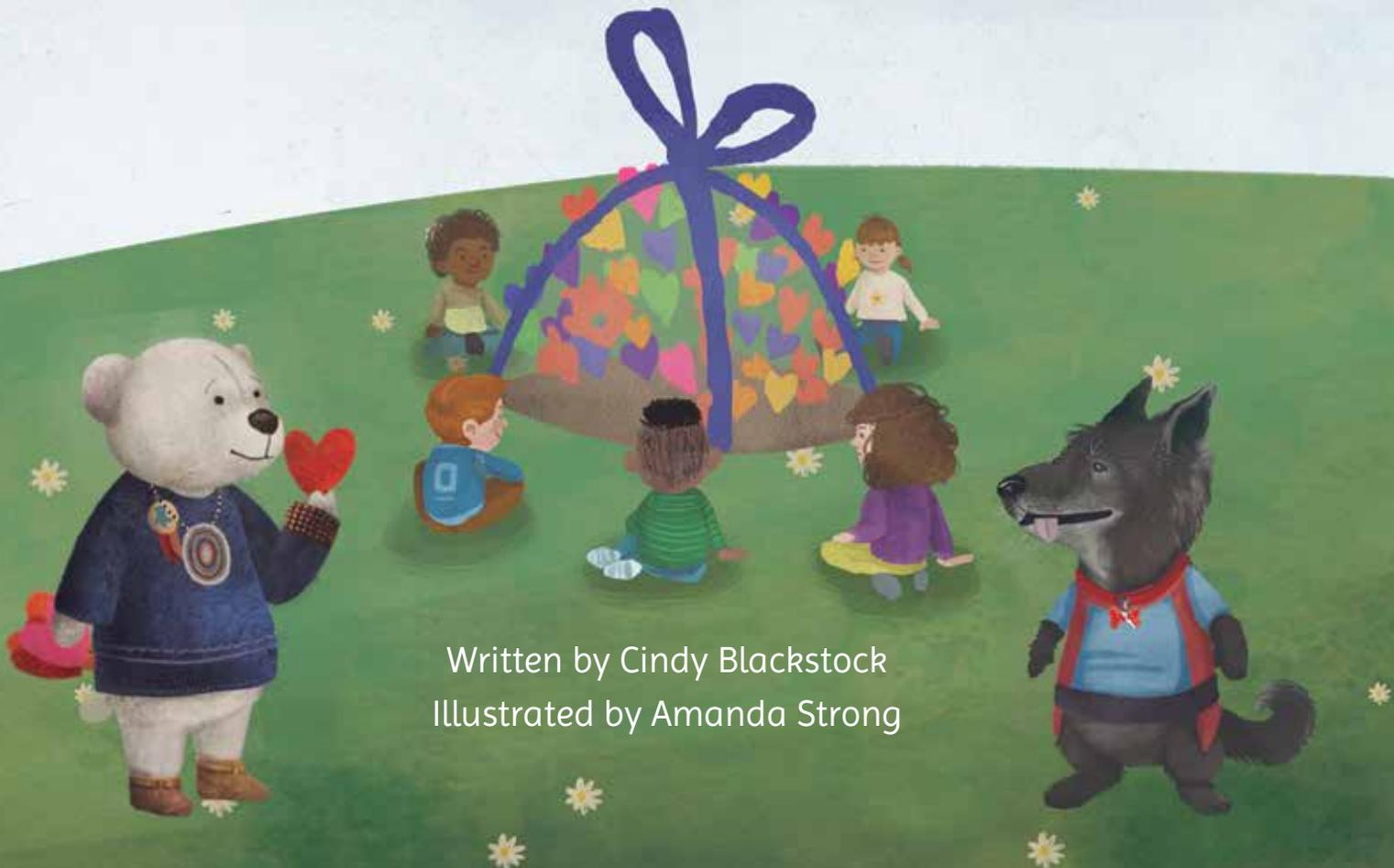


Spirit Bear: Honouring Memories, Planting Dreams

Based on a True Story



Written by Cindy Blackstock
Illustrated by Amanda Strong

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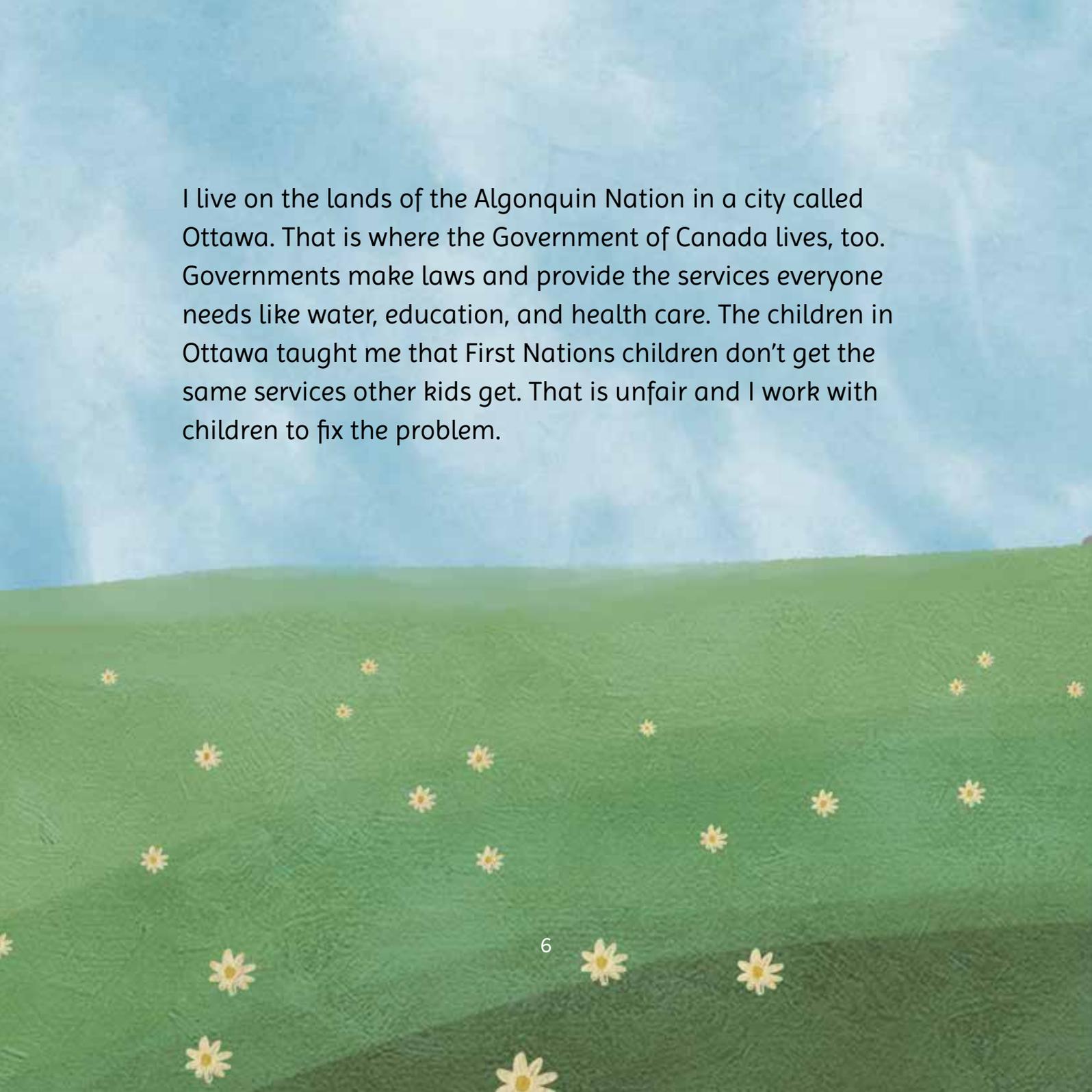
We honour the memories of all the children and families affected by residential schools and the veterans who fought for peace and justice for all people in Canada.

This book is dedicated to four very special heroes for children who crossed over to the Spirit World this past year: Elder Elmer Courchene of Sagkeeng First Nation, Gary Sacobie of Kingsclear First Nation, Nita Walkem from Nlha'7kapmx Child & Family Services, and Maurina Beadle of Pictou Landing First Nation. They showed us what loving justice for children looks like. May we all honour them and their families by always being there when children need us.



Hi, everyone! My name is Spirit Bear and I was born in a huckleberry patch in the Carrier Sekani territory in British Columbia. I am a *Bearrister*, which means when I see something wrong, I have to learn about it and try to help. Some problems seem big and hard to fix but my mom, Mary the Bear says the first step in fixing a problem is believing you can. I know mom is right because I saw children work with First Nations to make Jordan's Principle come true so First Nations kids can get the services they need like help from doctors, teachers, and Elders when they need them.





I live on the lands of the Algonquin Nation in a city called Ottawa. That is where the Government of Canada lives, too. Governments make laws and provide the services everyone needs like water, education, and health care. The children in Ottawa taught me that First Nations children don't get the same services other kids get. That is unfair and I work with children to fix the problem.



FAIRNESS
FOR
FIRST
NATIONS

SPIRIT
BEAR
PLAN

♡
JORDAN'S
PRINCIPLE
!!!

EVERY CHILD
MATTERS

EQUAL EDUCATION FOR
FIRST NATIONS

Today, I went to visit Victoria Island in the middle of the Ottawa River. It is sacred to the Algonquin. On my way home, I saw a dog carrying a huge bundle of decorated hearts on planting stakes!

“Hello, my name is Sus Zul, which means Spirit Bear in English,” I said. “What is your name?”

“My name is Jake,” he replied. “I help my friend Mick fix big trucks back home in Prince George, BC, but today I am volunteering as an official reconciliation support dog.”



I was surprised!

“Prince George? That is where I am from, too! I am a proud *membear* of the Carrier-Sekani Tribal Council.

“What are you doing with all those hearts?” I asked.



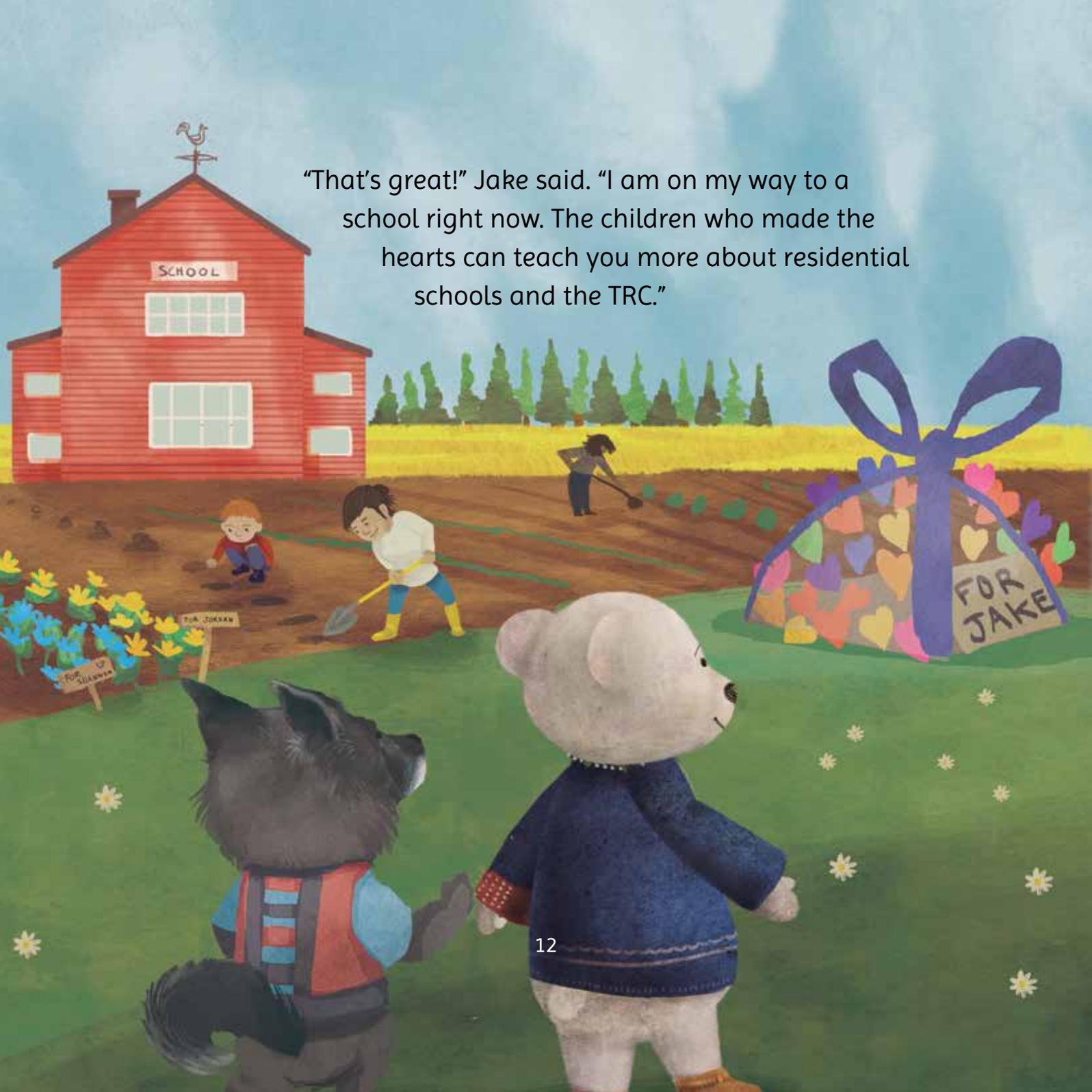
“Well,” said Jake, “the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (they call it TRC for short) is having its closing ceremonies in a few days and asked children to make hearts in memory of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children who went to residential schools. I am collecting the hearts from schools to take them to Rideau Hall for the ceremony. There are too many for me to carry. Do you want to help?”





“Sure,” I said, “My Uncle Huckleberry and his friend Lak’inswx taught me about residential schools and my sister Era Bear mentioned the TRC, but I want to learn more.”





“That’s great!” Jake said. “I am on my way to a school right now. The children who made the hearts can teach you more about residential schools and the TRC.”



“Hey! You must be Jake!” the children exclaimed as we arrived at the school.

“Yup,” said Jake, “and this is my new friend Spirit Bear. He is helping me carry the hearts to the TRC ceremony. Maybe you could teach him what you know about residential schools and the TRC?” The children excitedly said, “Sure, we will teach you, Spirit Bear!”



One boy stood up and began to speak.

“Hi, Spirit Bear. My name is Gary. Residential school survivors came to visit our class this morning to tell us what it was like to be in one of the schools.”

Another student named Elmer continued, “For over 100 years, the Government of Canada removed First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children from their families and put them in residential schools that were run by churches.”

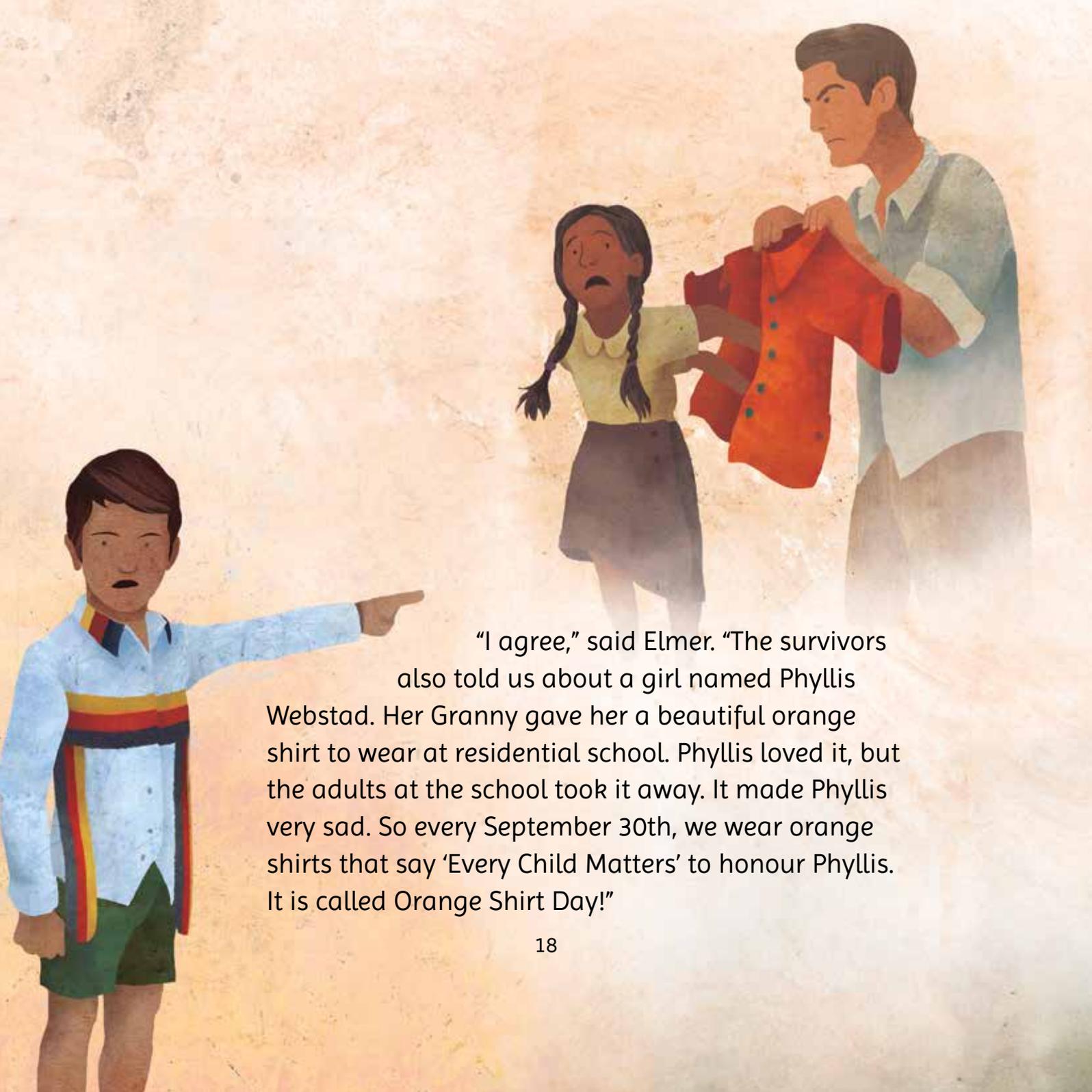


A girl named Nita went next, saying, "Spirit Bear, the government wanted to change Indigenous peoples into people like them, so they did not allow Indigenous children to speak their languages, practice their culture, or pray in the way their ancestors (people and animals who lived before us) did. That made them sad."



“That is not right!” I said.





"I agree," said Elmer. "The survivors also told us about a girl named Phyllis Webstad. Her Granny gave her a beautiful orange shirt to wear at residential school. Phyllis loved it, but the adults at the school took it away. It made Phyllis very sad. So every September 30th, we wear orange shirts that say 'Every Child Matters' to honour Phyllis. It is called Orange Shirt Day!"

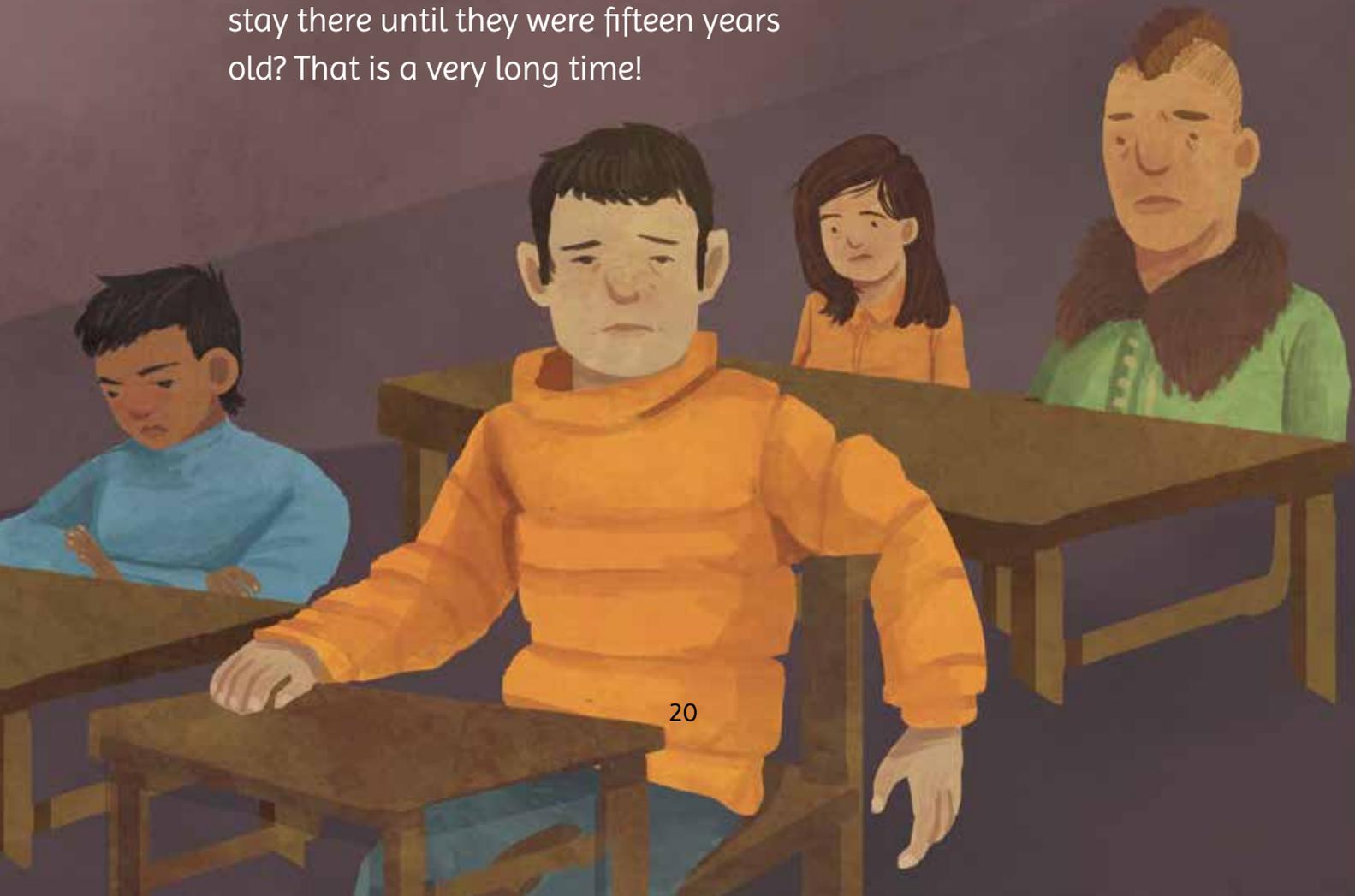


Jake chimed in, "I have an orange safety coat I wear at work. On September 30th I will wear it to honour Phyllis! Spirit Bear, I can lend you one, too!"

"Thanks! I will get the other bears to wear one, too!"



“I am so glad you will wear an orange coat, Jake and Spirit Bear. We have to remember all the children who went to residential schools, and the ones who passed away there, too. Do you know that children had to go to the schools when they were only five years old and they had to stay there until they were fifteen years old? That is a very long time!



“Many children only got to see their family during the summer, if they were lucky. Some families could not even come to pick up their kids because the government would not let the parents leave the reserve.”



Even though I went to bear school, I had never heard of a reserve for people before and neither had Jake.

“Is a reserve like a dog house?” Jake asked. “Mine is made out of wood and sits on my nana’s porch!”

Nita answered sadly, “No, Jake, it is not like a dog house. A dog house is a place where you live, where you can be yourself, and where you choose to stay and go as you please.”



“When Canada became a country in 1867, the government passed a law called the *Indian Act*. It pushed First Nations peoples off their lands and onto smaller places called reserves. The *Indian Act* is still around today and First Nations are still working hard to get their territories back! Métis and Inuit people are trying to get their lands back, too.”



“That is not right!” I said. “How can Indigenous peoples get their cultures and land back?”



Elmer replied, "That is what treaties are for. Treaties are agreements (promises) between First Nations and the government on how to share the land so each group can live the way they want. The problem is that the government tried to break the treaties and take more than their fair share of the land. Now First Nations are working hard to get the government to honour the treaties and stop the unfairness."



Jake asked, "How can we help?"

Gary responded, "In 1996, a big book came out called the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (called RCAP for short) that had a lot of answers, but not much was done to put them into action. The TRC is going to remind people about RCAP and give us more ideas on how we can help."

Languages

Cultures

Good Schools

Keep
Families
Together

Honour
Treaties



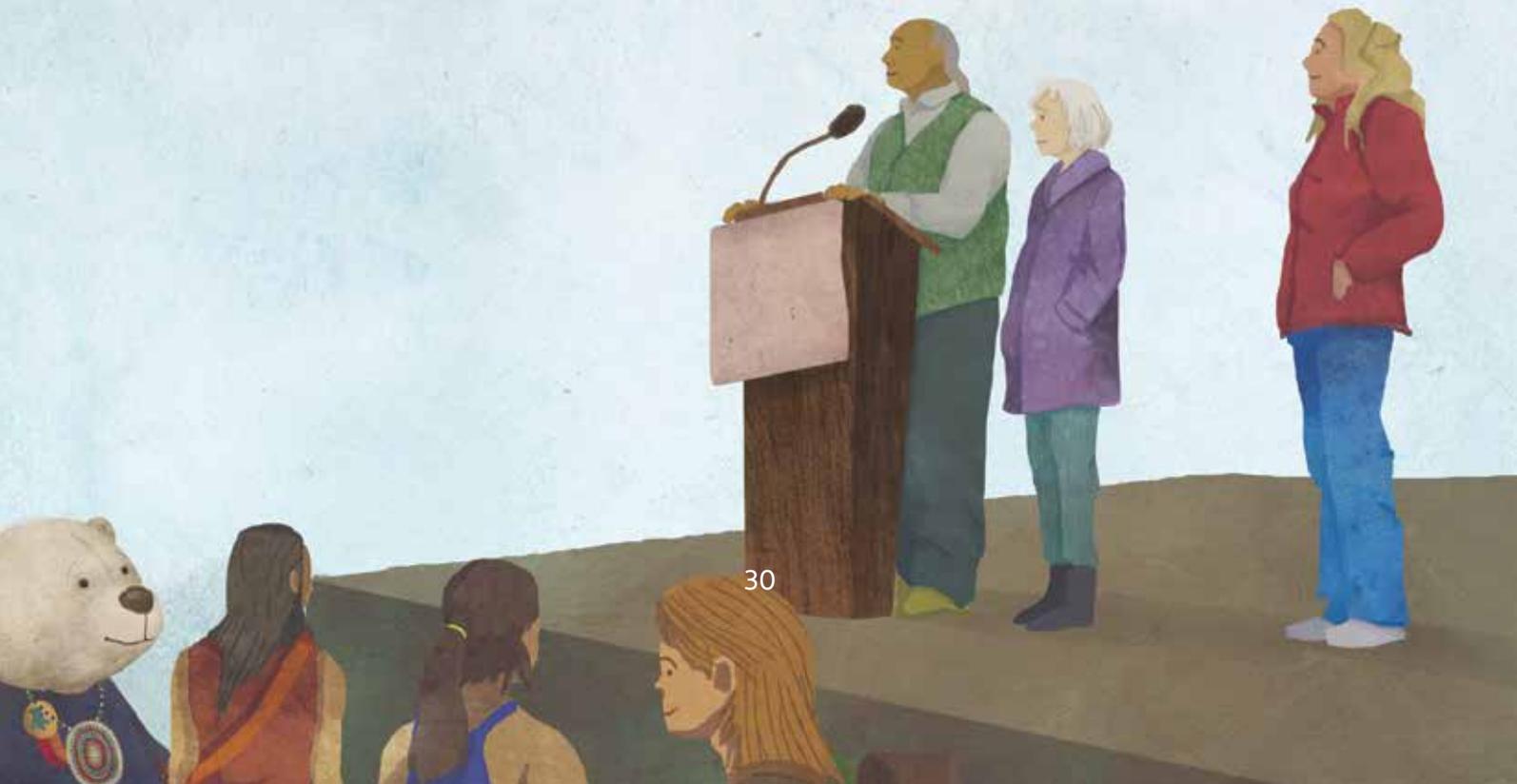
Jake shouted, "1996! My grandpup Kalum was just a puppy then. He told me that when he was out for a walk one day in Saskatchewan, he saw a residential school closing. He and the other animals were SO happy the schools closed but taking children from their families for so many years left a lot of sadness and problems behind. That is what the TRC is trying to fix, Spirit Bear."





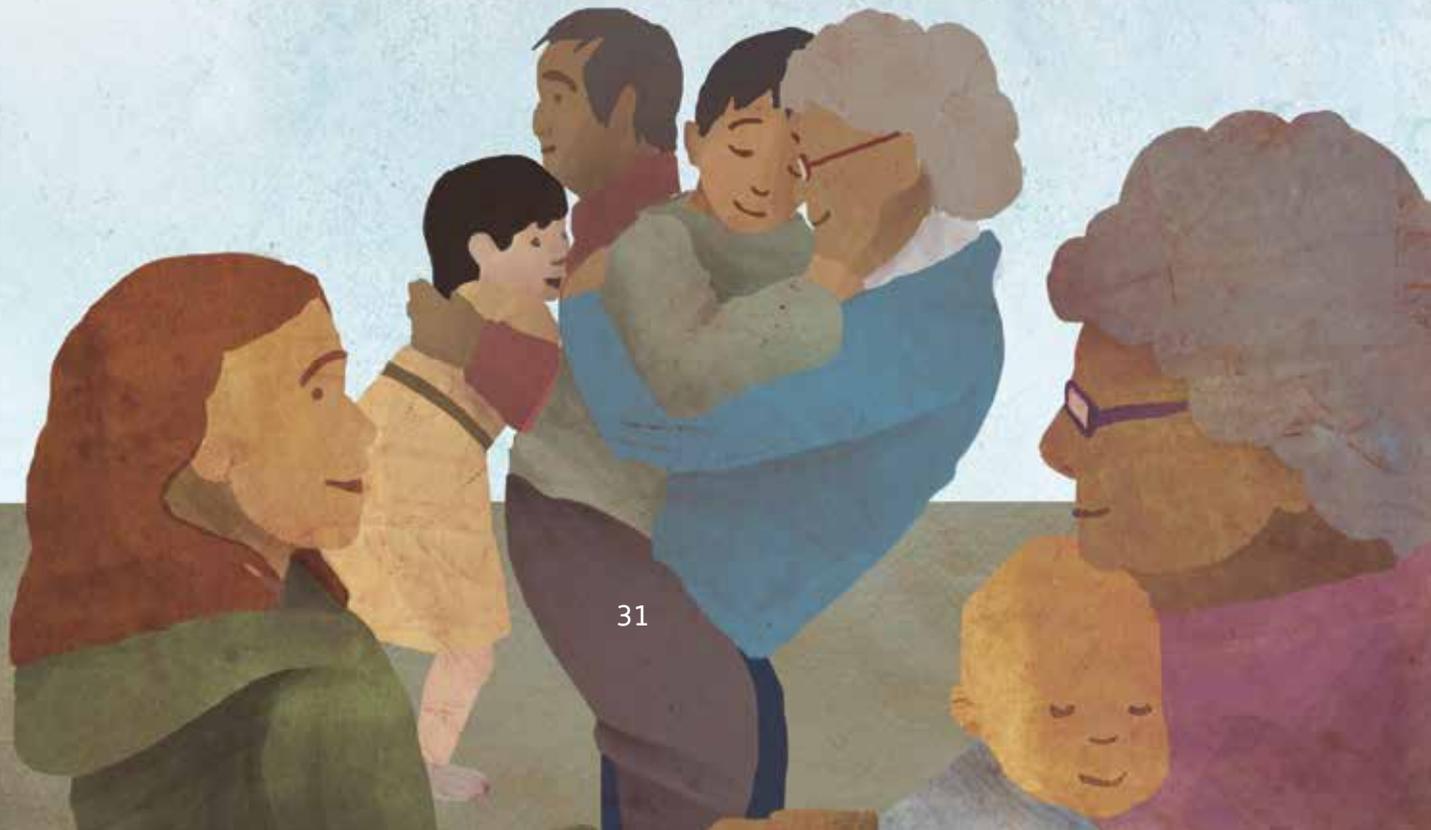
“I am glad they are closed but why did the government and churches think it was a good idea to keep them going for so long?” I asked.

Nita replied, “That is what the TRC wants to find out. They talked to over 7,000 people, mostly residential school survivors who bravely told their stories, so we could all learn from the past and have a better future.”



Gary spoke up again, “The TRC listened to the survivors’ ideas and made Calls to Action so we can all help make their dream come true. We get to hear the Calls to Action tomorrow!”

This gave me hope. “I can’t wait to hear the Calls to Action so we can help!”



Suddenly, Jake jumped up. “Oh no!
We are running late. Come on,
Spirit Bear, we have to get
these hearts
to Rideau
Hall before
bedtime!”

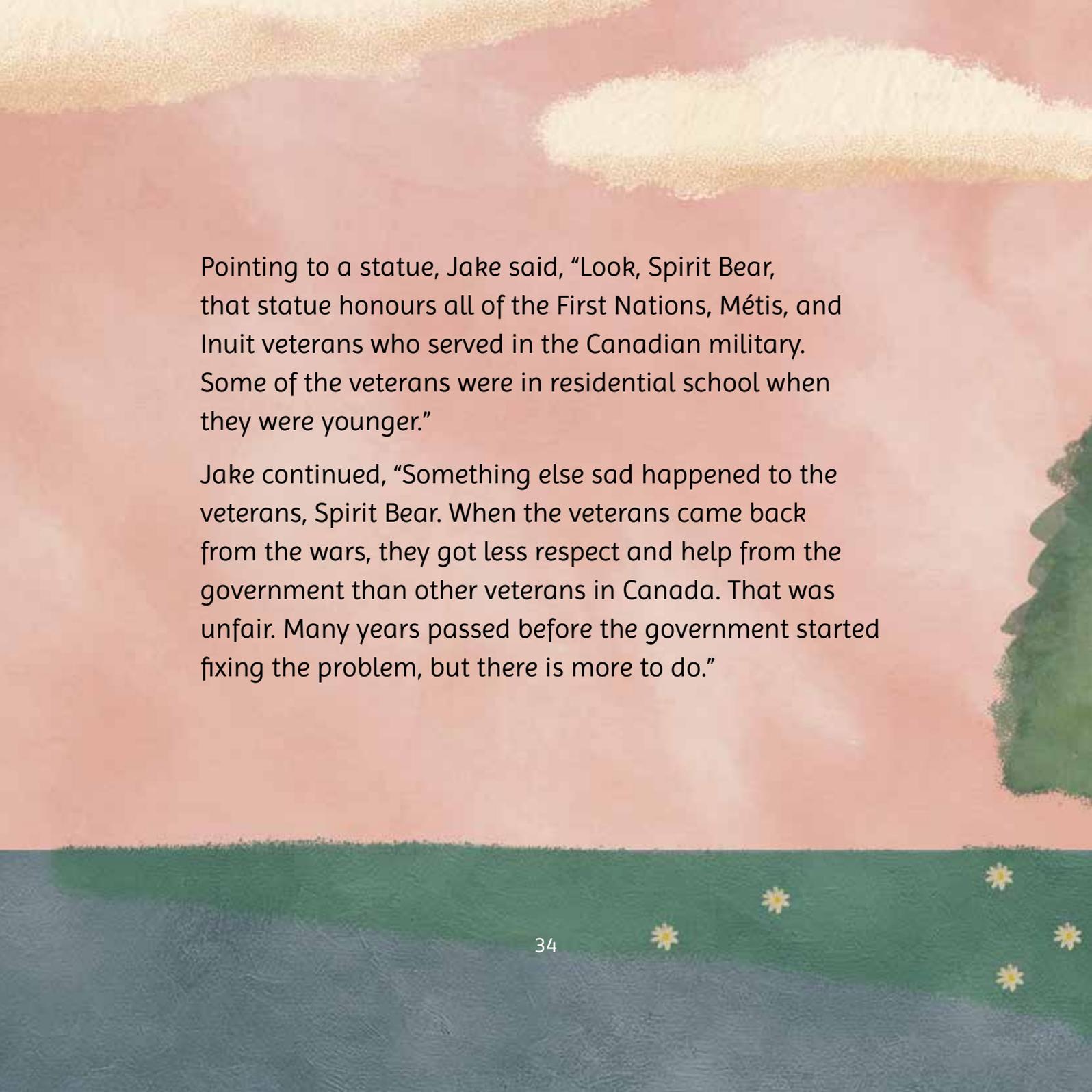


I turned to the children. “Thanks for teaching me!”

They replied, “You’re welcome! See you tomorrow, Spirit Bear and Jake!”

And with that, we were on our way again.





Pointing to a statue, Jake said, “Look, Spirit Bear, that statue honours all of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit veterans who served in the Canadian military. Some of the veterans were in residential school when they were younger.”

Jake continued, “Something else sad happened to the veterans, Spirit Bear. When the veterans came back from the wars, they got less respect and help from the government than other veterans in Canada. That was unfair. Many years passed before the government started fixing the problem, but there is more to do.”



Hmm, I thought for a second. "Let's plant a heart to honour them!"

Jake responded excitedly, "Good idea! We need to honour veterans every day, not just on Remembrance Day. We can ask the children to send letters and drawings to thank them and show we care."





"I am so glad we are finally here," Jake said, turning to look at me. "My Aunt Mia is a fancy dog and she has a dog house here we can sleep in. Let's put the hearts outside Aunt Mia's dog house so we can watch over them!"



Rideau Hall



“Hey! Look up at the sky, Jake,” I said. “My ancestors have come to watch over the children and residential school survivors tomorrow. They must know the TRC is an important thing!”

“I am sure you are right, Spirit Bear.” Jake replied. “Ancestors are very important and wise. My ancestor, the great wolf, is going to howl tonight to spread the word to the other animals about the TRC and the Calls to Action! Sweet dreams, Spirit Bear!”

“Good night, Jake,” I said with a yawn.





The next morning, Nita, Elmer, Gary, and the other children arrived at Rideau Hall.

“Hey, look!” they yelled in excitement. “There is Spirit Bear and Jake!”





Nita ran up to us and asked, “Have the residential school survivors and other important people who are going to Rideau Hall come by yet?”



“No,” Jake answered, “but they will be here soon so let’s get all the hearts ready for when they arrive!”



Gary called to all of us, "The ceremony is starting!"

We found our seats and Nita whispered, "They are saying the Calls to Action now."



Jordan's
Principle

Let's All Learn

Keep
Families
Together

Looking around I saw hundreds of bubbles. I asked, "What are all the bubbles for?"



Jake replied, "They represent the dreams the residential school survivors have for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children today and the generations of children to follow."



Just then, something else caught my eye. “Look, Jake, there are squirrels! Aren’t you going to chase them?”

“Nope,” Jake answered, shaking his head. “Reconciliation means we have to get along and the residential school survivors need all of our help!”

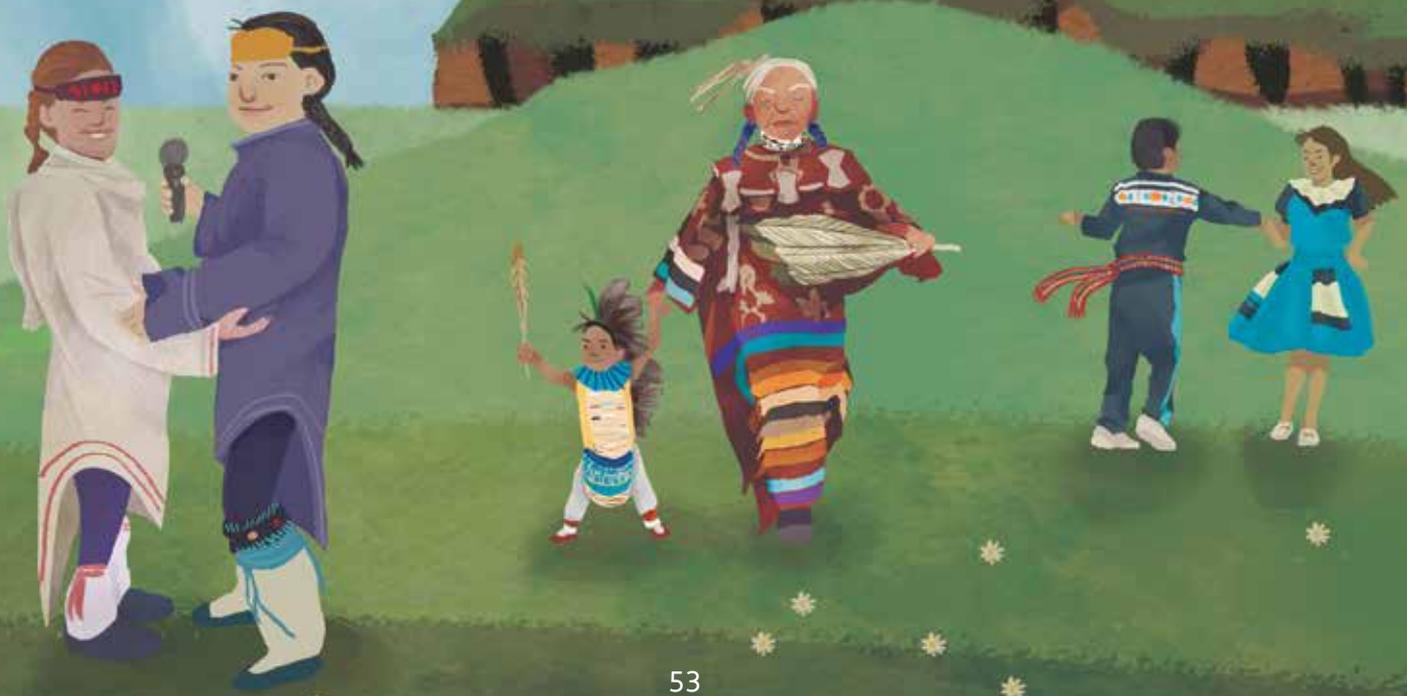




“Wow,” I said, “so that is what reconciliation looks like. We need to be fair and kind to everyone.”



“Yes,” Jake said, “and that is why it is so important that we show the residential school survivors that we have learned from the past by helping to make sure the TRC Calls to Action become real.”



Nita spoke up, “Yes, Jake. Helping means showing kindness and respect to people. We can write letters to the government to make sure they help with the Calls to Action. We can help residential school survivors in other ways, too. We can shop for things they need (I love shopping!), bake cookies, or shovel their driveways.”

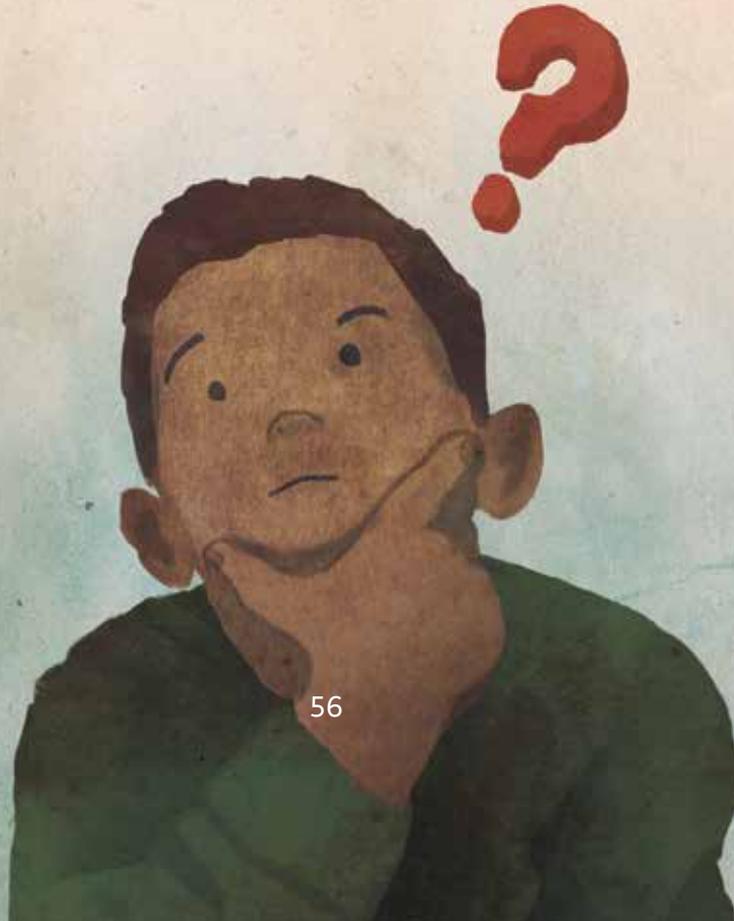
Elmer said, “Don’t worry, Spirit Bear, we will write cards to the Elders and veterans, too, to let them know we care and we will plant a heart garden at our school every year!”





“Awesome!” I shouted with joy. “I will draw a picture of my ancestor bears and ask them to say thanks to the Indigenous ancestors for me!”

Gary added, “And we will make sure all the children in Canada know they can help First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children and youth grow up healthy and proud just like their ancestors wanted!”



“When I grow up,” Gary continued, “I want to help families stay together and be a volunteer fireman to help keep children and their families safe!”



Elmer agreed with Gary. "Good idea. My Elders always say, 'We must always look after the little ones.'"

I looked at him and replied, "Elmer, I promise to be the best *Bearrister* I can and always 'look after the little ones.'"





Jake piped in, “And I promise to be a good reconciliation support dog and train the pups to follow in my grandpup Kalum’s paw prints!”





Timeline

Indigenous peoples (that means First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples) have lived in the place we now call Canada for a very long time! Some people say, “since time immemorial” (that means forever).

1497

Explorers from England and France start arriving in Canada and say the land is now theirs.

1867

Canada becomes a country of its own.

1871

The government of Canada starts to sign treaties with First Nations. Treaties are about sharing. But the government did not see it that way. The government used treaties to make First Nations families move to smaller and smaller patches of land so that settlers and their families could move in.

1876

The *Indian Act* becomes a law. This law tries to control First Nations and take the land they live on.

1876

The government creates the reserve system. A reserve is a small patch of land for First Nations families to live. For a long time, First Nations families could not leave the reserve without permission from Canada!

1879–1996

Canada takes Indigenous kids from their families and puts them in residential schools. Kids were not allowed to speak their language or celebrate their culture and were often treated badly by the adults in charge of the schools.

1907

A man named Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce visited the residential schools and told the government that Indigenous kids were getting sick because they were not getting the same help to keep them healthy as other kids and the schools were falling apart. The government did not help and many students died.

1996

There is a big book called the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. It gave some answers on how to fix the unfairness against Indigenous families. Residential schools finally close!

Timeline *(continued)*

2001

A statue is made to honour Indigenous soldiers! It's called the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument.

2006

Residential school survivors grow up and take the government and the churches who ran the schools to court. An agreement was made called the Indian Residential Schools Settlement.

2007

Spirit Bear is born and learns that First Nations kids get less help from the government than other kids. He goes to Ottawa to work with kids to help fix the problem.

2008

The government says sorry to the kids who went to residential schools.

2008

A group called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is made. Their job is to listen to stories about residential schools. Then they write the stories down so we can learn from our mistakes.

2013

Every September 30th, we wear an orange shirt to say, "Every Child Matters!"

2015

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission celebrates the end of their work! They make a book called the *94 Calls to Action*. Spirit Bear says we should all read this book and then help fix the unfairness!

2015

Spirit Bear, lots of kids, and residential school survivors plant a Heart Garden at Rideau Hall to show they promise to help make the *94 Calls to Action* real. Every spring, we plant Heart Gardens for the kids who went to residential school and to show that we will act on the *94 Calls to Action*!

Find learning resources and fun and free ways you can help at: www.fnccaringssociety.com



Spirit Bear is on his way home from a sacred ceremony when he meets Jake, a friendly dog, with a bag full of paper hearts attached to wood stakes. Jake tells Spirit Bear that school children and residential school survivors will plant the hearts when a big report on residential schools called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC for short) is shared. The TRC will have Calls to Action so we can all help end the unfairness and make sure this generation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children grow up healthy and proud!



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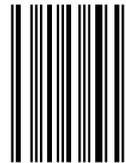
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