
Chemawa Letter

This was compiled by Coquille tribal member Toni Ann Brend from conversations with her father.

I have a story that my father told to me—one of many I wrote down during the time period prior to 1984. I wish to share these stories with you.

In his own words as follows:

I went to Chemawa Indian School when I was in the eighth grade. I had to take the eighth grade over again. I didn't like Chemawa. I was lonely, my sisters came to the school two years later but I never got to see them, just once in a while.

Freddy Wasson came to Chemawa and one of the reasons he died was from loneliness and he is buried there. Aunt Daisy was working as a nurse at Chemawa and they decided to send me to the school there. Uncle George was there. They never asked me if I wanted to go. I just went two days after they told me.

At Chemawa we went to school half a day and worked the other half. There were three buildings for each sex, and administration in the middle.

On weekends kids used to run away, they (the adults) would catch them and beat them. At Chemawa my room was across the hall from where I could hear them beating the kids for their misdeeds. They used to beat them with a hose. One day, when no one was around, I went into the office, found the hose, and cut it into little tiny pieces. No one knew I did it. Then they wouldn't let us eat dinner that night, lined us all up, and asked us who did it. Then we didn't get to eat dinner for several nights.

We used to put on uniforms and march with guns and the little kids had wooden guns. George, my friend, played basketball. They used to sneak away and play basketball and I had to cover for him. He had more money than I had and I used to go to the country store nearby and buy butterhorns for me. There was a big stout kid we called Step and a Half. He had one leg shorter than the other. He always wore a big black hat. You could see the big black hat before you could see him. We slept in two bedrooms. One kid, John, picked a fight with the other kid. I was watching and cleaning my nails with a pocketknife. I told one kid to knock it off. He told me to be quiet or he would knock me off my ass. I said he better knock it off or I would throw the knife between his toes and I threw the knife up and it landed right between his toes.

- Chief Tony Tanner