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Ideas — Wakenonhkwišeres

BY MORGAN LEARN on NOVEMBER 7, 2018 • (0)

Ever since I was very young, I always felt a special connection to my hair. There are photos of me (I think I was about three or four) with extremely long, jet black hair. I had ringlet curls that formed naturally at the end of my hair, which was something no one else in my family ever had. I got my hair cut a little after I turned four. My mom cut it short and gave me bangs. The curls never came back and my hair turned to a dark brown color. Even at that age, I knew short hair didn't suit me. I felt like I lost a piece of me when I got my haircut, so after that I asked my mom to let me keep my hair long.

For Kanien'kéha:ka (Mohawk) people, hair is a very important aspect of our culture. Everyone, men and women, were (and still are) expected to grow their hair long. Not only did this represent bravery and warrior status, but the length of one's hair is indicative of one's spiritual growth and connection to the Earth.

Cutting hair in Kanien'kéha:ka has different historical and cultural connotations. Men would shave parts of their head for war, which is where the term "Mohawk" originated. When [Indian scalps](#) were sought after for reward, men cut their hair in hopes it would protect the women and children from being killed. But the symbolic act of cutting one's hair is one that resonates with me the most. When a family member passes away, we cut our hair to mourn their loss. The cut hair is either burned or buried which symbolizes their return to the earth. When the hair grows back, it represents spiritual healing.

During the late 1880's until the end of the 1990's, [residential schools](#) stole Indigenous children and subjected them to mental and physical torture. Aside from literal genocide, these schools killed off various aspects of Indigenous culture in order to assimilate them into [whiteness](#). When children arrived, they were given an Anglo name and their hair was cut.

A lot of Indigenous people today grow their hair long. Not only is it a form of resistance, but it connects us to our culture. I haven't cut my hair in over three years and I don't plan on ever cutting it again. I feel connected to my people, to my ancestors, and to the land. I grow my hair long to remember my ancestors who were subjected to maltreatment from the Canadian government. Wakenonhkwišeres (I have long hair) because without it, I would be lost.

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Academic – ish.

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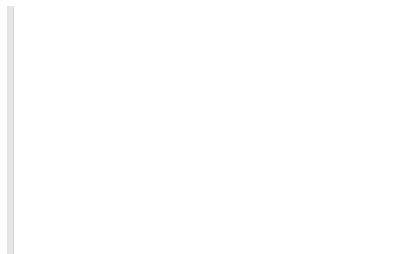


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