

My name is Che Butler. I'm an enrolled Siletz tribal member, but am also of Apache, Pueblo, and Huichol descent. I grew up poor and struggling. The first year living in this area was spent living in a van. My older sister and brother would wash in a gas station bathroom before school.

Growing up, I experienced many racial events in my life. As a Native person I have always had to be twice as good if I wanted to play in any sport. When I was in the second grade I dropped out of elementary school because my teacher used to tell me that all the buffalo died because the "Indians killed them", and that "Indians died with the dinosaurs". After hearing this I knew that growing up as a Native youth was going to be hard. Fortunately I had a family that supported me in anything I did. They even sent me to a private school because I wouldn't go back to public school. I don't know how my mom did it on a \$600/mth check, but she did. My whole family lived roughly so I could get a good education.

Even though I knew what that teacher was saying was a lie, how many of my class mates believed her? How many of those kids went home and were never corrected with the truth? Or how many Native kids are out there that never had parents like me? They never had the opportunity to leave the school because what they were teaching was wrong. Did they make it, or did the racial slurs just get worse as they got older? How do you think these kids deal with the racism? Why do you think our youth are committing more and more suicide across the country?

Once I got in high school I thought racism was gone because my family had worked really hard to get it out our town. I wore my hair long and proud. Before me my older brother who was the only male with long hair, and he was made fun of for awhile. As I started to play sports I wore my hair in a braid. I knew my heritage and was proud of it. Then it changed.

My junior year I was playing basketball at Molalla High School. I had my hair braided and my family with me in the bleachers. Then I saw it; he came around the corner wearing a headdress like my ancestors used to. His face was painted with dollar store face paint and he was wearing buckskin pants. My heart stopped, my spirit started to cry and my hands trembled. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. He started to dance around, was war hooping, and got the crowd into a tomahawk chop. He was mocking our people. I got angry. I wanted to rip those feathers off and wipe that paint off his face, but I remembered that anger was not the way. My father had fought many fights because of the same reasons, yet the problem was still here. The ancestors rested my spirit and cradled it because it was so hurt. I continued to play my game because I knew who I was and was proud of it.

Then I looked over at my family. My dad's lip was tightened, my mom had tears in her eyes, and my brother, who was 12 at the time, had an ashamed look on his face. I could tell that what was going on had him questioning who he was and if he should really be proud of being something that everyone makes fun of. During the half time show there was a younger boy who had a little weight to him with a target painted on his stomach.

He got in the middle of the court and started to dance around. My brother's friend, who is not Native, wanted to know why they were making fun of Natives like that. We couldn't answer.

After this event I went home angry because this is not how my people are supposed to be portrayed. I didn't know what to do because I was only one small youth in this state, and this issue is so big. With my mom and sister's help and advice, I wrote a letter to the Oregon Indian Education Association board asking them to help support the removal of Native American mascots. As I was reading that letter to them I knew what I was doing was right because I could see the water starting to form in my elders' eyes. I could feel my voice starting to get more and more powerful. The ancestors were starting to come inside me and help me speak. I could feel the years and years of hurt in my heart, and I got choked up. My elders on that board accepted my letter and agreed to help end the hurt that is going on with their youth because of this issue. This is how it started.

I am an indigenous person of this land, and I strongly support the removal of Native American mascots and logos in public high schools. My reason being is because my peers, YOUR youth, are feeling degraded and ashamed of who they are due to the racism supported through Native American mascots. Our youth are still being called savages, squaws, wagon burners, etc. and are made fun of daily. Their self-esteem is low and their spirits lost. The suicide rate for American Indian / Alaska Native youth aged 15 to 24 is 3.3 times higher than the national average. Our youth are feeling lost and ashamed who they are. Many don't have parents like I did. They go home and can't talk to anyone about it. Instead they pick up a bottle and embrace the demons of alcohol. Later on these demons either start to own our youth and they become alcoholics, or they end up committing suicide.

So I don't understand why we would allow continuing of these racial problems. When the facts are there, I hear superintendents say that "you guys have bigger problems", but this problem is bigger than you think. What happens in a kid's young adulthood helps form the kind of person they are going to be later on in their life. If we allow the racism to continue, we are just overlapping our past. The hate will still be there in Native people because they were made fun all their life. There is hope for these people, and you, as the board of education, can start this change. Create equality for all.

hayu masi (many thanks) Che' Butler