

Minute for Right Relations, March 2018

“Will she be home for supper?”

On a late summer day I was in our little town of Manitowaning with my father. Living on a farm with my parents and three sister, coming to town was an event. Holding tightly to his hand, I was looking from side to side on the main street. I saw a large, dilapidated bus full of children, parked along the side of the street. The child I noticed clearly was a little girl about my age (5 – 6 years old) with her little face pressed against the bus window. Tears were streaming down her face. I tugged at my father’s hand to stop – I needed to ask questions. “Where is she going? Why is she crying?” When told she was going away to a special school with the other children on the bus, I had more questions. “Where is this school? Is it far? Will she be home for supper?” “No,” my father said. “It is too far away.” “Are her mother and father on the bus?” “No, they are just taking the children.”

By this time, my father gently began to move on. I looked back at the little face awash in tears. Even at my young age, I knew there was something terribly wrong. I could not imagine not being home for supper with my family.

After these many long years (over 80), I still weep as I pen these words.

Marian Gilmour was born and raised on Manitoulin Island. The children she witnessed would have been en route to the Spanish Residential School. Marian continues to make the Island her summer home and worships at St. Andrew’s-by-the-Sea in South Baymouth. In the winter, she lives in Sudbury and is a member of St. Peter’s United Church.