him down at the Port Pub where I filled his ears. He was always askin’ me things.”

“About this place?”

“Oh yeah, all the time. Wanted to know where all the kids went, how they were bein’ treated, that kind of thing. That’s what did him in, I guess.”

“What do you mean?”

“Oh Christ, that’s a story in itself.”

“I’ve got the time,” said Alan, holding up his bandaged hand.

“It ain’t pretty,” warned Tom.

The old man had a prodigious memory. After listening for a while, Alan interrupted,

“You mean they got to his wife before they fired him?”

“Oh, hell yeah, it was the talk of the town. The church guys paid her to leave him and make his life hell after he started squawking about what goes on here.”

“And that was right after he wrote his letter to the United Church head office?”

“The same week. I heard the scuttlebutt from my Mountie buddies. The church arranged the whole thing with the feds. Even lined up the judge who took Carl’s kids from him.”

Tom stared out the window as children appeared, trudging listlessly around the yard.

“God knows why he gave it all up just for them,” he said, nodding at the natives in the schoolyard. “Never made any sense.”

“Maybe he found out something he couldn’t keep quiet about,” Alan replied. “You know, like about children dying up here.”

“Now you’re soundin’ like him,” Tom frowned. “Hell, them kids’ graves out back ain’t no secret. I’ve been diggin’ ‘em since I was your age. Just part of the job.”

“Did you tell Carl about the graves?”

“Yeah, like I’m tellin’ you now. Even told him about burnin’ the bodies. Why d’ya think Peake wants the furnace scrubbed so often?”

Alan sighed and shook his head.

“Yeah, it’s a shocker when you first hear it,” said Tom. “A few clean-ups back, I found two little skulls in the oven that we missed. Baby ones. I could hold ‘em in my hand.”

“Babies?”

“Sure,” Tom said matter of factly. “These girls get pregnant all the time from visitin’ big shots. Then we’ve got to get rid of the evidence. Right?” He paused and said in a lower tone, “These kids die like flies anyway. Hell, there’s even a quota the head office gives us. So many bodies every month. Always been that way.”

Alan stared at him incredulously and thought of the paper he had found.

“And if you ask me, those dead kids are the lucky ones,” added Tom.

“Why?” Alan said, his anger rising.

“These kids go cheap. You want one for a servant or for fuckin’, no problem. Cash on the barrel to Andrews or Plint or that bastard Bill Howie at First United. They auction ‘em off to the local farmers, too, a regular slave labor deal. Hell, they even use ‘em over at the church’s Indian hospital in Nanaimo and the one up the coast in Bella Bella.”

“What for?”

“Drug testin’ and brainwashin’ experiments, that’s what I was told. Military stuff. Carl dug it all up. Why do you think they hammered him so bad?”

“What ever happened to him?”

“God knows where he is now,” said Tom with a sigh. “He tried fightin’ back, protestin’ and such, but he got no help from anybody. They defrocked and blacklisted him, smeared him from one end of the country to the other. The newspapers and lawyers wouldn’t touch him, not with the church and the feds against him. Everybody got scared of him. The church said he was crazy and dangerous. The old slam dunk operation.”

The old man grunted as he stood slowly.

“Anyway, enough of this shit. I got to go clean up that mess.”

Soon, the noon bell sounded along with a cacophony of dutiful, regimented footsteps.



United Church's Alberni 'Indian Residential School', 1964



Joan Morris, indigenous survivor of Nanaimo Indian Hospital experiments, 2006

Alan deliberately stayed away from work after that, feigning sickness. He knew if he quit it would be harder to get Unemployment Insurance, and with the strike in town, nobody was hiring. But going hungry seemed better than working in that hellhole.

He lay in his dingy room one morning sorting out his options when a rapping sounded.

“Alan Whitehead? Open up. RCMP.”

The ride was a short one. He was left alone in a white room, watched by a camera. The man who eventually entered was tall and plain clothed.

“So, where did you put it?” the man snapped without taking a seat.

“Put what?”

“Don’t be cute, asshole. The document.”

“Who are you, anyway?” Alan demanded.

“Inspector Montague,” replied the cop curtly. “Now just tell me where it is, and you can get out of here. We’ve torn your place apart and it’s not there. Did you give it to a reporter?”

“No. I, uh ... I got rid of it.”

“How?”

“I burned it.”

Montague looked at him skeptically.

“You thought it important enough to show to some waitress, but then you burned it? Why?”

“I thought I’d get in trouble.”

“You sure as hell are in trouble, shit for brains,” barked the Mountie. “For this, too.”

He tossed a notebook on the table.

“You’re keeping quite the detailed record, Al. Planning on blackmailing someone?”

“No! I was just, you know, writing down my thoughts about things.”

Montague stared at him coldly and then barked,

“Everything that goes on in the Alberni Indian residential school is a classified state secret under federal Orders in Council. You can get life imprisonment for having violated that secrecy.”

“Christ, I didn’t know that!”

“Sorry, but that’s no defense under the law. Your cozy conversation with Francine Williams puts you and her up shit creek.”

The cop let Alan stew in his fear for a few moments. Then he lay a document on the table.

“Sign it,” he commanded. “It says that anything you find in there you hand over to me, pronto. If you don’t, you’re toast.”

Alan quickly signed the paper.

“Alright. Now get out of here,” said Montague. “And don’t forget, you’re being watched.”

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Charlie Thompson was a consummate survivor. It was no small feat to still be alive after five years of imprisonment in the Alberni residential school. He managed it by playing the game.

During his first week of incarceration, Charlie had ratted out his own sister Debbie for speaking their Tseshaht language. Principal Andrews had rewarded him with a spot in the protected group of children. After that, Charlie started eating regularly and was spared the mandatory rapes, slave labor and floggings. Debbie died quickly, which was a sort of blessing.

Charlie had an instinct for spotting human weaknesses, and he was powerfully built, so he soon became one of John Andrews' "Enforcers", as the other children called them.

Armed with a club and garbed in a special uniform like a latter-day *sonderkommando*, Charlie and boys like him greeted every new batch of their fellow natives as they were unloaded from trucks in front of the "school". Anyone who was unruly or spoke their language received the business end of an Enforcer's club, or penis. The lesson was learned quickly by everyone.

"You could be a slave or a sellout," recalled a survivor. "Those were your only choices."

Not only could Charlie do whatever he wanted to anyone in the school who wasn't white, but he became the official poster boy for the Alberni Indian residential school.

Presaging his later role as a prominent west coast tribal "chief", young Charlie would stand alongside Principal John Andrews whenever the media needed a photo-op of "*our selfless humanitarian efforts to rescue and elevate the local Indian children,*" to quote a typical United Church press release.

The image of the smiling native boy and his words of adulation would be publicly dispensed whenever news of children's mistreatment wafted from Port Alberni or any of the other one hundred and fifty "Indian residential schools" across Canada, from where half the children never returned.

The Catholics and Anglicans had their own death camps and versions of Charlie Thompson. The extermination of entire peoples and its subsequent whitewash depended on these collaborators. And when the pubescent Enforcers became adults and ran the state-funded native band councils, they proved even more helpful and lucrative to their masters.

As tried and true was this system, it was not infallible. Burning human flesh can be smelled miles away. And as crippled and afraid as they were, the unprotected survivors of the Christian death camps had no interest in keeping the Big Lie alive. People talked. The Enforcers and their pale bosses were constantly closing leaks and calling their handiwork "*death by natural causes*", which suited the rest of Canada just fine.

For all his privileges, Charlie Thompson remained an errand boy for the whites, and he knew it. But he had bigger plans that went beyond raping his fellow natives.

One day, he dreamed, he would be the guy who owned the land and made the big bucks. He would out white the whites. But to get there he had to first prove to people other than the United Church that he had the right stuff.

Francine was alone in the diner that night, cashing out and doing her final check. She was so intent on her job that she didn't notice the two men who had quietly entered.

"Oh my God!" she shrieked when she saw them. "You guys scared the shit out of me!"

“Sorry, babe,” said the tall man, smiling. “Just bring us a couple of coffees.”

“We’re closed,” she said, staring uncertainly at the shorter man, who was a native.

“He said two coffees,” barked the Indian.

“Hey, come on, Charlie, let’s not be rude,” said the taller man with a grin.

He grabbed Francine by the throat.

“In the back,” he ordered, holding up a stiletto blade.

Later, Charlie Thompson swore profusely as he washed his hands in the kitchen sink.

“I knew the bitch wouldn’t have it,” he said. “I fucking told you so.”

The white man gave him a condescending smirk as he wiped his blade.

“Then consider this on the job training, Tonto. We may need you again soon.”

“When?”

“Eager, aren’t you?” said the white man. “Don’t sweat it. Andrews will let you know.”

“What about her?” Charlie gestured to the woman’s body.

“We’ll deal with it. You just keep your mouth shut.”

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After his arrest, Alan returned to his job like nothing had happened. But the experience helped him appreciate the look in the other staffers’ eyes that had once perplexed him: a detached resignation, like the kind his mother wore after years of living around her wife-beating husband.

“Everybody blames the game,” Tom Peabody would often say. “They play it so much they don’t think they’re playin’ it.”

For Alan, the game amounted to keeping his mind on his job and his feelings locked away, like he’d done growing up. He tried to forget everything he had seen and Tom had told him. He spoke to no-one.

Alan’s life became heart-crushingly lonely, made lonelier by Francine’s sudden absence. She had left town for another job, according to her boss, who refused to say anything more. Tom Peabody was his only friend now, but he became reclusive and took to the bottle even more. The old guy often lay passed out in the basement office.

Alan’s dream of the little Indian girl who was buried between the walls stopped recurring. She appeared to him one last time, but only to stare at him sadly and, he felt, accusingly.

He regretted that he hadn’t destroyed the document he had discovered in the furnace room. It still lay where he had hidden it, wrapped in plastic under the oil drum behind his apartment. He knew the Mounties still suspected he had it and were waiting to see if he found anything else in the school rubbish. So he deliberately ignored the papers he had to routinely shove in the school furnace. *What I don’t know I can’t report to the bastards*, he thought contentedly. But still the buried document tugged at him, like his own unwanted childhood memories.

Alan’s uneasy equilibrium ended abruptly one evening soon after he had begun his shift. He ignored a sudden child’s scream because it was such a common sound at night. But when it resounded again right outside his basement door, he looked out into the hall.

A young girl ran past him, chased by John Andrews himself.

“Stop that bitch!” Andrews yelled at Alan.

Alan was too shocked to do anything.

“Didn’t you hear me?” the Principal exclaimed. He caught up to the girl and dragged her down, tearing at her clothes as she screamed in terror. She looked ten years old.

“Now get the fuck out of here!” Andrews yelled at him as he spread the girl’s legs wide.

Something simmering in Alan exploded. In a rage, he grabbed the nearest object and swung it at Andrew’s head. The blow was so hard it threw the Principal to the wall, where he collapsed and lay still. Blood ran out of his nose and ears.

“Fuck you, you sick asshole!” roared Alan at the prostrate man, dropping the metal bar he clutched. He turned to the native girl who lay curled up and whimpering on the concrete floor. When he went to her, she screamed again and started crawling away.

“Hey, come on, it’s okay now,” he said to her. “He’s not going to hurt you ever again.”

The girl looked at Alan for the first time. Her pretty, oval-shaped face was bruised and swollen, her lips bleeding.

“What’s your name?” he asked her gently.

“Number 483,” she said automatically.

“No, no, I mean your real name.”

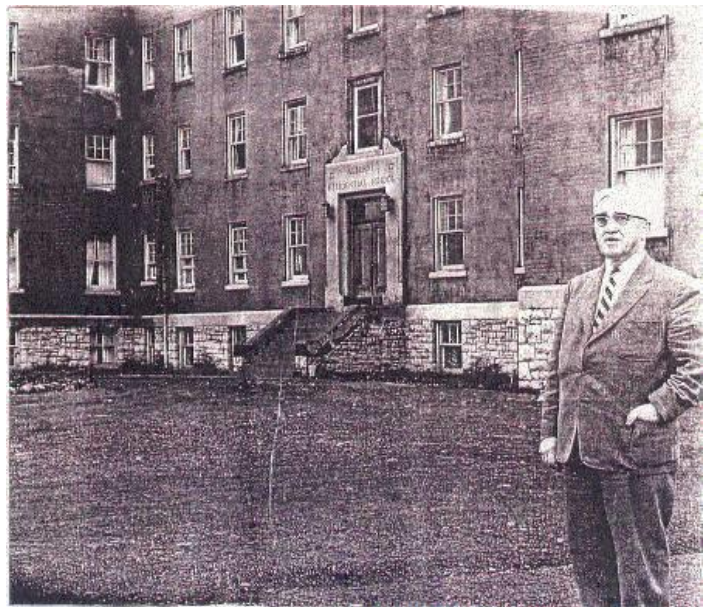
She hesitated and then said slowly,

“Sally George.”

“Hi Sally. I’m Alan. I’m the janitor.”

Her deep brown eyes looked confused.

“Come on, I’ve got to get you out of here,” he said, helping her up.



John Andrews (left) and Alfred Caldwell, Principals, United Church Alberní ‘Indian residential school’. Caldwell killed at least two students, Albert Gray and Maisie Shaw



Harriett Nahanee, eyewitness to Alfred Caldwell’s murder of Maisie Shaw in 1946

Her Ahousaht name was Song of the Sun, given to her by her mother Owl Carrier before she was killed. Sally was of clan mother lineage, descended from the great shaman Maquinna and heir to her people's secret teachings and the power they bestowed. Just before the Mounties attacked their village and stole her and all the other children, her mother had told her,

"Listen to the sun for what to do and who to trust, daughter. But never trust the whites, those Mu-Multh-Nee ghost people, even when they seem friendly and kind. They all have two heads and two hearts. They eat whatever is living and make it as dead as they are. They bless the killing and call it life. They are all crazy. And they will hate you especially for who you are."

Sally remembered her mother's words as she followed the white man named Alan through the forest. Anything was better than staying in that evil place near that Thing, but as soon as she had the chance, she would leave him. By the time she and Alan reached the highway that ran west to the coast, the sun was appearing. They finally stopped, exhausted, and fell to the ground.

"Where do you come from?" he asked her as they crouched in the bushes.

"Marktosis," she said quietly. "It's our village, on the big water."

"Is it safe for you there?"

"No, they are all the white man's dogs. They hate me because I am traditional."

Alan's face sunk in despair. He had probably killed John Andrews. There was nowhere for him to escape to now, either.

“The Enforcers will come for me,” said to him Sally quietly. “You will run away and let them take me. Then they will rape me and kill me like they do to all the others.”

“I’m not going to let that happen to you, alright?” exclaimed Allan angrily. “Now let’s get going. We can’t hang around here.”

Sally suddenly saw the white man’s goodness, trapped inside him like a sliver of light.

Maybe he isn’t as crazy as the others, she thought, as she followed him through the woods.

.....

RCMP Inspector Peter Montague was not a happy man.

“I thought you Mounties always got your man,” barked the politician over the phone.

“You watch too many movies, Minister. Things are complicated out here.”

“That fucking janitor is supposed to be on your leash. Now we hear he’s put John Andrews in the hospital and has taken off with some Indian kid. I thought you read him the riot act.”

“I did,” Montague answered. “Some people need more convincing.”

“So, will he be another Carl Abbott? We can’t afford that kind of public damage again.”

“It’s not like that at all, sir. The janitor’s a rank amateur. They won’t be hard to find.”

“I hope so, for your sake, Pete. Anyway, they’re the least of our worries,” said the Minister gravely.

“Now what?”

“It’s the churches again. They want more protection.”

“How much more can they get from us?” barked Montague. “We’ve covered their asses all along, for God’s sake!”

“They’re running scared these days now that we’re phasing out the funds for their so-called residential schools,” said the politician. “So, they want us to scrub any of their connections to the Indian hospital experiments and the killings at Camp Z. Plus a guarantee that none of it will ever go to court. If we don’t play ball, they’ll pin it all on us and spill everything they know about Project Paperclip, the Pfizer drug testing, and the German doctors at the camp.”

“Jesus Christ!” Montague exclaimed, nearly smashing the phone receiver onto his desk.

“The worst of it is coming from the United Church because they’re in so deep; especially that idiot Andrews. He doesn’t try to hide anything. Even his own people consider him a liability.”

“He’ll be easy enough to deal with,” muttered Montague, pausing. “What about shutting down Camp Z? Pull the plug on those Nazis for a while.”

“We thought of that, but the next delivery for the nano-serum testing is already in the pipeline. Fifty kids, fresh from the churches. They’ve already been erased from the residential school records. And we can’t exactly put the little bastards in motels.”

“What a fucking mess,” declared Montague. “So, what do you want me to do, Minister?”

“I think you know. Just use reliable people this time. Deal with Port Alberni especially. And find that elusive janitor, quickly.”

“And then what do I do with him?”

“Use your own judgement, Pete. But keep the residue minimal this time, will you?”



Inspector Peter Montague, RCMP

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Excerpt from a confidential memorandum to the National Security Council, Document 20301 (05/01/1974), from the Joint Advisory Committee PROJECT ERSATZ Update (cc: RCMP Security Service, MI6, Deputy Director for Operations, CIA)

Synopsis

Due to excellent clinical results, the first stage of trial testing of the E1-A neural inhibitor serum will commence earlier than anticipated, on 01/02/1974 at the National Defense Research experimental facility (*aka* 'Camp Z'). Two test groups, each of twenty-five aboriginal subjects, male and female, ages four years to sixteen years inclusive, have been prepared for trial testing of the aforementioned serum.

PROJECT PAPERCLIP consultants Dr. Gustavus STRUGHOLD, Dr. Heinz LEHMANN (*aka* ‘Major Bob Armstrong’), Dr. Ruth KYANDER, Dr. Josef MENGELE (*aka* ‘Dr. Green’), and United Church of Canada clinician Dr. George DARBY sr., have been seconded from the Defense Research Board in Ottawa to Camp Z. Their task is to supervise the insertion procedure, diagnose test subjects’ responses, and monitor the post-operative deployment of the fifty implanted subjects. (*See attached note from Dr. G. DARBY*)

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January 3, 1974

R.W. Large Memorial Hospital

Bella Bella, B.C.

To the members of the Joint Advisory Committee, Project ERSATZ

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I trust you will not consider this memo ill-advised. The importance of our work to the Free World compels me to make these remarks, which are, of course, strictly “off the record”.

I need not remind you of my long and fruitful career as a medical missionary with the United Church of Canada on the west coast, including my time as the Director of the R.W. Large Memorial Hospital and supervisor of its clinical research among the coastal savage tribes.

This contact included my creating the first X-Ray clinics and sexual sterilization programs among the Ahousaht and Nuu-Chah-Nulth Indians in conjunction with the United Church and federal government, at the West Coast General Hospital in Port Alberni and the Nanaimo Indian Hospital. The latter facility created several successful spin-off projects, including the pain threshold, mind altering, and sensory deprivation experiments that are of such importance to the military and the American space program.

In this capacity, I must warn the Committee of the hazard of expecting a quick application of our test serums. The creation of controlled, alternate human personalities is still in its pioneer phase, despite the success of our German colleagues and the groundbreaking work of our esteemed associate, the neuro-surgeon Doctor Wilder Penfield of Montreal.

In general, our program has been slowed by our failure to find a method of creating “drone” substitute personalities through other means than chemical or surgical intervention, whose results have proven disappointing. Instead, we are exploring the use of electronic methods to alter human brain waves and manipulate thoughts, emotions, memory, and behavior.

To quote Doctor Penfield, whose remarks I find remarkably visionary,

“In order to guarantee social order and preserve our democratic way of life, it is necessary to manipulate and alter human consciousness directly and permanently. This can best be done by interfacing the brain synapses and neurons of our populace with an electronic apparatus in order to create a hybrid personality that can be manipulated at will: in effect, a new type of integrated synthetic organism, part man and part machine.

“In theory, this process can be achieved by injecting nanoparticle ‘Trojan Horse’ vaccines into the general population, say under the guise of a contrived global pandemic and with mandatory pseudo-inoculations. Our colleagues at Pfizer and Roche Pharmaceuticals are already working on such a prototype serum.

“This procedure of ‘techno-formation’ will allow us to control the thoughts and actions of entire populations and will serve as a new form of bio-weaponry. Accordingly, the development of a new nanotechnology and computer system to achieve such a massive techno-formation requires that we expend any amount of money and human lives to achieve such mastery, but behind a cloak of maximum secrecy.

“In that regard, the present method of using young aboriginal test subjects is to be preferred and should continue regardless of the consequential massive death rate among the children. The stateless status of Indians, their isolation from the general populace and containment on reservations, and the near-endless supply of easily disposable test subjects from Indian residential schools and hospitals makes the savages the best option.”

To add a ‘p.s’ to Doctor Penfield, the task of resolving the Indian Problem will be greatly aided by our continued use of aboriginal children. In that sense, the experience and expertise of our German colleagues in dealing with their own inferior racial minorities should be highly valued and relied on, now and in the future.

Sincerely and most respectfully, I remain, your servant,

George Darby (sr.), M.D., FRCPS, DSC

NOTE: The Joint Advisory Committee officially concurs with Darby’s remarks.

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The weather had smiled on Alan and Sally, sparing them the freezing rain and snow. But after another day in the woods they were exhausted and famished. Alan’s mood matched his condition, as he morosely stumbled on without a plan, as Sally trudged steadily behind him.

Occasionally an RCMP cruiser would speed past them, its lights flashing. West of Alberni the Mounties were doing vehicle checks as police helicopters passed overhead.

Why am I bothering? Alan thought grimly. *It’s just a matter of time until they get us.* Still, he didn’t regret what he had done. That Andrews pig deserved to die. He felt clean and free for the first time.

As he crouched down to hide from another helicopter, Sally pulled on his sleeve.

“We have to go over there,” she said quietly, pointing south, away from the highway.

“Why? What’s there?”

“There will be food for us,” she said. “Deer Woman told me.”

“Who the hell is Deer Woman?” Alan asked irritably.

“One of my Grandmothers. She can make us invisible if we go more into the forest.”

Alan stared at the road and then shrugged. He didn’t have a better option.

Sally hurried ahead of him, bouncing like she herself was a deer. Her energy seemed to grow the further they went; he could barely keep up with her. By the time dusk fell, they were deep into an old growth forest, its trees rising two hundred feet above them.

Sally stopped suddenly and stood completely still. Alan felt like they were being watched. As the girl stared ahead of her, Alan saw the wolf that returned her gaze. It was grey and majestic. It sat staring at them thoughtfully. Then it rose, turned, and trotted off into the forest with Sally close on its heels. Perplexed, Alan ran after her.

The wolf led them to a clearing and loped into the forest. In the dell stood a log cabin.

“I have been here before, but I was little,” said Sally later, as they dined in the cabin.

“This ain’t bad,” remarked Alan as he slurped the concoction in his bowl. “What is it?”

“It is *chummis*. Salmon eggs in bear grease oil. It brings good medicine.”

“Good to know,” he winced, feeling suddenly nauseous. “I wonder who lives here now.”

“One of my relatives, I don’t know who. Deer Woman says this is a safe place.”

Alan was drifting off to sleep when Sally interrupted his doze.

“Why do you work for the Mu-Multh-Nees?” she asked him. “You don’t seem like them.”

“The who?”

“Your people. The Ghost People. The Eaters of my people and the world.”

“I don’t know,” said Alan, shrugging. “It was just a job to me. At least it was at first.”

“I felt your peoples’ master when I was in the school prison,” she said, sounding much older. “It is a Thing that eats everything that is alive. It ate your people before they came across the big water, so now you spread its death wherever you go. Your people can’t help doing it, they are crazy like it is. But sometimes, one of you sees it for what it is and tries fighting it.”

“I know of one man who did,” said Alan. “A man named Carl. I wish I’d known him.”

“Yes, I can see him,” said Sally, her eyes closed. “He was a holy man who loved us. The Thing hated him for it. It still does because he still fights it.”

“You mean he’s alive?”

“Yes, but he evades his enemy like we are doing now. He has learned to fight the way the People do. From the shadows.”

Sally began to hum and sing softly. Then she stopped and opened her eyes.

“Do you hear it?” she asked Alan.

“What? All I hear is the wind.”

“Yes. On the wind. The voices of my friends and my family. The ones the Thing has eaten. And the soul of your people, longing to be released from it.”

Alan stared at her incredulously but with a dawning acceptance.

“And there is more,” continued Sally, her eyes aglow. “A great silence. The Great Mystery. And more. A nothing. No bird song. No children’s laughter. No happy voices of the People. It is vanishing. The Thing is eating it all. One day it will eat the whole world and all its people.”

Sally lifted both her hands and sang some more. Then she sat in silence.

“I think you will have to go now,” the girl finally said to Alan.

“Go? Why?” he said, dumbfounded.

“It is your time to return to them,” Sally said with a hint of sadness. “It is safer for me that you go. But we all thank you for what you have done. You will be remembered.”

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The Mountie ran to the waiting chopper with a wave at the pilot.

“You all set?” he yelled over the revving props.

“Yes sir.”

Peter Montague secured his handgun and donned the earphones as the machine climbed into the clear blue sky. As they soared over Port Alberni, he began calling his backup.

“A complete cordon, five miles around. Nobody in or out. I want this done right.”

“We’ve got the tactical boys all ready, sir,” said a crackling voice.

“Keep them on a leash, for Gods’ sake,” exclaimed Montague. “I want this guy alive.”

Alan had been trekking all morning away from the cabin, honoring Sally’s wish. As he stooped to drink from a stream, he heard helicopter rotors in the distance. He ducked into the trees, but the chopper appeared and began circling overhead. Alan deliberately broke cover and ran across a field, hoping to draw them away from the girl.

The helicopter quickly landed in the field ahead of him as the rotor wind buffeted the long grass.

“Just stay where you are, Al,” came a familiar voice through a megaphone.

As the rotors died, Peter Montague emerged from the chopper pointing a gun at him. Other armed men wearing flak jackets emerged from the woods and soon joined him.

“Easy now,” the Mountie said to Alan as he approached. “Get on your knees, hands up.”

As he frisked him, Montague asked,

“Where is she, Al?”

Alan glared at him coldly.

“Okay,” the Mountie said. “Come on.”

Two of the armed men grabbed Alan and led him back to the helicopter.

“We can do this the easy way or the hard way, Al,” said Montague as he lit a cigarette.

“I can butt this out in your eye, or you can talk.”

“I don’t know where she is,” Alan said quickly. “We got separated.”

The Mountie smiled and took a puff. Then he gestured to the armed men to leave them and butted out the cigarette on the helicopter.

“Is he dead?” Alan asked.

“Who? Your good buddy John Andrews?” Montague smirked. “He sure is, but not because of you.”

“What do you mean?”

“The Reverend has been an embarrassment and a problem for a while,” explained the cop. “We’re tying up our loose ends and cleaning up the image of the Indian schools.”

“So, you guys killed him?”

“We expedited things. Just like we need you to do now,” said Montague. “So, tell me where she is and you’ll walk, Al. You’ll even get your old job back, with a promotion.”

“And if I don’t?”

Montague struck Alan on the jaw with a heavy blow. He fell like a poled ox.

“Don’t be stupid,” the cop said to him, rubbing his fist. “Come on, get up.”

Alan staggered to his feet, holding his bloodied face.

“Where is she?” Montague repeated. “That’s the last time I’ll ask.”

“I can’t tell you,” he said, bursting into tears. “I just can’t.”

“Oh, sure you can, Al. It’s the easiest thing in the world to do.”

“Why is that one little girl so important?” he sobbed at the Mountie.

“That’s our business. Your business is to not get thrown out of this chopper from a thousand feet up.”

Alan fell to his knees blubbering. He looked around him, praying for something to happen to save him. But he was forsaken in a wind-swept field, facing death.

That’s when the memory struck him, putting everything in perspective. He was back once more in their family kitchen, standing over his mother’s battered body as she raised one hand towards him.

“Help me, Alan!” she sobbed through bloodied lips. “Stop him!”

And then came the blow of his father’s hand on his adolescent face, and the bite of a knife pressing against his throat, and the coarse words he would never forget.

“Get the fuck outta here, you little bastard, or you’ll be next!”

And then he had run and never stopped running, abandoning his screaming mother to be slaughtered.

I could have stopped him, Alan thought, staring at the sky. I could have saved her life. But I didn’t. And I wouldn’t, if it happened again.

Alan sighed with a strange relief and self-acceptance.

He looked up at Peter Montague.

“She’s in a cabin,” he said quietly. “I’ll show you where.”

.....

Denouement

The sound of music and applause echoed from the hills behind the school.

“Today, on the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Alberni Indian school, we are proud to continue our ministry with the opening of this new administrative office.”

The speaker was a chubby faced man in a suit. He smiled as the applause rose again.

“We are most thankful for the generous funding provided by Chief Charles Thompson and his Tribal Casino, without which this project would not have been possible.”

An even fatter man wearing an Indian bonnet stood up and waved.

“So, let us give thanks in prayer,” said the speaker. “Oh loving and merciful God ...”

Alan Whitehead watched the ritual from the doorway through which he and Sally George had fled, so many years before. When the prayers began, he smirked and returned to his basement office, closing the door on the quintessentially Canadian farce.

Looking about his cubicle, he realized how much at home he felt there, close to what was familiar and ordered. He glanced down at the floor where Tom Peabody’s body had been found years before, struck down in mid-stride. The city coroner never issued a cause of death and Alan smelled a rat. But he doubted that old Tom would have raised much of a fuss over the whole thing. As he so often said, everybody plays the game.

Not everybody, thought Alan. *But it might as well be.*

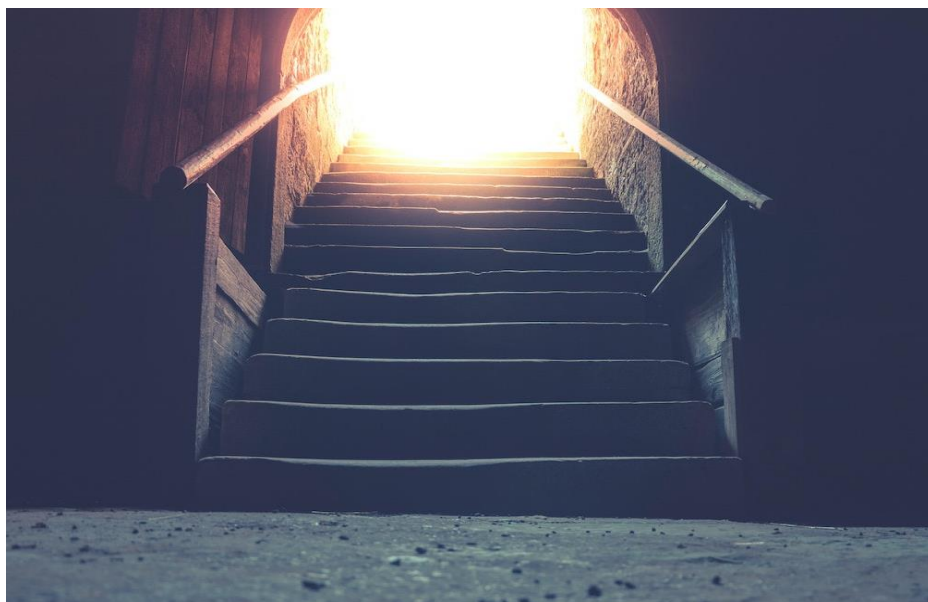
He felt his years as he trudged to the furnace room. Upstairs, the familiar footsteps could be heard, walking in lockstep uniformity.

The native children had not been permitted at the United Church ceremony. They were confined to their building until the wealthier guests were ready to view them and select the best ones. Business was business, after all.

Alan stared at the sacks of confidential material waiting to be burned and the old over-scraping tools gathering dust on the wall. The disposal method was a lot easier and more efficient now, thanks to the new, hotter furnace that needed little upkeep and destroyed even the most resilient evidence. Tom would have been proud.

The maintenance man gazed at his reflection in the broken mirror over the sink. He didn't recognize the wrinkled face that stared back at him, for it seemed to be dissipating before his eyes. It mattered less to him every year.

The rhythmic throbbing of the furnace comforted Alan and filled the empty silence he had felt on that last day with Sally George, when she spoke of the fate awaiting all of them. He shut his eyes and moved with the machine-pulse of the oven. He felt himself consumed by its flames and rise with them to the sky, carried on a shrug of eternity.



About the author

Kevin Annett, M.A., M.Div., has twice been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for leading the twenty-five-year campaign that uncovered and prosecuted genocide in Canadian ‘Indian residential schools’. He is a former United Church minister who was fired without cause, ‘defrocked’ without due process, and permanently blacklisted after exposing the murder of indigenous children at that church’s Port Alberni ‘Indian residential school’.

Kevin is the author of twenty-six books and plays and is a world-renowned whistleblower, human rights activist, award-winning film maker, and public speaker. He is an adopted member of the Metis and Anishinaabe indigenous nations and is a co-convener of the sovereign Republic of Kanata. His main websites are www.murderbydecree.com , www.republicofkanata.org and www.bbsradio.com/herewestand. His email is angelfire101@protonmail.com .



Kevin Annett (left) with survivor Johnny ‘Bingo’ Dawson, eyewitness to killings at the Anglican Indian school in Alert Bay, BC. Bingo was beaten to death by Vancouver police on December 9, 2009

