Are the distractions enough.

How much can you distract yourself until you get pushed to the point you want to end it all? You hear about residential schools all the time, but have you ever heard the personal stories of the kids who attended them and **the effects of residential schools (on the main characters of Indian horse and Sugar falls?)** In the late 1800s to 1980s more than 100,000 First Nations children in Canada attended residential school and it left a tattoo imprinted in their brains of the trauma they experienced. The author of *Indian* *Horse*, Richard Wagamese is an Ojibway from the Wabaseemoong First Nations in northwestern Ontario, so he tells this story from the knowledge passed on from his ancestors. The protagonist Saul in the novel *Indian horse* comesfrom an Ojibway family in Ontario who abandoned him and his grandma to fend for themselves. Saul loses one of the most important people in his life to the cold. After that devastating moment, Saul was taken to St. Jeromes residential school to start the next chapter of his life. In *Sugar falls* by David Alexandre Robertson the protagonist Betty was thrown out of her house by her mom to survive with the little life experience that she has, a nice family in Ontario accepts her into their house as one of their own, as soon as she finally feels like she has found her place with her new family she gets removed from the devil himself and put into a residential school. **Similarly, in *Indian Horse* and *Sugar falls* both characters were mentally, physically, sexually and spiritually traumatised by the effects of residential schools. In *Indian* *Horse* Saul finds strength through hockey which helps him cope with the abuse and uses it as a distraction. In *Sugar falls*, nature and her memories of her family and tradition helps her cope through the effects. In both stories the effects of residential schools forced them to find coping methods to survive the hardship.**

In both novels the characters are challenged with the effects of four different kinds of abuse: mental, physical, sexual and spiritual abuse, that left our protagonist in an emotional rollercoaster. In Indian horse, father Leboutillier sexually abuses Saul when they are alone, often in his quarters ““You are glory Saul.” That’s what he always told me. It’s what he whispered to me in he dim light of his quarters, what he said to me those nights he snuck into the dormitory and put his heads beneath the covers. The words he used in the back of the barn when he slipped my trousers down. That was the phrase that began the groping, the tugging, the pulling and the sucking, and those we always the last words he said to me as he left, arranging his priestly clothes” (wagamese, 199). Throughout the trauma of the sexual abuse that Saul went through, he found himself liking it which made him feel revolted with his soul, he found himself longing for the desire of the warmth of being in someone’s arms and feeling loved and safe, which he knew he may never experience again so he let his spirit allow it to continue. Though Saul never got physically abused by the priest or sisters at the school he watched as others were. Similarly, in both stories when they sexual abuse Saul and Betty they use phrases to make it sound like what they’re doing to them is acceptable “you are glory Saul” “happy rides” those are the phrases that will never be erased. In Sugar falls the priest would go into where the kids were sleeping, and he would take them and make them sit on him “He called them happy rides” when he came for us and made us sit on his lap” (Robertson,28). Betty’s friend told her that when it happens to close your mind from it and forget. So, she did. Except it did not last. And she wasn’t the only one: everyone in that school faced the same agony as she did. Betty experienced physical abuse throughout her rebellion, the sisters would hit her and make her pay for the so called horror of her expressing herself through her culture. When she would speak her language they would hit her, when she wrote her language they would hit her, when they even thought that she was thinking about her life before, it would soon be forgotten, and replaced with the memories of abuse. Once Betty got hit so hard the impact of the kick made her lose her hearing. Even though some of the effects of the abuse were only short term, the memories of it were forever.

Saul Indian Horse finds ways to handle everything he is going through by focusing on other things like hockey, books, isolation and even the use of alcohol to forget. Hockey was his biggest distraction; when he would step foot on the ice it was not Saul from the residential school anymore, it was Saul the ice hockey champion. When he was on the ice all his worries would be forgotten and left behind. “When I hit the ice I left all that behind me. I stepped onto the ice and Saul Indian horse, the abandoned Ojibway kid clutched in the frozen arms of his dead grandmother, ceased to exist” (Wagamese, 83). Saul put everything into hockey, as everything was taken from him. Saul lost a lot of his life to alcohol and used it to forget his life and everything that was going on around him. “It’s funny how bartenders always tell you to drink up. When your lost to it like I was you always drink down” (Wagamese, 189). Whenever Saul found himself in a tough situation where he had sunk to the bottom of the barrel he would refer to drinking, which made him become an alcoholic. By going to rehab Saul got a part of his life back together, so he could finish the rest of his journey with the help of the knowledge he collected from books.

 Betty learns that to survive the residential schools she must find coping methods to be able to go to when she needs them. She relies on nature and her memories that she has of the times before the residential schools, the memories of her adopted family, who took her in as one of their own and turned the bad times of her mother throwing her out into good memories which she carried on with her the rest of her life. The memories of her playing with her siblings and parents, the memories where she was in a happy place “The beat of the drum represents the strength in our relationships, between our ancestors, our traditions with mother earth, and with each other” (Robertson,13). One of her best memories were of her dad and them going to Sugar falls together and her being taught that her relationships through people help her find the strength, resilience and determination to fight through the worst, her father taught her that you must keep your relationships with people, for they will help you in the future. Her new adopted family gave her the greatest strength “Relationships, that’s where we find our strength as a people” (Robertson, 12), she demonstrates her understanding of the lesson from her father by making a friend while in the residential school, who she soon lost by drowning in the lake during her escape attempt of the school, that was the start of the many friends she would loose.

In conclusion, Similarly **in *Indian Horse* and *Sugar falls* both characters were mentally, physically, sexually and spiritually traumatised by the effects of residential schools. In *Indian* *Horse* Saul finds strength through hockey which helps him cope with the abuse and uses it as a distraction. In *Sugar falls*, nature and her memories of her family and tradition helps her cope through the effects. In both stories the effects of residential schools forced them to find coping methods.** By reading these two novels we experience the effects that the residential schools leave on the main characters in both *Indian horse* and *Sugar falls,* by reading these stories us as Canadians question ourselves on how we can not feel guilty of letting the abuses pass without consequences and stripping people of their identities and replacing it with what we think is proper. We learn that Saul and Betty are capable of fighting through the stereotypes that are placed on them, by finding coping methods like hockey, nature, memories and alcohol to resist letting Canadians remove them from their identities. Now not every child who attended the residential schools had the same trauma as the others, the effects that it leaves on them for the rest of their lives will be tattoo into their brains forever. All of our actions in the past have consequences.