**Forgiving the hardship and trauma of the residential schools**

People will often take broken or mentally ill people for granted, but looking at how they got there gives us a better understanding of how everyday citizens become but a shell of their former selves. These sources explore (what) **the effects of residential schools on the main characters of *Indian Horse* and *Sugar Falls.*** *Indian Horse* is a Bildungsroman novel written by First Nations author Richard Wagamese that focuses on the life of Saul, the protagonist, and his life as an Ojibway boy going through residential schools. The story takes place during the 1960s in Ontario. Similarly, the protagonist of *Sugar Falls,* Betty*,* deals with the residential school experience during the mid-twentieth century in Ontario. *Sugar Falls* is a graphic novel written by David Robertson and illustrated by A. Scott Henderson. The residential school system, was a program introduced by the Canadian government to “take the Indian out of the Indian” and was an act of cultural genocide to assimilate and indoctrinate the first nations people. The residential schools existed across Canada by and large during the 1880s-1960s with the last one closing in 1986 and the Indian Act in 1920 marking the mandatory attendance for all aboriginal children. **Throughout both *Sugar Falls* and *Indian Horse*, the protagonists face abuse in the form of residential schools, although the way that they differ is in what they take forward. For Saul, he takes the loss of his innocence to heart as he canonizes Father Leboutillier to hide from the truth. Comparatively, Betty embraces the truth and looks forward with recognition. Ultimately, both characters teach and give back to the community by exploring their culture through language and hockey respectively.**

Betty from *Sugar Falls* deals with the residential schools by trying to live her life as her late friends would want her to. Her resolve and determination to honour her courageous comrades is both explicitly shown in her name change from Betsy to Betty to honour Helen Betty Osborne, one of Betsy’s murdered friends. But also, Betty’s change is implicitly seen in her long-standing connection to the land and native language. She says, “Betty lived there [Sugar Falls] and was one of my closest friends. I was devastated when she was murdered… [April,] ‘That’s why you changed your name to Betty right?’ “Yes, April. I did it to honour her”. (Robertson, 38/39) During *Sugar Falls* all of Betty’s trials and tribulations culminate in the death of Helen Betty Osborne, someone so like her that it shows Betty what could happen and why she needs to stay true to her own culture. Later in *Sugar Falls*, Betty teaches Daniel that what kept her going was not forgetting the past but accepting and moving forward with conscience of what happened. After hearing Betty’s stories, Daniel recollects something taught to him by his father: “My father once told me there was an ember in me that would one day ignite to burn as bright as a sacred fire. I believe that ember is in all of us.” (Robertson, 40) The quotation from Daniel explores how he believes that each of us has a flame and sharing that lets it burn on in others. As stated by Betty, “You honoured me by asking to hear it. Telling these stories is how we will create change.” (Robertson, 40) Reiterating Betty’s earlier point, she explains how facing forward while understanding what happened behind is how change will occur.

Comparatively, Saul Indian Horse incessantly attempts to ignore and avoid the discrimination, abuse, and hardship he faces during the first two-thirds of the book by using various internal tactics. Eventually, his abusive past haunts him in his lack of self-control, as when Saul joins the feeder team for the Maple Leaf’s he becomes nothing more than a “cheap goon” (Wagamese, 165). This is irreconcilably different from Saul’s attitude during the rest of the book as he clearly states, during this conversation with Virgil, “You don’t gotta take the cheap stuff, Saul, hit the fuckers back,” [Saul,] “That’s not my game” (Wagamese, 141). Finally, when Saul as an adult is unable to escape the truth any longer he turns to the bottle and work and begins to take out his hatred on others. Saul’s more detrimental coping mechanism of using alcohol, is shown: “I was an alchemist, mixing solutions I packed in my lunch kit to assuage the strychnine feel of rot in my guts” (Wagamese, 91). His blatant disregard for his well-being is demonstrated by an inability to stay sober without everything coming to a head, without anyone to rely on. This second quote showcases Saul’s drastically opposite comportment just 25 pages later. Scarier still is accepting the sexual abuse from Father Leboutillier by claiming it was “useful” and accepting it as just a fact of life. He tries to cancel the bad of the rape with all the things he enjoyed about Father Leboutillier and Saul’s time with him at the residential schools. Because it was Father Leboutillier who introduced him to the love of his life, hockey and really brightened up his dreary time at school. Saul states, “I loved the idea of being loved so much I did what he asked… The secret morning practices that moved me closer to the game also moved me further away from the horror” (Wagamese, 199). He is coping with the abuse through his abandonment problems because unlike Betsy from *Sugar Falls* he never had a strong connection with his family (other than his dead grandmother).

Similarly, both explore similar effects of the harsh climate of the abusive residential schools. Towards the end of both sources, Saul and Betty of *Indian Horse* and *Sugar Falls* strive for a sense of connection, something to tie them to the culture they grew up with. After Saul faces the worst in his life, the racial discrimination, being a slave to the bottle, throwing himself into his work, and after he goes on his proverbial ‘journey of truth’ he returns to his only home left. In Manitouwadge, Saul returns, to teach the next generation, the love of hockey. As Saul divulges, “But if I learned anything while I was at the center, it’s that you claim things the most when you give them away. I want to coach.” (Wagamese, 218) The conclusion to Saul’s character arc is craving to give back to the community he took for granted. Likewise, Betty faces the abandonment of her family, trauma of the callous destruction of her culture and the loss of her friends by maintaining her strong relationship to her culture and teaching it to others. She says, “I imagined her reborn… no more pain for her. And from, there was only anger left.” (Robertson, 36) Her anger towards the nuns here is clear but how she reacts is opposite to young Saul but is liken to older Saul. Her father explains, “When the darkness comes, let this strength be alight. Let it guide you away from the pain.” (Robertson, 33) This quote represents how and why Betty’s mental state stays afloat throughout the novel and why she is still willing to tell her tale.

In conclusion, both Betty and Saul overcame the effects of residential schools by teaching the next generation their culture and making sure they do not face racism. But while Saul attempts to escape his sexual abuse through hockey Betty accepts the abuse and tries to learn from it and accept it as a part of who she is. Through multiple quotes, Saul goes from a hockey-loving kid to a hopeless drunk, and Betty changes her name for her murdered friend and teaches Daniel how to use history. In the end, they both return to their cultural and historical roots, Betty by teaching Ojibway and Saul through teaching hockey. Ultimately, the protagonists overcome hardship not by avoiding their demons but accepting and moving on.