

PRESENTATION OF THE DOCUMENTARY

Richard Cardinal: Cry From a Diary of a Metis

Child, 1986

Please be advised that this film contains a graphic still image of Richard Cardinal's body taken after his death by suicide.

Richard Cardinal, a young Métis man, committed suicide at the age of 17, after spending most of his life in 28 foster homes and shelters across Alberta.

This short documentary, running 29 minutes and 14 seconds, was shot in Alberta in 1986. In it, Alanis Obomsawin weaves excerpts from the young man's diary into a powerful tribute to his short life.

Released decades before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the film exposed the systemic neglect and abuse of Indigenous children in Canada's child welfare system.

Awarded Best Documentary at the 1986 American Indian Film Festival, the film was screened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2008 as part of a retrospective of Alanis Obomsawin and continues to be shown around the world.

Throughout the documentary, reconstructions of Richard Cardinal's childhood, in which he is portrayed by a young boy, are shown while excerpts from his diary are read aloud.

These poetic fictional sequences alternate with interviews that Alanis Obomsawin conducted with Richard's brother, Charlie Cardinal, and his last foster parents Leo and Terry Crothers, as well as with two former foster families, the Smiths and the Keslers. Numerous photographs of Richard Cardinal, his life, and the tragic moments surrounding his death also appear on screen.

Photographs from his heartbreaking diary and courtroom sketches from the provincial court inquiry are also shown throughout the film. Numerous press clippings are included, providing a glimpse of the extensive media coverage of Richard Cardinal's tragic death.

With this film honoring the young man's memory,
Alanis Obomsawin retraces one of the galvanizing
moments in the struggle for Indigenous Peoples to
govern social services in many communities at this
time.