

ORAL RECALL - EXERCISE 2

The offender Jane Williams has been found guilty of three counts of assault causing bodily harm while she was a teacher and had under her care Native Indian children housed in a residential school in Fort Albany.

At the time, the offender, also a Native Indian, was a member of the congregation of the Catholic Grey Nuns of the Cross. She was found guilty of throwing Mary Martin, aged ten years, to the floor thereby fracturing her collar bone. She was also found guilty of striking Susan Miller when she was seven, as well as Jenny Peters when she was eight. Both were struck on the head, with a bell and broom respectively. Both suffered cuts to the head. Jenny Peters was rendered unconscious for a short period of time.

Of serious concern is not only the tender years of the victims, but the general circumstances surrounding the assaults. The young victims had all been residents of the school in Fort Albany. They had been removed from remote Native Indian communities and from their Indian way of life. They were separated from their families for the greater part of the year. In short, they were deprived of a normal childhood a native child could reasonably expect to experience. They were placed in a totally foreign environment. They were subjected to rigid discipline and, as was clearly borne out by the evidence, they lived in constant fear of being punished for not adhering strictly to this discipline imposed on them. In this context, they were afraid of the offender.

Shortly before these assaults took place, one of the victims, Mary Martin, had gone to the principal of the residential school, Mother Mary Phelan, to beg her to send her home. But she was too timid to express her fear of the offender, and her request was ignored. The other two victims were too scared to speak up.

All three victims kept silent about the assaults for years. The incidents only came to light recently when, during a counseling session, Jenny Peters mentioned that she used drugs to forget her unhappy years at the school.

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