Valedictorian Letter

Bozhoo! Tansei! Hello, my name is Dezarae Meade. I am a graduating grade 12 student at the Comp. Hayden and myself were chosen to be the Promoting Aboriginal Student Success valedictorians of 2021. I was emotional to hear that I was chosen for the role, it’s a huge accomplishment for me, something I’ve been unknowingly working at since grade 10.

I came into high school hoping I would get decent grades. I wasn’t really looking to join clubs or anything because I didn’t want too much of my attention taken away from my schoolwork and basketball. I jumped at the chance to join PASS though. As soon as I heard about a program promoting success for students like me; I was excited to see what it had in store. I heard the opinions and stories from other students and elders in the workshops we had. We went on field trips that turned out to be some of the best memories in my life. Most importantly, I got to be a part of something that I was proud to be in, a community motivated to help me be successful during and after high school.

I took an interest in my culture at an early age. When I was about 5-7 years old, my grandmother taught my cousins and I Ojibway from booklets the same way she educated her students in Hollow Water. My grandfather taught me the teachings of the medicine wheel, he would take me with him to gatherings and I would teach alongside him. When I was 14, I joined drum group. I learned songs and stories from many admirable women. I have a sense of identity when I am participating in my culture. I am thankful for that because many people struggle with not knowing who they are.

Generations of assimilation continue to affect the lives of countless Indigenous people. A system meant to keep us in a life of poverty crime. 75% of Manitoba prisons were Indigenous in 2018. Children are taken away from alleged unfit homes regularly and put in non-Indigenous homes that will not teach them who they are. In 2020 69% of children in care were Indigenous. How can you be a parent when you never had a parent? Residential school survivors did not have parental figures; they had rapists and murderers. A series of evidently unfortunate events have led us here, the new generation; me, Hayden, all the other Indigenous students.

The best way we can succeed is to reconcile. I feel like a broken record because of how much I say this, but I cannot say it enough, we need to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma. We need to take back our teachings, our livelihood and find ways to heal. My children will grow up with sober, present, understanding parents, and they will be the same to my grandchildren.

To conclude, thank you to everyone. Thank you to the staff who helped me with my assignments. Thank you to the PASS staff for teaching me more about my culture and motivating me to succeed. I would also like to thank my friends and peers for supporting me and making school an interesting place to attend.

Dezarae Meade Gr 12 PASS Valedictorian