

companion to  
*"Speaking My Truth"*

# RECONCILIATION & THE WAY FORWARD

Collected Essays & Personal Reflections

edited by

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**Sara Fryer**

# Learning to Listen

I flew over the frozen lakes of Canada's north and arrived in a small town on edge of Great Bear Lake to listen to stories of residential schools from former students. I wondered if people would ask why I was here to listen? I'm not an Aboriginal person but I enjoy hearing about people's lives and believe in the power of testimony to educate and heal. I sat and chatted in the hockey arena and, shyly, people began to come forward and to request some time to share their statements of life before, during and after residential schools.

People light up when speaking about their time before attending the schools. They share stories of lives lived close to the land. Big fish. Hunting and traplines. The price of the muskrat pelts that sustained families in 1930s. How to make snowshoes. I hear about pain and abuse. The suffering that, for some, goes on for many years after they leave the schools. And we talk about survival and resistance. A father who rescued his daughter by running his sled over mountains for days to reach the school. A first hug. Love stories. But I also hear awful stories of children who were so hungry they were forced to steal eggs that they cook while hiding in the bush. Food they will share with

many others. One Survivor remembers her Mom sewing a beautiful outfit for the first day of school, and how it is discarded on arrival at the school. Others remember stolen moccasins and forced haircuts.

It is difficult to describe what happens to two people when one chooses to speak and the other sits to listen. Going through the process many times, I noticed how the drab details of the office we are in suddenly blur and fall away, leaving the teller and listener alone, closely connected. The suffering breaks the listener's heart. It broke my heart again and again. But in the moment, when I am listening, I don't cry because I fear that I will cause the teller more pain. My tears come later, when back at my apartment. I think about the little kids I meet in the stories. I think of the pain people carry all their lives and of the powerful, brave, determined Survivors I am fortunate to have met. I won't leave my apartment for a week. When I do, I find I cannot write, edit, or read my Master's thesis, despite the pressures and deadlines. Nothing seems as important as this work, the stories shared.

I am inspired by the grace of each person who was able to turn their memories back on those difficult times and to find the words and courage to share these experiences with me and many others in order to establish the truth about what happened at the schools. I learn many things with every conversation and I am thankful, grateful. Their courage and ability to trust is vital, and it helps to establish the enduring,

often devastating, truth about what happened at the residential schools. But it also helps us to recognize some Survivors' continuing work to turn lives around—their own, the lives of loved ones and those around them. This impacts my life and the lives of others who are touched by these truths. We are all indebted to the Survivors' commitment to justice and healing.

\*

Five years later, when I am looking for a job, I try to describe my skills on a resume. My words, however, do not capture what it means to listen, to have listened. They can't describe for experience and power that comes from the closeness of the shared space around Survivors' stories. Where on my resume will I account for the intimate connection that I know can exist between two strangers, the power of these stories to utterly transform space and time? How do I detail the responsibility and the gratitude that I know, the trust that was extended to me?

I have a good memory, which means I can remember everyone I have ever met. So I often wonder for each of these people what it means to open your heart and trust a stranger with your life story? As I helped to gather statements, I began to think that reconciliation happened every time someone decided to trust me and share their statements. I've learned to hold the pain close as we speak and then to shed it like a snake sheds its skin. I learned to cry and to laugh, how to chat, and when to serve tea. I have become a patient person. I learned to bury my need to ask



questions and learned to listen quietly. I am skilled at watching for signs of pain and hurt; I have developed a great deal of respect for the families and counselors who work to support Survivors through the difficult Settlement Agreement processes. The heroes are those who survived and those who help them, many of whom are also Survivors.

\*

At the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) National Gathering in Vancouver, I am sitting in the bleachers of the Agrodome with my colleagues, and we begin to speak about launching new research on lateral violence. The Healing Foundation had commissioned a study that found that life at residential schools has contributed to forms of lateral violence that continue to impact life in Aboriginal communities today. We discuss how to share this important work; we are worried the media will take up it and use it to continue to blame the wrong people. As we look down on the event, I watch people walk through an exhibition on residential schools, and I wonder if they might find a part of their story in this new study, in the book we eventually decide to produce.

Gazing down at the Legacy of Hope display about the history and time line of the Canada's Indian Residential School System, I contemplate how it might feel to see a general history of residential schools and attempt to fit an individual's deepest, most painful experiences into this narrative to place oneself

and one's life among the didactic summaries. What is it like to see yourself, a loved one, or friend in the documentary photos that accompany these panels or are in the scrapbooks? Someone draws a moustache on a political figure in the exhibition. I don't stop her.

### **What Does Reconciliation Look Like?**

In 2008, the Healing Foundation hosted a think tank on reconciliation and healing the legacy of residential schools. The meeting was intended to start a dialogue about the renewed, revived relationship between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people living in Canada. In advance of the meeting, I interviewed writers, lawyers, artists and activists who would attend the think tank to get a better understanding about people's perceptions of reconciliation and renewal. I found that, for most, the concept of reconciliation was still hazy and that they did not have clear ideas about the activities that may embody reconciliation.

However, there was one idea that resonated. While few agreed on what reconciliation might look like, a starting point could be by sharing meals with one another and letting conversations crisscross over supper. I remember that when I was invited to gather statements in different communities, the food came first, and last. We would speak about the bannock. Fried? Or baked? Grease or butter? Small but important differences first. This idea came back to me, this past summer, when I went to Sioux Lookout to attend a launch for the *Origins of Lateral Violence*. Garnet Angecone, his friends and allies invited us to

Northwestern Ontario for a day of ceremony and sharing for this powerful book—to recognize that the discussion of lateral violence offered “good medicine.”

About 70 people gathered at the Friendship Centre in Sioux Lookout to start a dialogue on lateral violence, which due to the lingering effects of residential schools and the legacies of learned abuse and victimization, remains one of the most challenging topics in Aboriginal communities. We had begun to plan this meeting in April when the snow remained a blanket on the earth, covering ground floor windows in homes and at the hospital. Now, as the event was taking place, it was after the first blush of leaves on the poplars had emerged, and we could see that these leaves had been eaten by caterpillars. It struck me as I stood listening to the drumming and sharing of stories that the forest understands renewal.

Eagles soared over Lac Seul that morning, blessing us and the proposed lateral violence workshop. The drumming and singing honoured those who had suffered, while the morning sunlight warmed our backs, comforting those of us gathered in the circle. After the workshop, we sat around the Seven Grandfather Rocks and shared our thoughts and prayers. Then we ate moose that had been dropped off at the Centre the night before. The Healing Foundation chose this location well. And I was happy we were in Sioux Lookout. I knew this important and difficult work would continue because of the commitment of those in the community who work for positive social change. I thought about how they, like Garnet Angeconeb, continue assert a

powerful force on communities across the country.

Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people sitting in a circle, speaking to one another, sharing a meal together, participating in ceremony throughout the day. The healing work happens when we allow new friendships to take hold, and to continue to share meals together as the years pass. Reconciliation was visible that day—I saw it, we felt it.

### **The Road Ahead**

With the Healing Foundation closing its doors after 15 years of funding and with the wind down of the TRC, the state-sponsored means of healing and truth telling seem to be disappearing. Yet, it is clear to many that there is a lot of work to do and that we are not much closer to an improved relationship among one another in Canada. Aboriginal people in Canada have assumed much of the ‘renewal’ work for these fledgling positive relationships. They have been working hard in the courts, on the streets, on the editorial pages of national newspapers, and in community centres. Their work is vital in the difficult process of educating the rest of us and finally, we hope, transforming Canada.

Books are powerful tools for starting conversations and forging new relationships. This is something the Healing Foundation has learned over the years, and we sincerely hope that the work presented in this volume continues to create space to listen to one another and to share. As a follow up to *Speaking My Truth: Reflections on Reconciliation & Residential Schools*, we have asked Elders, artists, leaders, activists, academics and

politicians to think and write about what's next on the road to reconciliation?

We are pleased to be able to present a variety of pieces—personal reflections, life stories, provocations, as well as conversations between old allies and new friends. We hope these will help in start new conversations. Garnet Angeconeb, whose moving “Speaking My Truth” essay gave us the title and set the tone for the first volume, returns in this volume to reflect upon the community activism and alliances that emerged in the 1970s and continue to this day. Lorena Sekwan Fontaine, Lisa Forbes, Wendy McNab, Lisa Murdock, and Roberta Stout, the daughters of Survivors, share their personal experiences in creating digital stories on the intergenerational effects of residential schools and the dear friendships that emerged from this important work. Elder William Louttit’s life story, shared with Janice Cindy Gaudet, recalls the hopefulness of a new granddaughter and those ancestral lullabies that soothe her. Emphasizing the power of oral testimony, we bring together a collection of conversations, with a lecture by Justice Harry Laforme, a conversation with Andrea Webb, and speeches by Georges Erasmus, the Right Honorable Paul Martin, Mary Simon and Stephen Lewis. There is also incisive political commentary by voices as diverse as Katsi’tsákwas (Ellen Gabriel), Tony Belcourt, Mark Abley, Cassandra J. Opikokew Wajuntah, and Wayne K. Spear. These different contributions help frame how we understand the past and how we might use lessons from it to guide us forward.

I know that I speak with my fellow editors when I say that we are impressed by the levels of commitment demonstrated by the contributors to this volume and truly inspired by the depth of the work represented in their texts. Each of the editors has provided texts we hope shed light on to this volume—the good work we see it growing from, the directions this work points to as we set out on the road ahead. We hope that the scope of these commitments might help spark new conversations about how to affect powerful change and create new opportunities for meaningful relationships.

\*

I have been treated kindly by many individuals, and people have been patient with me. I have had good teachers; these teachers in turn have become dear friends because of the intimacy that comes from working together. When they come to stay with me when in Ottawa, we cook food together. They leave rhubarb crumbles in my freezer as gifts that I can't help but eat right out of the pan.

The road to reconciliation is a long and difficult one, yet we can remember that a powerful thing happens when we sit down at a table to share food together. When we begin to trust ourselves, and each other, to speak the truth and to listen quietly, everything changes. In the spirit of listening quietly, I look forward to following this volume out into the world.

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## Biography

**Sara Fryer** is dedicated to generating better evidence about mental health and addictions based on people's experiences of care. Sara has worked with the Aboriginal Healing Foundation since 2008, and her research has informed federal government evaluations, books, art exhibitions and secondary school curriculum. She has enjoyed working in rural and remote communities throughout Canada where she often hears big fish stories that she reports back to her grandfather, an avid fish storyteller. Having grown up in northern Ontario, she is happiest walking the rocky shores of Lake Huron. Sara holds a Master of Arts degree in Sociology from Laurentian University.

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**Garnet Angeconeb**

## Were We Ready Then— Are We Ready Now?

It was the longest and coldest night of my life. As a young man, I was lost in the haze of the lingering effects of the Indian residential school system—very confused. But on this one night I was touched by the spirit of the Mother spirit. It was her mystical force of love that saved me from freezing to death.

Many years later, at this present stage of my life, the message from the mother spirit is just now starting to make sense.

It was the blustery night of January 31, 1976, when I had the misfortune of being involved in a snowmobile accident, which forced me to battle with the terrifying winter elements on the vast frozen lake of Lac Seul in northern Ontario. The temperature had dipped down to a harrowing minus 40 degrees Celsius.

How could anyone so foolish survive such harsh conditions without the warmth of a fire? It was a miracle that I survived at all. I buried myself in the snow to try and get a sense of warmth.



Every once in a while I would yell out into the stillness of the frigid night. Strenuous yelling seemed to help circulate the blood flow within my already weakened body. Yelling was a short-lived reprieve from the cold.

Lying on the frozen lake, I could sense the inevitable warning signs of passing on into the spirit world.

I would yell again for help, thinking maybe, just maybe, some passerby would hear my desperate plea for help.

And then there was a magical moment—a vision—when I saw a woman spirit appear before me. She looked a lot like my mother. She was the spirit of Mother—a holy, spiritual being.

When the motherly figure spoke in the beautiful Anishinaabe language, she assured me that I was going to be all right. She was carrying a large blanket made out of rabbit skins. In her sweet voice she said, “Here, I have come to cover you with this blanket so you don’t get cold out here. This blanket will keep you warm.”

After the visit from the Mother spirit, my mind raced through many of my life’s experiences that I had taken for granted: loved ones—siblings, parents, and grandparents—and especially remembering the teachings of the elders. I was feeling that it was too late to reach out for their wisdom and teachings to save me.

I should have listened to them when I had the chance ... so I thought.

After being released from the confines of the Indian residential school system with a wounded soul, I didn't want to listen to anyone. The system had made me too angry to listen to the counsel of others.

I was bitter. I was mad at myself. I was mad at my parents. I was mad at the government and at the churches. I was even angry at my Creator. I was mad at the world.

At the time there was an unwritten code of silence. Almost no former student talked about their negative experiences and bad memories of the residential school system.

Remembering the freedom and love I once enjoyed with my family prior to the residential school daze, I wanted to take back my past, take back my childhood. Coming out of the residential school ordeal, I lived through a false sense of freedom. I was blinded by the system's negative effects. I was aimlessly drifting around in my life.

Now if only I could cling onto the teachings of my elders. Could it be that those wise teachings and lessons were coming to an end as I realized there was the real possibility that I would not live to see the next day?

Back to that night on the frozen lake...

By now I was really scared, fearful. Once again I would scream for help into the emptiness of the night. No help came, at least not in the form of human love.

Again, my mind started to race through the memories I cherished of my great-grandmother Margaret Ningewance and the things she used to tell me and my older brother Harry.

She was a wise teacher.

### **The Prophecy of the Arrival of the Newcomer**

As a child, I would listen to my great-grandmother talk about the ancient prophecy of the coming of the Europeans to the shores of Turtle Island. Later in life, I would hear the same story from another elder by the name of Ida Kenny of the Lac Seul First Nation.

Both my great-grandmother and Ida spoke about what they had learned from their elders.

They said the Anishinaabe prophets of a long time ago would warn the people to prepare themselves for what was to happen. *Asho-wii-zhok* they would say, which in the Anishinaabe language means “get ready, be prepared.” Be prepared for the time when strangers would come to occupy the lands they lived on.

The astute Anishinaabe prophets at the time would instruct their people to pass on the prophecy to future generations. The prophets would forewarn of the arrival of the newcomers as they will encroach upon territories, be friendly, be different from the Anishinaabe ways, be aggressive, take over the land, and want to take the many resources of the land: the water, the trees, the animals, the fish, the birds, the rocks, the plants, and the medicines.

The Anishinaabe prophets would even forewarn that the newcomers would take away the Anishinaabe way of life—the language and the culture.

The prophets would tell their people and future generations to get ready for that time to come.

Today, my teacher Ida Kenny asks two questions for reflection: Were our people ready back then? Are we ready today to enter into a renewed relationship with the newcomer?

### **The Sun and the Moon**

Another teaching was reiterated to me through the experience I had endured that night on the frozen lake.

The elders would talk about and refer to Grandfather Sun (*Omi-shomisima*) and Grandmother Moon (*Kokomisinan*). They would speak about the sacred gifts of life and how

those gifts would flow in a cycle from Grandfather Sun and Grandmother Moon: the masculine and feminine, the male and female. Like the sacredness of the woman, the moon goes through a cycle every twenty-eight days.

That night as I faced the near end of my short-lived journey on earth, I was given a renewed life from the Mother spirit. I felt safe and warm. I felt the love of a mother. It's hard to accurately describe the love showered upon me, as all I know now is that it was beautiful, warm, and very special. I also felt at peace.

I must have drifted off to sleep for a while. When I awoke, I could see the eastern skies begin to light up. It was a beautiful sunrise. That morning as I watched, I could not help but say *meegwetch* to my Creator for carrying me through the night.

It was indeed the birth of a new day and a new beginning.

### **Ashamed to be Anishinaabe**

Upon leaving the residential school, it had already done its damage on my identity as a human being, as a person, and as an Anishinaabe. In my heart I felt displaced and angered.

I was ashamed to speak my indigenous language. When I returned to my family and “home” community I did not want to speak what, in my ignorance and shame at the time, had become the “backward” language of the Anishinaabe people. I

pretended that I no longer could speak the beautiful language of my parents and grandparents. I thought I was better than the people living on the reserve. I thought I was great, if not the greatest to come “home.”

But I was lost in my own home and in my own heart.

Whenever I saw a lost brother or sister drowning in the sea of alcoholism, masking their pain, I would turn the other way...ashamed to be an “Indian.” Little did I know, then, but I too would soon abuse alcohol.

Away from Lac Seul, and while living amid the confusion of a small-town setting, I did not quite know where to fit in. Was I acting too “white” for my people? And yet, I did not quite fit into the “white” world.

### **Flames of Racism Burn**

In the 1960s and 1970s the small town of Sioux Lookout, and generally in northwestern Ontario, racism and acts of racism were ablaze like a raging forest fire out of control.

One could feel the heated tension between many of the townsfolk and the Anishinaabe people. Some non-Anishinaabe people did not agree that racism was alive and well, and they likely still don't agree.

At least a wild forest fire could be extinguished with a lot of effort and with a lot of firefighting equipment. The fires of racism, though, were (are) not that easily extinguishable. And throughout the years since, a lot of meaningful effort has been deployed to control the flames of racism.

The 1973 American Indian Movement armed occupation at Wounded Knee in the United States set off a rippling effect across the continent. For a time it increased hostility towards aboriginal people, even in places like Sioux Lookout. The already tense relations in this country were not untouched by consequences of what was then happening south of the border.

In the summer of 1974, at Anicinabe Park in Kenora, there was an armed occupation of the park by the Ojibway Warriors Society. Again, another event to cause rippling effects across the country that elevated even more racial tension.

Shortly after the Kenora occupation, a local resident wrote a racist pamphlet, a book of sorts, which was essentially labelled “hate literature” against the Anishinaabe people. In the minds of some, the book was appropriately called “Bended Elbow.”

This so-called book further sparked division between the Anishinaabe and non-Anishinaabe community. There was more racial hostility and more openly racist attitudes. Relations had deteriorated to an all-time low.

The streets were a mean place. It was not uncommon for thugs to prey on “drunken Indians” and beat them, sometimes horrendously. If there were no physical beatings, verbal assaults and racist remarks were the weapons of destruction.

Racism and acts of racism echoed within the hallways of the local Sioux Lookout high school. There was very little, if any, mingling among the Anishinaabe and non-Anishinaabe students. If we had one thing in common, it was that we really didn’t understand each other—our ways and values, where we came from, who we were, or why we were there.

First year Anishinaabe high school students from the remote northern communities would often be enrolled in what was called the “ITIO program,” which was a transitional program before being immersed into a regular high school program in the second year. Although this program had good intentions, the students in the program would be isolated from the main student population. For some, the program would be dubbed the classroom for “Indian dummies.”

Some of the staff and teachers refused to acknowledge that racism existed within the school environment. When one is not the target of racist attacks, it is easy to say racism doesn’t exist. There was a sense of denial.

Amid this time of my personal turmoil and confusion, the words of Elder Ernest Benedict of Akwesasne resonated. His words became alive: “Be proud of who you are.”



It was in 1972 when I first met Elder Ernest Benedict. I had the privilege to attend a province-wide First Nations youth gathering in Sudbury, Ontario. Listening to Elder Benedict's powerful message essentially ended my cultural confusion and identity crisis.

During 1998 to 1999, I would be further honoured as I sat with him at the board table of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. He served as an Elder/adviser to the organization.

### **A Good Sign for Good Change**

Recently, a former non-Anishinaabe classmate acknowledged that, "We knew there was a residential school nearby but we knew nothing about it. We thought you guys had it good out there."

Those words verify that all of Canada needs to know its history about the Indian residential school system. It means that we need to engage in meaningful dialogue that will take us on the journey to reconciliation, including what is taught in the educational systems. It is encouraging to see signs that indicate social change is happening. We need to tell the world that we have embarked upon a journey leading us to the realization that reconciliation is possible, even with small but significant steps.

For example, when one enters into the main foyer of the Sioux Lookout high school, one will notice on the wall the depiction of the seven Grandfather teachings of the Anishinaabe people: honesty, humility, truth, wisdom, love, respect, and bravery.

To me, that's the sign that the process of reconciliation is at work. Both my children graduated from the same high school I attended. And I know now that it will be a good school for my grandchildren.

### **Time for Change—Time to Smother the Flames**

By the time the 1980s rolled around, many of the local citizens in Sioux Lookout, both Anishinaabe and non-Anishinaabe, rose to the challenge to begin smothering the flames of racism. It was time for an awakening and a forging ahead with new (or renewed) relations.

Sioux Lookout is a small community of 5,800 residents nestled in the heart of northwestern Ontario along the main line of the Canadian National Railway system.

From the Indian residential school system to the community-at-large, it was time to rework the spirit of the modern-day warrior.

It was time for change.

In 1988, with the goal to create a healthy and inclusive community for all, the Sioux Lookout municipal council supported the set-up of the Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee or S.L.A.R.C.

The Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee is dedicated to helping all residents and visitors to our community learn to work and live together while respecting and celebrating our

differences. The goal is to develop a just community where the future will be better for us all.<sup>1</sup>

A similar group was recently formed in the nearby community of Dryden, Ontario: the Dryden Area Anti-Racism Network (DAARN). Its mission statement reads:

to promote cultural diversity, engage in educational activities, and stand against racism and discrimination to achieve respect and harmony within our region.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Sioux Lookout Community Coalition for Healing and Reconciliation**

Across the land people are already engaged in good conversations at the community level. An example is the work of the Sioux Lookout Community Coalition for Healing and Reconciliation. The Coalition is a small discussion group consisting of former students, clergy of churches that ran residential schools, and interested citizens. In creating awareness and engaging public participation, the group has organized a number of local and regional activities and events: sharing circles, survivors' gatherings, special ceremonies, and launches.

In 2011, with financial assistance from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, the Coalition published a handbook, *Starting to Talk: A Guide for Communities on Healing and Reconciliation*.<sup>3</sup>

A copy of the handbook was presented to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission at the Halifax national event.

In its purpose statement, the Sioux Lookout Community Coalition for Healing and Reconciliation “sees reconciliation as a community movement and seeks to answer the question: How do we move forward as a community from the legacy of residential schools?”

A participant of the group remarked, “It is our desire to create awareness of our collective past and to understand where we are at today. So if we are aware of our past and understand each other today, together we can move forward to a better future.”

### **A New Chapter on Relations— *The Sioux Lookout Friendship Accord***

Another step toward rebuilding and fostering new relations between municipalities and neighbouring First Nations communities is demonstrated with the signing of the Sioux Lookout Friendship Accord between the First Nations of Lac Seul, Slate Falls, and Cat Lake and the Municipality of Sioux Lookout.

In November 2011, through a workshop facilitated by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, a verbal agreement between Sioux Lookout and area First Nations was reached to work more closely together in areas of common interest.

On June 21, 2012, on Aboriginal Day, the Friendship Accord was signed forging ahead with (re)new(ed) relations.<sup>4</sup>

Having been involved with the founding meeting (in Lac Seul) of the parties to the Friendship Accord, I was invited to make a presentation to the Sioux Lookout Municipal Council. A number of key points were stressed in the presentation:

- advocate for and promote renewed relations between the Anishinaabe and non-Anishinaabe people of the region;
- work more closely together in areas of common interest, be they political, economic, and social;
- acknowledge that the Indian residential school system is a shared history for all Canadians;
- apply the federal government's Statement of Apology in the broadest context of reconciliation of renewed relations; and
- chart a new direction for future generations.

The following is an edited version of the presentation that was delivered a few days before the signing of the Friendship Accord:

*June 6, 2012*

Your Worship, Members of Council, Ladies, and Gentlemen:

It is an honour for me to sit with you at this table, a table that will hopefully mark a significant milestone in the process of reconciliation, understanding, and a time of renewed relations for everyone in this community and region.

I need not remind you that it has been almost four years, on June 11, 2008, since the federal government issued its Statement of Apology to the former students of the Indian Residential School system.

In order to totally appreciate the value of the powerful words of the Apology, you had to have lived your childhood through the hellish experience of the Indian Residential School system—a history that we collectively share in this country. In other words, this dark chapter of Canada's history is not just about Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people.

It is about all of us.

And so when I heard the words of the Apology, I rose to the challenge: what do we have to do here in our community to embark upon a path of reconciliation, a collective journey leading to renewed relations?

I listened very intently as I heard the prime minister of this country say,

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a Government, and as a country. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential Schools system to ever prevail again. You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey. The Government of Canada

sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly.

The prime minister further said, “in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey.”

You may ask yourself, “Why is it that I am talking about the Apology?”

I talk about the Apology because it applies right across the country, from the living room of every Canadian to the hallways of all our schools to the pews of every church to the streets of all citizens to all band offices to the provincial and municipal chambers of this nation to the hearts of each one of us.

You see, the Apology was intended for former students of the Indian Residential School system. But we must open our minds about what it really means in the broadest sense, in the broadest context. Again, I cannot emphasize enough that it is about a renewed way of living and working together in this country, and yes, right here in Sioux Lookout and the region.

In the fall of 2010, during the last municipal election, I listened and I heard some of you speak about creating “partnerships” with the First Nations community. I was then, as I am now, encouraged to see good signs of relationship building.

For example, I am encouraged to see that this Council is forging ahead with the signing of a Friendship Accord with area First

Nations, especially with the closest neighbour just west of here—that being the Lac Seul First Nation to which I am a member.

The Friendship Accord, if it is to properly work for everyone, must be built on a mutual relationship of respect, trust, openness, good faith, and the willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue.

That's it—to engage in meaningful dialogue. We can no longer communicate through other parties. We can no longer talk to one another through the media, meanwhile giving each other a taste of discomfort. We can no longer afford to have someone else settle our disagreements.

To touch very briefly on the concerns of social issues, these issues have been here a long, long time; they have been years in the making. The causes are deep-rooted and complex. And there is no hard nor is there a fast way to obviate what we share. The issues will take a long time to address.

And so where do we start?

Very straightforwardly then, we must communicate with each other in a good way.

In saying that, we may not always agree in addressing some of our issues, we may agree to disagree. But we must, both the Municipal leadership and the First Nations leadership, come to



a table of common understanding where meaningful discussion can take place.

I am hopeful that such a table will soon be created that can lead to a meaningful “partnership” that we can all speak of.

I see the Friendship Accord as a basis for constructive dialogue, a process that hinges on addressing the social, economic, and political relations of this community and region. If I can be optimistic about seeking well-thought out long-term goals to our challenges, I see this table of common understanding as a win-win situation for all citizens.

This is a major step, a major milestone in the building of good relations.

I see this step as a wise investment of time, energy, and resources. Not only will this initial investment reciprocate, its dividends will pay off in the long run.

To be specific, I see this as an opportunity for the collective to come together to share in our common concerns and issues, identify and prioritize the issues and concerns, and engage in a process to address the challenges.

In conclusion, I would like to share the words of Chief Sakatcheway, upon the signing of the 1874 Treaty Three Adhesion on behalf of the Lac Seul people, whose traditional territory we live on today. He said,

If you give what I ask, the time may come when I will ask you to lend me one of your daughters and one of your sons to live with us; and in return I will lend you one of my daughters and one of my sons for you to teach what is good, and after they have learned, to teach us. If you grant us what I ask, although I do not know you, I will shake hands with you. This is all I have to say.<sup>5</sup>

My friends, the time is here. The time is now to pay heed to the wisdom and honour of voices past, for their teachings are alive in each one of us today.

The time to be reactive is over. The time to be proactive is now.

And so, what is this all about? This is about your children and grandchildren. Whenever I look into the eyes of my three beautiful grandchildren, I cannot help but remind them: this is for you; this is for the well-being of everyone.

Meegwetch!

### **Dialogue is Just Starting**

In conclusion, we must honour all those heroes—all the survivors—who never got to be part of the healing and reconciliation process. May they rest in peace.

And now that the walls of silence have been broken, let us, all of us, talk. Let us talk and act responsively until every ounce of

pain caused by the Indian residential school legacy has dissipated.

The governments of the nation need to keep driving the processes of dialogue. And as a “community” we will respond accordingly with a renewed sense of hope.

There are still many challenges ahead on the path to healing. But the collective determination of all is to ensure the road to reconciliation will be well-travelled.

The Anishinaabe elders of the past challenged all to be prepared for new relations. And today, all of us must ask ourselves: are we ready to enter into an era of renewed relations?

I often think about that horrible night lying on the ice. In many ways I was gifted with a renewed life to do things differently.

And now we—all Canadians—must learn from the mistakes of our shared past. We must now do things differently for the better.

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## Notes

- 1 Source:—[www.slarc.ca/aboutslarc](http://www.slarc.ca/aboutslarc)
- 2 *DAARN Newsletter*—Vol. 2 issue March 2014.
- 3 To download the *Starting to Talk* handbook, go to [www.slarc.ca/node/323](http://www.slarc.ca/node/323)
- 4 For further information on the Sioux Lookout Friendship Accord see [www.siouxlookout.ca](http://www.siouxlookout.ca)
- 5 Morris. The Honourable Alexander, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories*. (Toronto: Willing and Williamson, 1880) p. 63.

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## Biography

**Garnet Angeconeb** is an Anishinaabe originally from the Lac Seul First Nation and now lives in Sioux Lookout, Ontario. Garnet attended Pelican Indian Residential School near Sioux Lookout from 1963 to 1969. In 1975, Garnet graduated from Queen Elizabeth High School in Sioux Lookout. In 1982, he graduated from the University of Western Ontario with a diploma in journalism.

In 1985, Garnet was elected to the council of the municipality of Sioux Lookout. It was there that Garnet spearheaded the founding of the Sioux Lookout Anti-racism Committee. Today the Sioux Lookout Anti-racism continues its work with an added dimension to mandate the Sioux Lookout Coalition for Healing and Reconciliation. The SLCHR membership comprises of local former Indian Residential School students, clergy, and interested citizens. The main purpose of the SLCHR is to promote awareness and seek renewed relations as a result of the Indian Residential School legacy. Garnet co-chairs the Sioux Lookout Coalition for Healing and Reconciliation.

He is a recipient of the Queen's Golden Jubilee award (2002), Diamond Jubilee award (2012), and Member of the Order of Canada (2012).



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**Georges Erasmus**

## Nothing to Celebrate

*In October 1989, the Department of the Secretary of State hosted an Ottawa conference, “Bringing Canadians Together,” to discuss the celebration of Canada’s 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1992. Georges Erasmus, the Assembly of First Nations National Chief, gave an unscripted speech to an audience of prominent Canadians, asserting that Canada had nothing to celebrate. The following transcript is an excerpt of this remarkable speech.*

What are we going to celebrate? Are we going to celebrate that it took until 1959 that we could vote in this country? Are we going to celebrate that it took until 1968 that we could vote in Quebec?

What are we going to celebrate?

Are we going to celebrate the fact that our Aboriginal languages are not considered important enough to be regarded in any legal way? Are we going to celebrate the fact that there’s not a single court in this country where, if the only language you speak is indigenous, you don’t have any legal rights there, but you’ll be forced to operate in French or English?

What are we going to celebrate?

I don't like what has happened in the last five hundred years. The last one hundred and twenty-five years. I couldn't do a lot about it. Let's say the majority of the people in this room, in this country, couldn't do a lot about it. But what are we going to do about the *next* five hundred years? What are we going to do about the next *ten* years—so that when the year 2000 comes around there are differences.

What are we going to do about the poverty amongst native people? We don't like it when Canadians are unemployed. We're concerned when we're around ten percent or more. We're concerned when there's a million people or more in this country who are unemployed. But what about when *ninety* percent of your people are unemployed? I don't think we have a solitary thing that we should be celebrating, unless we are going to do something different in the future.

It's really time for some change. It's really time that the European people and their descendants, and the rest that are here that are now Canadians, seriously begin to address the basic relationship they have with this land and the people that were here first. We can do things differently in this country. We can be leaders for the world.

We criticize Southern Africa and the racism that is seen there, and yet we have no examples at home. The problem they are

having in South Africa is descendants of European people trying to wrestle with how they are going to live with the indigenous population. In that case, the indigenous people are the majority, so there is paranoia in that white race that's there. What's *your* paranoia? We're the minority here. Why can we not deal here with the problems that we criticize South Africa about? Why can't we have a situation here where native people have enough land and enough control over their lives so they have some dignity? We have no reason to criticize anybody else. We have no examples to show the world.

But it can be different. And it must be different. Or the next couple of decades will not be the French-English problem. That will not be your problem. You cannot continue to have a situation where people are lined up to get to the negotiating table, and maybe in thirty years, maybe in forty years, they will continue to negotiate. You cannot contain that situation. What we have now, in the way land is being dealt with in this country, we have treaties that are hundreds of years old that are supposedly protected by the highest law in this country—the Constitution—and we have not yet fulfilled the land requirements in those constitutional, legal documents.

Can you think of any other people amongst us that we'd have that kind of legal document and still, one hundred years later, be talking about whether we should fulfill that? It only could happen—it *only* could happen—to native people. It certainly would never happen to the Anglos. The time has come—and



thank god to them, that they have the power now—it would not anymore happen to the French.

It was an insult to the First Nations when the Premiers and the Prime Minister of this country could walk out of a room that they were locked into, long after midnight, and they were going to tell the world that there were two founding people—that there were two distinct societies. By God Almighty, those same men were—or the majority of them, for the five years previous, who people like myself had been meeting with. And yet, they had the audacity, or the ignorance, to come out of there and not recognize that Canada... nowhere else, *nowhere* else in this world do the indigenous people from here call home. If we are not distinct here, where the hell are we distinct?

I believe we can do something different. *We* want to do something different. We are sick and tired of coming to events like this and being your conscience. Absolutely *sick and tired* of it. We'd love nothing more than to be able to go around and dance and feel good about ourselves. But, by god, we have too many real things to be concerned about.

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## Biography

**Georges Henry Erasmus** is Dene from Behchoko (formerly Rae-Edzo), Northwest Territories. He has long been a spokesperson for Canada's Aboriginal people and a leader in the struggle for First Nations rights and land claims. In 1976 he became president of the Dene Nation. He retained this position until he became northern vice-chief of the Assembly of First Nations (1983–85) and then national chief of the Assembly from 1985. He has been a delegate to the World Council of Indigenous Peoples and other international bodies. He was made a Member of the Order of Canada in 1987 and has received multiple honorary degrees of Doctor of Laws from universities across Canada and overseas. In 1991 he was co-chair of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. He has been the chair of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation since its inception. He is also currently the chief negotiator for Decho First Nations.



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**Andrea Webb**

## *Sounds Like Canada* Interview (01/24/2005)

**Shelagh Rogers:** There's no place like home. And how true. Thousands of Inuit gathered in Labrador this past weekend to begin the passage back to a home that was stolen from them. The communities of Hebron and Nutak sit on the beautiful eastern shore of northern Labrador. In the late 1950s, the provincial government of the day literally shut them down, moving the people. And what followed has been a long, sad history. One for which, Danny Williams, the current premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, has now apologized. That apology came with the signing of a land agreement creating a home for Labrador Inuit. The land is called Nunatsiavut (which means Our Beautiful Land) and it's roughly the size of Ireland. The 5000 Inuit in the area will maintain economic and self-government rights and that means they can now pass their own laws, control health care, education and justice. They'll still have to pay federal and provincial taxes. Andrea Webb was at the ceremony on the weekend. She grew up in Hebron. And this morning, she is at her office at the Sapucivic Addiction Treatment Centre in North West River, Labrador. Andrea, good morning.

**Andrea Webb:** Hi, Shelagh.

**Shelagh:** And Andrea, Congratulations!

**Andrea:** Oh, thank you.

**Shelagh:** What does this apology mean to you?

**Andrea:** It means the world to me. I never felt excited as much as I am about the apology and I think it's healing to all of us people who were relocated from Hebron and Nutak, including our children and grandchildren.

**Shelagh:** What do you remember about the relocation?

**Andrea:** I remember everything like it was yesterday. You never forget because it's so fresh in your mind all the time. It never leaves you, even though I was a child at the time. And as a child at that time, I felt like I was 60 years old, even though I didn't know what 60 years old felt like.

**Shelagh:** How did you find out that you were going to be moved?

**Andrea:** The kids in Hebron were not told because our parents were not allowed to tell us about it. We just knew there was something happening. We didn't know that we were actually leaving our home.

**Shelagh:** What was your home like Andrea?

**Andrea:** My home was beautiful. There is no other land like it anywhere in the world. I'm sure there are nice places but there's nothing that I've seen so far as beautiful as Hebron.

**Shelagh:** What made it so beautiful?

**Andrea:** Maybe because we were so innocent...even if you were an adult, you were also very innocent to your surroundings. And the world on the outside. We were not used to the world on the outside.

**Shelagh:** Your world was right where you lived.

**Andrea:** Yes.

**Shelagh:** What was it like?

**Andrea:** We have very, very high high mountains right around Hebron. Everywhere you look are very very high mountains. And when you're traveling by boat in the summertime, it's beautiful. You just want to look at the mountains. You feel at peace. Even when you're hunting and trapping and fishing and everything else, you still want to look at those mountains.

**Shelagh:** And what is the sky like?

**Andrea:** The sky is beautiful. Even when it's not nice weather, it's still beautiful to us because it's home.

**Shelagh:** And the people?

**Andrea:** Well the people, like I said earlier, because we were such innocent people, we just did our own thing in the community. We were into making seal boots, cleaning seal skins, making our own food, berry picking and just looking after each other, especially the elders.

**Shelagh:** Where were you moved to, Andrea?

**Andrea:** When we were moved from Hebron, we were moved to Makkovik.

**Shelagh:** And what was that like?

**Andrea:** It was terrible. It was really terrible. It wasn't like home from the time you got there until up to today or when you left the community. People that were born there I know don't like to hear that, but to me it wasn't home.

**Shelagh:** What did you live in? What were your homes like?

**Andrea:** The government promised us houses. We were told that we would have homes when we got to Makkovik or the other communities that we were moved to. But there was nothing there. There was nothing for us. We had to live with other families. If we were lucky, we lived with one other family or we were packed into a house with five other families and that wasn't nice.

And the other people who didn't have any homes to go to, lived in tents. We were forced to live in tents.

**Shelagh:** What were you told were the reasons for relocation?

**Andrea:** We've been asking that for years ever since we were relocated and we always got different answers. We never ever got straight answers from anybody. But one of the things we were told was Hebron was too far to bring in doctors and nurses, it was too far away from the hospitals and our hills were too high. Those were the things that we were told but we heard different things throughout the years that I think were just made up.

**Shelagh:** Andrea, I want to play you some of the tape from the ceremony on the weekend and then I want to talk to you about what was going through your mind then. But first, here is the premier of Newfoundland and Labrador Danny Williams and he is apologizing to the Inuit.

Danny Williams:

“In 1956 and 1959, the Government of Newfoundland at that time, closed the communities of Nutak and Hebron.

Looking back, these closures were made without consultation. Today the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, on behalf of the citizens of the province, apologizes to the Inuit of Nutak and Hebron for the way in which the decision to close those communities was made and for the difficulties experienced by them and



their descendants as a result of these closures. (sounds of people crying, weeping)

As a symbol of reconciliation, the government of Newfoundland and Labrador will assist the Labrador Inuit Association in erecting an appropriate monument to remember those relocated from Nutak and Hebron, upon which this apology will be inscribed.

Nakurmek.”

**Shelagh:** That was Premier Danny Williams on the weekend. I'm speaking with Andrea Webb who was one of the people, she was a child... when she was relocated from her home in Hebron and Andrea is with me today from North West River Labrador Andrea, to hear that again... what did you think?

**Andrea:** That day, I forced myself to stay very, very strong because that's what I was told to be when my grandmother when she was still alive. And she also reminded me that when someone apologizes to you, you have to accept that apology. And even though I remained strong when he apologized to us, right now hearing it on the air, it's very difficult for me. Because right now I don't feel very strong.

**Shelagh:** (pause) How do you feel?

**Andrea:** It's good to hear the premier or the Newfoundland government finally apologizing to us after all these years. And

when we had our 40 year reunion in Hebron, back in 1999, the Hebron Relocation Committee was elected at that time. And right after, we went back home to our communities from the reunion and we held our first meeting and the very first priority was to try to get an apology from the Newfoundland government and from Ottawa. And we didn't think we would ever get that apology because we've had so much difficulty in trying to get those people to apologize to us.

**Shelagh:** Andrea, as we heard the premier reading the apology, we heard people crying too. You must have seen the effects of all of this just building up in the kind of work that you do at the treatment centre...

**Andrea:** Ya, I see that every day of my life. I saw it at the signing ceremony. It's okay for Inuit to cry. Everyone knows it's okay to cry. The only thing is that we're on the road to healing. We're finally on the road to healing.

**Shelagh:** What does this apology mean to people?

**Andrea:** It meant the world to everybody from Hebron and Nutak not only to the people of Hebron and Nutak but to our children and our grandchildren and our great grandchildren as well.

**Shelagh:** It will echo for the generations.

**Andrea:** Yes.

**Shelagh:** And what will be the next stage?

**Andrea:** The Hebron Relocation Committee will be intact because we are still looking for other things. One of them is compensation from both governments and we hope to see that in the near future. Not only for ourselves but to our children as well.

**Shelagh:** And what about the monument the premier promised? How significant is that?

**Andrea:** It's very, very important that we get that monument because we will be able to see our parents' and our grandparents' plus our own names on there. So it means the world to us.

**Shelagh:** Do you feel different since the weekend?

**Andrea:** I don't think I've ever been happy in all my lifetime. It always felt like I was carrying a boulder and it would never leave me and I could never get myself to be really happy and smile at anyone. But I feel so light since the apology. I feel very very light and very happy. And it's so good to feel like you are finally on your way to healing.

**Shelagh:** (pause) Thank you so much for talking to me today.

**Andrea:** Okay. You're welcome. Bye Bye.

**Shelagh:** Andrea Webb Lives in North West River, Labrador. She is a member of the Labrador Inuit's Relocation Committee.

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## Biography

**Andrea Webb:** In the 1950s, several hundred Inuit were forced to leave their communities of Hebron and Nutak in northern Labrador when the provincial government cut off services and closed the government stores. Andrea Webb of Happy Valley-Goose Bay is one of 150 Survivors of the forced Hebron resettlement and has been a long time member of the Hebron Relocation Committee. In 2005, then-Premier Danny Williams apologized to Survivors and in 2009 a monument commemorating the forced relocation was unveiled on the site of the former residential school in Hebron.



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**Justice Harry S. LaForme**

# The Indian Residential School System: “From the ashes of disaster grow the roses of success!”

The following is a variation on several speeches that I gave to a number of human rights groups and to members of the legal and law school community over the past year.<sup>1</sup> These speeches in turn had their origin in an article of mine: *Section 25 of the Charter; Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982: Aboriginal and Treaty Rights-30 years of Recognition and Affirmation.*<sup>2</sup> What I am attempting to do through this, is to add my voice to the conversation on Aboriginal/Canadian reconciliation. They are my thoughts on how we might turn the ashes of disaster that is the legacy of the Indian Residential School System and grow the roses of success that is reconciliation.<sup>3</sup>

## **The fires of disaster!**

It has been variously described as one of the darkest chapters in

Canada's history, a sordid Canadian legacy, and as John Milloy describes it in his book, *A National Crime*: "Of all the initiatives that were undertaken in the first century of Confederation, none was more ambitious or central to the civilizing strategy of [government], to its goal of assimilation, than the residential school system."<sup>4</sup> For context, I begin my discussion with a brief review of what by now all Canadians must, or at least should, know.

In the 1800's, the Canadian government established a policy to "aggressively assimilate" Canada's first inhabitants into English speaking Christian Canadians. To accomplish this, the government developed a policy to be carried out at church-run, government-funded industrial schools called residential schools. In 1920, Duncan Campbell Scott—the head of the Department of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932—described the essential residential school policy objective with these various statements:

I want to get rid of the Indian problem. Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed. They are a weird and waning race... ready to break out at any moment in savage dances.

It is readily acknowledged that Indian children lose their natural resistance to illness by habituating so closely in the residential schools and that they die at a much higher rate than in their villages. But this does not justify a change in the policy of this Department which is geared towards a final solution of our Indian Problem.<sup>5</sup>

The intention was—using the very language of the state—“to kill the Indian in [the child] and save the man.”<sup>6</sup> The government believed that children were easier to mold than adults, and the concept of a boarding school was the best way to prepare them for life in mainstream society. This was to be accomplished by,

removing the child “from the influence of the wigwam... superstition [and] helplessness”... through “the terrible example set them by their parents” and “thus become deprived... notwithstanding all the instructions given them at day school.”<sup>7</sup>

In all, about 150,000 Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their parents, from their communities, and forced to attend the schools. The last school closed in 1996. It is noteworthy that the *Indian Act* provisions that authorized and supposedly made lawful this abomination remain in force.

On May 10, 2006, the Government of Canada announced the finalization of *The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement*. The parties to the agreement were former students, Churches, the Assembly of First Nations, other Aboriginal organizations and the Government of Canada. As part of the agreement, the survivors wanted to gift the rest of us with a Truth and Reconciliation Commission; a breathtaking, life affirming and soul searing gift of hope. Thus, the agreement included a provision for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) with a budget of \$60 million



over five years. The agreement was approved by the Courts and incorporated into court judgments on September 19, 2007.

The truth of the Indian Residential Schools was undeniably and forever acknowledged on June 11, 2008 when Prime Minister Stephen Harper publicly apologized from the floor of the House of Commons on behalf of the government, and each party leader apologized on behalf of their respective party. The apologies were not only for the known abuses and excesses of the Indian Residential School system, but for the creation of the system itself.

The TRC was subsequently created with the mandate to promote public education and awareness about the Indian Residential School system and its legacy. The TRC over the past four years has visited over 300 Aboriginal communities and concluded its seventh and final national event on March 30, 2014 in Edmonton, Alberta. It is said that it would take more than two years to play back the more than 6,500 statements given by Residential School survivors to the commission, which range in length from 10 minutes to five hours. The sheer magnitude of the truth component is staggering.

What is or should constitute reconciliation, is not at all clear. However, what I am convinced of is that the suffering of the survivors; the legacy of the Indian Residential School system must give rise to an equal and positive return; a legacy of hope — from the ashes of their disaster must grow the roses of success.

Canada owes this to them. It owes it to us and indeed we owe it to each other and to ourselves.

Here then are my momentary and succinct thoughts on what reconciliation could be and how we might pursue it.

### **The ashes of disaster!**

Recently an item reported in Vancouver, B.C. and available on the website of the Canadian Tourism Commission, proudly proclaimed that: “For the third year in a row, Canada has been ranked No.1 as the country with the best overall reputation in the world.” It goes on to describe what factors are used to measure overall reputation, which include “trust, esteem, admiration and good feelings the public holds towards these countries, as well as perceptions of peoples’ quality of life, safety and attention to the environment.”

In his new book, *Clearing the Plains*, University of Manitoba Professor, Richard Daschuk qualifies that glowing reputation of Canada and describes the complete reputation as including: “... the dismal condition of Canada’s indigenous people in comparison with its mainstream population.”<sup>8</sup>

Many in Canada frequently point out, often times with bitterness and contempt, that over \$8 billion dollars a year is expended out of the federal treasury to address the state of affairs that is the Aboriginal tragedy in Canada. This Aboriginal

tragedy—as it’s reflected today in First Nations people—consists of approximately 600 occupied reserves—most of which are quite small in area; about 852,000 people who identify as First Nations, representing about 61% of the total Aboriginal population of Indian, Inuit and Métis and 2.6% of the total Canadian population. Over half of First Nations people live off-reserve.

The tragedy itself is that Aboriginal people in Canada are—and it seems always have been—the poorest of poor. We live shorter and less healthy lives than other Canadians, our babies suffer a higher rate of mortality close to birth; we experience higher rates of violence; we are less educated and less employed as compared to others; and we are systemically discriminated against by the criminal justice system and imprisoned at a significantly higher rate than other Canadians.

In short, and in spite of the enormous costs expended, the lives of First Nations people are bleak and we continue to have a better chance of going to prison than finishing high school. And, the manner in which Canada continues to address the Aboriginal/Canadian relationship offers little hope, in my view, of improvement in the future.

What is not well known is that this place of inequality that Aboriginal people have been relegated to is entirely contrary to the intended relationship promised and established at the beginning of European settlement of what today is Canada. Moreover, none of it was the choice of Aboriginal people.

I believe that because of the revelations of the Residential School System and its abuses, we have witnessed renewed actions and comments by Aboriginal people about their place in Canada. One such voice has been recognized as the “Idle No More” movement. Whatever one’s view of the actions or effectiveness of Idle No More, there is one particular principle it has, which I would like to refer to because it speaks to the Canadian confusion. It provides some answers to the why and how a government policy like Residential Schools can become real.

Idle No More, as a core principle of its movement, speaks of restructuring the relationship between First Nations people and Canada in such a way that will allow and make possible First Nations people access to, and use of, their homelands in culturally and economically beneficial ways.

This movement includes a pamphlet—or manifesto—with the title, “Resetting and Restoring the Relationship between Indigenous Peoples and Canada.” Among other things, the Idle No More manifesto calls for an “unrestricted modern treaty process.” This process would begin, it says, with the recognition of the right of Aboriginal self-determination found in s. 35 of the Constitution. People would be wrong to think of this as mere rhetoric.

I want to, therefore, begin this part of my discussion with a brief examination of what the relationship is that is to be restored or reset. This is important because it gives context to today’s Aboriginal rights in Canada and the place in which they

have been relegated. I have little doubt that many Canadians who hear expressions like “reset” or “restore” the relationship, wonder what does this mean; what are Aboriginal people really talking about?

### **The original intent.**

Not long ago, former Prime Minister Paul Martin was quoted in the *Toronto Star* as saying:

We signed treaties with many First Nations because their cooperation and their land were essential to the growth and success of our communities. And then, when our economic and military needs changed, and the peoples with whom we had contracted solemn oaths had been enfeebled by us, we simply abandoned our honour, ignored our agreements, and did what we damned well pleased. It is our national disgrace.<sup>9</sup>

The agreements the former Prime Minister speaks about are, of course, the historic and founding treaties and while most Canadians intuitively believe the treaties were probably not honoured—or as they might say, “they were broken”—I don’t think they know what it means beyond that. I would like to briefly revisit that beginning.

One of the earliest and original treaties is the “Two Row Wampum.” This treaty was entered into in 1613 between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Dutch. It is interpreted as a

treaty of respect for the dignity and integrity of the other nation. It stresses the importance of non-interference of one nation in the business of the other. This treaty was later repeated with the British.

It is within the intention of this earliest treaty that subsequent treaties are said to record the meaning of the agreements between settlers and North American first inhabitants that followed. That is, to declare peaceful coexistence between the two. These were the seeds that together were to be sewn, and that would take root and begin the growth of Aboriginal rights in Canada.

Bruce Erickson, an assistant professor at York University, last year published an article in the *Toronto Star* that outlined historical events that supported the Aboriginal view. This is the essence of some of what he wrote.

In the mid-1700s Britain—through the Seven Years War—had won the European claim to much of the North American interior. As a result England set out to govern the interior by its own rules instead of those that had been negotiated over the past century through an alliance with indigenous groups. The British were making changes in colonial power along the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes region. Suddenly—because they had been cut out of the decision-making process and out of the established terms of alliance—Aboriginal people broke the alliance in order to remake it with their input.

In 1763, a coordinated attack by indigenous groups led by Chief Pontiac on the English forts of the Upper Great Lakes Region unsettled the new reign of the British in the interior. This was not, however, an attempt to run the Europeans out of the region. Rather, this uprising was an attempt by Chief Pontiac to “reset or restore” the terms of alliance in the region. Chief Pontiac wanted a partner, not a ruler — this coordinated attack was simply the means to deliver the message.

Out of this came King George III’s *Royal Proclamation, 1763*, which mandated negotiations with Aboriginal people for use of the land they—the Indians—occupied. The *Royal Proclamation* recognized that the peace of the colony depended upon securing consent for British presence. Indeed, the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision in the *Métis* case recognizes this. The majority’s adoption of the “resonating” comments of Professor Brian Slattery is worth repeating:

The sources of the general fiduciary duty do not lie... in a paternalistic concern to protect a “weaker” or “primitive” people, as has sometimes been suggested, but rather in the necessity of persuading native peoples, at a time when they still had considerable military capacities, that their rights would be better protected by reliance on the Crown than by self-help.<sup>10</sup>

The treaties, as flawed as they may seem to some, are a permanent reminder that Aboriginal people were brought into the agreement of occupation of Canada as partners, as invested

nations. In other words, the original Aboriginal/European settler relationship was based on equality, mutual respect and shared occupation. And they were to be the foundation within which the roots of the Aboriginal/Canadian relationship were to take hold, to flourish and to grow into a guide to lead Canada into the future.

For a time, this relationship persisted and First Nations were self-governing within their recognized jurisdictions including all internal affairs. This was acknowledged in 1836 when the Attorney General of Upper Canada, R. Jamieson, gave evidence of the continuation of that constitutional norm. First Nations, he wrote “have within their own communities governed themselves by their own laws and customs.”<sup>11</sup>

Sadly, that has been forgotten—or perhaps ignored—in the subsequent growth of Aboriginal rights in Canada. Today most Canadians will tell you that the original roots, as I just described, are in no way reflected in the relationship that developed and that currently exists. What Canadians must know generally is that the current Aboriginal/Canadian relationship—such as it is—is one of distrust and anger and that it is a costly dismal failure. They would be correct.

Today’s Aboriginal/Canadian relationship is devoid of mutual respect and equality. The intentions of the original relationship were uprooted and the resulting relationship became fertile ground for disastrous policies like Indian Residential Schools.



Nevertheless, whatever the relationship is; it is broken, and history demonstrates that it is broken beyond repair within our current efforts to address it.

### **The ignition of the fires of disaster!**

Since the *Royal Proclamation, 1763* and into the early 1800s, Aboriginal communities gradually became viewed as obstacles to colonists' economic objectives. Aboriginal use of lands was seen as an obstruction to economic development. In addition, there was widespread illness that depleted Aboriginal populations in the late 1800s, which reduced the colonists' fear of Aboriginal peoples. The indigenous people of Canada ceased to be seen as a threat and became background noise and raised the question: What could/should we do with them?

This brings us to the stage of the settlement of Canada where the intentions of the colonists clearly shifted from those of mutual respect, shared occupation and assistance to that of dispossession and removal of the First Nations from the territories—the removal of the First Nations from the cultural fabric of Canada.

Government's intention now shifted to one that considered the treaties legalistically; that is, as contracts specifying the minimum requirements that government was obligated to do. An inherent part of this shift was that Europeans classified themselves as “civilized” and Indigenous peoples as “savages.” The

assumption being that as savages, “Indians” were at the bottom of human development.

From this institutionalized bias a complex set of images, terminology, policies and legislation evolved, which set Aboriginal people apart, geographically, legally... as inferior peoples. In other words, Indians were reduced; devolved from being equal founding partners to “wards of the state”; in all aspects diminished in capacity. That is to say, the state government assumed total responsibility for taking care of their needs, the state became the legal guardian of the Indians. And as legal guardian, it assumed the legal authority and the corresponding duty to care for the personal and property interests of its wards; the Indians.

And, all of this was supported by law. That is to say, different seeds were sewn into the foundation of Canada and took root than those originally intended. These disastrous seeds gave growth to a new and different Aboriginal/Canadian relationship as we now know it; that ignored the Aboriginal people, dehumanized them as people; at complete odds with the original relationship. From those seeds grew disastrous racist policies, the legitimization of such policies that included the tragic and devastating Indian Residential School System; the fires of disaster.

### **The cause of the fires of disaster!**

To really understand how Aboriginal people in Canada were

transformed from equal partners to dependents of the state by operation of law, we must go back to the roots of our current Canadian body of laws.

In his book, *Conquest by Law*,<sup>12</sup> Lindsay G. Robertson documents how the Aboriginal people of the United States were effectively “conquered by law.” It is essentially this same legal journey that Mr. Robinson describes in his book that finds its way into Canada with the same shattering results.

The Doctrine of Discovery originated in 1452 when the Pope of the Catholic Church granted Portugal the right to claim and conquer lands in West Africa. In 1453 the Pope issued further instructions, to redraw the lines of Portuguese authority. These “papal bulls” set the precedent for condoning and authorizing Christian kings to colonize new lands; heathen lands.<sup>13</sup> Once a bull allowed a king to send colonists to a new land, the land would be led in Catholicism with the king’s ultimate power flowing from the Holy See.

Individuals in these new lands were viewed as heathens and as sub-human, and the west’s religion, civilization, and knowledge were superior to the religions, civilizations, and knowledge of non-western peoples. Heathens were not considered deserving of land or power, and «at no time were they considered as the owners of their land or as being entitled to any role in connection with its disposition».<sup>14</sup>

About 370 years after these papal bulls, a dispute arose in the United States because a man purchased land from the Illinois Indian Nation. However, another man purchased the same lands some years later from the United States Government. In 1823 their dispute found its way to the United States Supreme Court. After relying on the “discovery doctrine”, the court decided that when the British “discovered” the lands, which made up the United States, they had assumed actual title to them. Because of this—the court reasoned—the Indians did not have any title to sell.

Importantly, a document relied on by U.S. Supreme Court as support for the decision was the *Royal Proclamation, 1763*. Unfortunately, Chief Pontiac’s uprising and the subsequent reaffirmation of alliance, which was the purpose of this proclamation, failed to make its way into the court record, nor was any Indian part of this litigation.

Jurisprudence in Canada around this time also began its shift *through law* to that of refusing to recognize Indian tribes as legal or political entities.

In 1867 Britain passed the *British North America Act* (the “BNA Act”) to unite provinces into a confederation, resulting in the formation of Canada. The powers of government were divided between the provinces and the federal government. Section 91(24) vested exclusive federal legislative jurisdiction in a “matter” and “class of subject” described as “Indians, and

Lands reserved for the Indians.” The government of Canada interpreted this as an opportunity to define, through legislation, the legal identity of its Crown wards—the Indians—as well as their rights and interests in Canada.

In Canada, the *Indian Act*, which was first enacted in 1876,<sup>15</sup> is the central tool by which the federal government rendered to itself the authority to completely manage the affairs of Indians, thus, making hundreds of thousands of Aboriginal people “wards of the federal state.” The *Indian Act* was heavily influenced by the legislative foundation established prior to its passage, which again included the *Royal Proclamation* and legislation created in the mid-1800s.

The legal justification and foundation for the current Aboriginal/Canadian relationship became virtually complete when in 1888 the courts gave judicial support to it. The decision in *St. Catherine’s Milling and Lumber Co.*<sup>16</sup> affirmed that Aboriginal title over land was allowed only at the Crown’s pleasure, and could be taken away at any time. An important feature of *St. Catherine’s Milling* as it moved through the courts was the reliance on United States jurisprudence grounded on the discovery doctrine. To this day it remains the law in Canada.

Today, scholars describe the Doctrine of Discovery as a “legal fiction” that is similar to other “legal regimes”, which were said to legalize such things as slavery.<sup>17</sup> The international Indigenous community has called upon the United Nations to declare that

the Doctrine of Discovery is illegal and cannot be relied upon by state governments in law making, policy development or in litigation.<sup>18</sup> That genie, however, appears to be out of the bottle, at least in my lifetime.

Nevertheless, it is the case that the original intent of the Aboriginal/Canadian relationship is a “misremembered” fact. The Two Row Wampum; the treaties that followed; and Pontiac’s uprising resulting in the British response through the *Royal Proclamation, 1763* are like mists in the wind.

In sum, the relationship that evolved under Canadian law was one in which: (i) Indians were defined as “wards of the state”;<sup>19</sup> (ii) their legal interest in their original territory was “one of a kind” and was not ownership; and (iii) the treaties were also “one of a kind” and were not international in nature.

1982 brought a new hope for Aboriginal people coincident with the patriation of the Constitution and the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Certain guarantees and protections exclusive to Aboriginal people were found in s. 25 of the *Charter* and s. 35 of the Constitution. Regrettably, what becomes clear from the jurisprudence is that the original relationship I first spoke of was not aided through the consideration of s. 35. Significantly, First Nations sovereignty was not a right that was “recognized and affirmed.” Furthermore, even the right to self-identification remains unacknowledged.

Section 35 has had little apparent impact on the ability of Aboriginal peoples to claim jurisdiction over their own communities and to define their legal identity. Thus in this realm, as in the others, it appears s. 35 recognizes and affirms Aboriginal rights as defined by pre-section 35 doctrines.

In any case, the courts did not affirm the original relationship rooted in equality, mutual respect and joint occupation of the land. Rather, through the operation of law, the original Aboriginal/Canadian relationship was transformed into one of Aboriginal dependency on the “good will” of Canadian government. Indians remain “wards of the state” wherein the state has responsibility for the legal protection of them and their property.

### **More ashes of disaster!**

The legal rights and the relationship of Aboriginal people in the Canadian constitutional framework invites—some might say mandates—policies and laws such as those which fostered Indian Residential Schools. First Nation Elder, Taz Bouchier commented on this at the TRC’s last national event in Edmonton: “The residential schools are just but a small snippet of the attempt to change us into other people.” Other policies and laws that came out of the wards of the state relationship illustrate the truth of Elder Bouchier’s words.

The *Indian Act* continues to this day to define who is an Indian and what rights and interests he or she may have from birth to

death. While I have not checked, I am told that the *Indian Act* provisions currently allows for 17 different kinds of Indians.

The affairs of Indians continue to be administered by a department of government. Indians remain wards of the state subject to a fiduciary relationship—and even who falls under this category is state-defined. Under this legislation, Aboriginal people of “Indian” status continue to this day to remain wards of the state. For example, in spite of my accomplishments within Canada—including being the only First Nation person ever to be appointed to an appellate court in the history of Canada—in-  
deed in the Commonwealth—I remain a ward of the state.

A particularly odious example appears in the late 1800’s. At that time a great famine hit the prairies of Canada, which had few settlers and was predominantly populated by Aboriginal people. The First Nations people of the prairies were faced with starvation at a time when the Canadian government was pursuing its “national policy” of the swift construction of a railway to the Pacific Ocean. The Canadian government had a moral and legal obligation to feed these starving people who were Canada’s wards. In, *Clearing the Plains*, Professor Daschuk describes the Canadian government’s approach to this conundrum this way:

Faced with a pressing agenda of development and saddled with thousands of starving people across the prairies, the government used food as a means to control the indigenous



population. The strategy was cruel but effective. By 1883, only a few hundred desperate holdouts were still not on reserves and under the control of the Department of Indian Affairs.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, starvation was the tool used by Canada to free up the western lands; to make way for the national railway by forcing the Aboriginal people of the prairies to enter into land surrender treaties and become dependent upon the state.

A recent report in “The Hill Times” suggests that Sir John A. MacDonald’s approach to agreements with First Nations through duress is said to involve current aspects of government funding to First Nations. First Nations people, including some Chiefs, are claiming that bands are being required to support federal omnibus legislation and proposed resource developments as a condition of receiving certain funding. Some are refusing to sign the contribution agreements while others, out of need, have signed. The federal government denies this is the case.<sup>21</sup>

Another example was the “sixties scoop”, which refers to the Canadian policy that began in the 1960s and continued until the late 1980s, of apprehending unusually high numbers of Aboriginal children and fostering or adopting them out, usually into white families. It’s estimated that up to 18,000 thousand First Nation, Inuit and Métis children were adopted or fostered to non-native homes under this policy.

Today, Aboriginals account for 22% of all cases in Canada, yet account for only 2.6% of the Canadian population. Of all

children in care, the percentage of Aboriginal children reaches 60 to 78% in some provinces. When an investigation by a children's aid society is triggered, First Nations children are five times more likely to be investigated and 12 times more likely to be placed in foster care than non-First Nations children.

A substantial number of these adoptees face cultural and identity confusion issues as the result of having been socialized and acculturated into a euro-Canadian middle-class society. As one author put it, the identity issues of adoptees may be compounded by being reacquainted with one of the most marginalized and oppressed groups in North American society.

And finally, in 1999, the Supreme Court of Canada in the case of *Gladue* found that there was a drastic overrepresentation of Aboriginal people within both the Canadian criminal population and the criminal justice system. It labeled this reality “a crisis in the Canadian criminal justice system.” In 2012, in the case of *Ipeelee*, the Supreme Court again examined the effects of its decision in *Gladue*; it found the statistics were growing worse. *Gladue* and *Ipeelee* both acknowledge that “excessive imprisonment of aboriginal people is only the tip of the iceberg insofar as the estrangement of the Aboriginal peoples from the Canadian criminal justice system is concerned.”<sup>22</sup>

In spite of the Supreme Court's two ground breaking decisions, here is the reality today; fresh into the year 2014. While Aboriginal people make up about 2.6% of the overall population of Canada; 22% of the total federal inmate population

claims Aboriginal ancestry. Aboriginal women represent 33.6% of all federally sentenced women in Canada.

The 2013 report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator of Canada cautioned that, “Current sentencing trends combined with a growing and youthful demographic indicate that the over-representation of Aboriginal people in Canada’s correctional system is likely to grow.”<sup>23</sup>

Shockingly, since 2005-06, the Aboriginal inmate population has increased by over 40%. There are now more than 3,500 Aboriginal people behind bars in federal penitentiaries. More than half of the daily inmate count at several institutions in the Prairie Region is Aboriginal.<sup>24</sup> If this incarceration travesty was a “crisis” in 1999, what should we call it today?

Research has disclosed that adaptation of abusive behaviors learned from the Residential School System has caused intergenerational trauma—the cycle of abuse and trauma from one generation to the next. This research makes it clear that individuals who have suffered the effects of traumatic stress pass it on to those close to them and generate vulnerability in their children. The children in turn experience their own trauma.

The system of forced assimilation has had consequences which are with Aboriginal people today. Thus, the need for reconciliation does not rest solely with the school Survivors; rather, the intergenerational effects, demands that reconciliation must also address this intergenerational trauma. These dire facts are

recognized in cases such as *Gladue* and *Ipeelee* which call for action to address them.

I consider myself a survivor of the Residential School system although I was fortunate to avoid Residential School. Nevertheless, I view myself to be a survivor because I am a First Nation man; a proud Anishinabe. I know who I am and where I came from. I honour my ancestors and I embrace traditions and values of the Anishnabek. I am one of the four races of mankind; each endowed with special knowledge and gifts to be shared with each other for the betterment of all living beings on Mother Earth. I know well that I am who I am thanks to the resilience of my brothers and sisters throughout Canada who suffered through the forced internment in the Residential Schools and refused to let the Indian in the child be killed. Words do not exist to express my heart's gratitude and feelings for them or what they are owed.

The Residential School System is arguably the starkest—certainly the most ambitious—example of what flowed from the abandonment of that original relationship. It is one manifestation of the extraordinary breadth and width of the over arching government policy that unilaterally assumed the right to relegate an entire race of people to an inferior tier of society and made them wards of the state.

This national disgrace that includes the legacy of Residential Schools must be addressed through reconciliation that is as broad, ambitious and over arching as that racist policy. Nothing

less will give justice to those children who attended and suffered in those schools and resisted the death of the Indian in the child.

Here are some of my thoughts on reconciliation.

### **Growing the roses of success!**

I believe that the current relationship will continue to regulate Aboriginal people in Canada to being the poorest of poor in their own land and marginalizing them from the larger Canadian society. We will continue to live shorter and less healthy lives, be less educated, less employed and more significantly incarcerated than other Canadians. And, we will continue to be systemically discriminated against. Our lives will remain bleak and offer little hope of improvement in the future.

The consequences of having been essentially conquered by what legal scholars describe as a fiction-based law—the Doctrine of Discovery—is harsh and apparently permanent unless a new course of action is pursued. While the public desire may well be that Canada should never again repeat such disastrous policies and law as I just described, the ability of the government of Canada to lawfully do so continues because First Nations people remain “wards of the state.”

Canada, consciously and expressly chose to move from the original relationship to the current relationship with Aboriginal people. It alone decided, for reasons of economic gain and

political expediency, to make Indians “wards of the state” to exist under the care and control of the state.

Now, after centuries of developing and administering this specifically chosen path and failing in all of its severe assimilation efforts—Canada finds the Aboriginal/Canadian relationship unworkable, extremely expensive and a severely divisive aspect in Aboriginal/Canadian relations. Indeed, it is often said to be Canada’s international shame, which infects its otherwise stellar reputation as one of the most favoured nations in the world.

Chief Justice McLachlin of the Supreme Court of Canada in the 2004 *Haida* case observed that “a basic purpose of s. 35(1)—[is] the reconciliation of the pre-existence of aboriginal societies with the sovereignty of the Crown. Let us face it; we are all here to stay.”

In the 2005 *Mikisew Cree First Nation* case the court said, “The fundamental objective of the modern law of aboriginal and treaty rights is the reconciliation of aboriginal peoples and non-aboriginal peoples and their respective claims, interests and ambitions.”<sup>25</sup>

In June 2008 Prime Minister Stephen Harper, spoke about “forging a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians.” A relationship he said; “based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that

strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.”

All of this sounds like language that describes the relationship that was originally intended. Since s. 35 of the Constitution has as its basic purpose reconciliation, and if that includes, as Prime Minister Harper asserts, “forging a new relationship... based on our shared history”, then the task remaining is to chart that path.

Ian Desjardins in his article, *Sovereignty and Diversity: The New Relationship Between Canada and Indigenous Peoples*, submits that reconciliation:

entails two main initiatives: creating positive relationships, and the merging of two or more distinct sovereignties through the thought of compatibility. When these two initiatives operate together, it creates a sovereign bonding that highlights and succors one another in mutual respect. This idea can then produce social and political autonomy.<sup>26</sup>

In its broadest sense reconciliation should refer to the bringing together of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. It should permit the overcoming of the reasons for the division and inequality between them. Importantly, it should include a process to ensure that Canada and its first inhabitants are in agreement on the rightful place of Aboriginal people in the Canadian constitutional framework.

We do know this: the foundation of Aboriginal law and the Aboriginal/Canadian relationship in the Canadian constitutional framework has largely been founded upon the legal fiction that is the discovery doctrine. In other words, the roots of the Aboriginal law tree are incapable of bearing anything that is sustainable. Our attempts to graft new and creative branches on to this tree will not bring health to the tree's roots.

Nothing less than a new approach is required, which includes discarding the false discovery doctrine and all that grew out of it; especially wardship of Canada's first inhabitants.

Whether s. 35 of the Constitution can provide the means for a shift in the Aboriginal/Canadian relationship to reverse the historic and continuous dire consequences of the existing one is the issue.

In fashioning a solution, I would make two observations: First, the courts have repeatedly said that this relationship issue should not be resolved through the courts.

Second, I know that if the federal and provincial governments are around a table with representatives of Aboriginal societies, the totality of jurisdiction necessary for change is also present. In such a scenario reconciliation becomes very possible. As Idle No More suggests: we could restructure the relationship between First Nations people and Canada in such a way that access to and use of the homelands of First Nations people will



occur and make possible its use in culturally and economically beneficial ways.

Put another way, with good will, honour and an honest effort, modern treaties could be fashioned to define the Aboriginal and treaty rights that are to be “recognized and affirmed” such that the original intent of the Aboriginal/Canadian relationship can be re-established and honoured. To use the words of the Idle No More manifesto, let’s reset and restore the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada. This would be reconciliation worth working toward.

As Prime Minister Harper recently said in a speech he delivered in Israel: “It is a Canadian tradition to stand for what is principled and just, regardless of whether it is convenient or popular.” Can it be contested that restoring the original relationship—that existed between the early settlers and this country’s first inhabitants—is the principled and just thing to do?

The survivors of the Residential School System—indeed, all Canadians—are owed nothing less. Only then will Canada be fully and honestly entitled to claim the best overall reputation in the world. Canada will be able to then say: “from the ashes of disaster grow the roses of success.”

Miigwetch

April 9, 2014

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## Notes

- 1 I am a member of the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation in Southern Ontario. I am the only First Nation person to ever be appointed a judge of any appellate court in Canada. My past includes being one of the earlier lawyers to specialize in the area of Aboriginal Rights law. I have chaired two Royal Commissions on Aboriginal issues; sat as a trial judge of the Ontario Superior Court of Justice; and currently sit as a judge on the Ontario Court of Appeal. The opinions in this discussion paper are mine.
- 2 From the movie, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, written in 1968 by the Sherman brothers.
- 3 E. Mendes and S. Beaulac, *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, 5th ed. (LexisNexis, 2013).
- 4 John Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 2006), at 14, quoting D.C. Scott, “Indian Affairs, 1763—1841” in A. Shortt & A.G. Doughty, eds., *Canada and its Provinces* (Toronto: University of Edinburgh Press, 1914) vol. 4, at 52 [hereinafter “Milloy”] at 21—22.
- 5 See John Leslie, *The Historical Development of the Indian Act*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Treaties and Historical Research Branch, 1978), at 114.
- 6 *Supra*, note 4, at 27.
- 7 *Id.*, at 26.
- 8 Richard Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina, University of Regina Press, 2013), IX.
- 9 A reference to comments in his book: Paul Martin, *Hell or High Water: My Life in and out of Politics* (Emblem Editions, 2009).
- 10 *Manitoba Metis Federation Inc. v. Canada (Attorney General)* [2013] 1 S.C.R. 623, at para. 66, quoting Professor Brian Slattery, “Understanding Aboriginal Rights” (1987), 66 *Can. Bar Rev.* 727, at 753.
- 11 See, John Milloy, *Indian Act Colonialism: A Century of Dishonour, 1869—1969* (Research Paper for the National Centre for First Nations Governance, May, 2008), citing NAC, RG10 Vol. 60, pp. 60737-38, To John Joseph Esquire, Secretary to His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor from R. Jamieson. Att. Gen. Upper Canada, 18 February, 1836.
- 12 Lindsay G Robertson, *Conquest by Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- 13 An excellent essay on this topic is that of Melissa Morris, “Papal Influence

- in the Conversion of Infidels: Alexander VI's *Inter caetera*", (Professor Edward J. Gallagher, Department of English, Lehigh University, Pa., 2004).
- 14 Green, L.C., and Olive P. Dickason. *The Law of Nations and the New World* (Alberta: U of Alberta P, 1989), at 38—39.
- 15 It should be noted that while this was the first statute titled the Indian Act, John Milloy, *supra*, note 11, reminds us that this was a continuation of the real first Indian Act, namely, the *Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians, the Better Management of Indian Affairs*, Statutes of Canada, 32—33 Vic., c.6, 22 June 1869.
- 16 *St Catherine's Milling and Lumber Company v. The Queen*, [1888] UKPC 70, [1889] 14 AC 46 [*St Catherine's Milling*, UKPC].
- 17 See, William Bradford, "Beyond reparations: An American Indian theory of justice" (2005) 66:1 *Ohio St LJ* 1.
- 18 UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 11th Sess, *The North American Indigenous Peoples' Caucus Statement*, 8 May 2012 (delivered by Steven Newcomb [Shawnee/Lenape]).
- 19 In *St. Ann's Island Shooting And Fishing Club v. The King*, [1950] SCR 211, at 219, the Supreme Court of Canada described it this way: "The language of the [*Indian Act*] embodies the accepted view that these aborigenes are, in effect, wards of the State, whose care and welfare are a political trust of the highest obligation."
- 20 *Supra*, note 8, at 184.
- 21 Bea Vongdoungchanh, "Feds 'blackmailing' First Nations into signing their power over water, resource development for continued funding," *The Hill Times*, April 7, 2014.
- 22 *R. v. Gladue*, [1999] 1 S.C.R. 688 and *R. v. Ipeelee*, 2012 SCC 13, 280 C.C.C. (3d) 265.
- 23 Annual Report of the Correctional Investigator 2012-2013 (Howard Sapers, Correctional Investigator).
- 24 *Id.*
- 25 *Haida Nation v. British Columbia (Minister of Forests)*, 2004 SCC 73, 3 SCR 511; *Mikisew Cree First Nation v Canada (Minister of Canadian Heritage)*, [2005] SCJ No 71, 2005 SCC 69.
- 26 <[http://www.Academia.edu/Sovereignty and Diversity: The New Relationship Between Canada and Indigenous Peoples](http://www.Academia.edu/Sovereignty%20and%20Diversity%3A%20The%20New%20Relationship%20Between%20Canada%20and%20Indigenous%20Peoples)>, at 14.

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## Biography

**Justice Harry S. LaForme** is a member of the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation, Ontario. He graduated from Osgoode Hall Law School in 1977 and was called to the Ontario Bar in 1979. In 1989 Justice LaForme was appointed commissioner of the Indian Commission of Ontario, and later, in 1991 he was appointed as chief commissioner of the Indian Specific Claims Commission on Aboriginal land claims. He taught the “Rights of Indigenous Peoples” law course at Osgoode Hall Law School in 1992 and 1993. In October 1989 to June 1990 he served as co-chair on the independent National Chiefs Task Force on Native Land Claims. In January 1994 he was appointed a judge of the Ontario Court of Justice (General Division), now the Superior Court of Justice, Ontario; one of only three Aboriginal judges ever appointed to this level of trial court in Canada at that time. In November 2004 Justice LaForme was appointed to the Ontario Court of Appeal. He is the first Aboriginal person to be appointed to sit on any appellate court in the history of Canada. He became the first chair to the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He received the 1997 National Aboriginal Achievement Award in the area of Law and Justice and has written many publications and articles on issues related to Aboriginal law and justice.



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Janice Cindy Gaudet & William Louttit

## Is There Hope?

*The lifelong journey of healing is one that can often take us to places within ourselves, within our community and within society. It seeks to call forth an inquiry into the systems that limit the uniqueness of our lived experiences and to awaken the power of our spiritual nature and beyond. As a Métis scholar seeking to advocate for Indigenous knowledge relevant to the Omushkego Cree people, my research study has led me to explore the relationship between, land, healing and grandmothers songs as a method of nurturing hope in our everyday lives. For this inspiration, I give thanks to Mr. William Louttit, a James Bay Cree grandfather, father, brother, uncle, storyteller and language keeper who has on many occasions shared his life experiences including those from Horden Hall, Anglican Indian Residential School.*

*A few years ago, during a field research trip to the Moose Factory community, I asked William, what would be meaningful research? He responded by saying, “as we raise little children, we are doing it without grannies’ beautiful lullabies; instead we are using plastic rattles. I was thinking this last night as my 4 month old granddaughter was crying and tired. I held her and sang my late mom’s lullaby. Slowly her eyes focused on*

*me and her eyes started closing and she fell into a peaceful, relaxing sleep. I almost cried.” His word’s echoed a longing from within that yearned to be remembered. The best way I can describe this longing is like an ache that can only be soothed by an intelligence greater than my own. When William further shared with wonderment, “it was like my granddaughter already knew the song herself,” a familiar restlessness began to calm down. I too unexpectedly understood how such an exquisite intelligence expressed in the simplicity of a mother’s lullaby, exists through, in, and around us.*

*Through our various conversations, his life experiences of life before, during and after Indian Residential School were often interwoven in his personal narratives. The rest of this paper shares some of William’s lived experiences through our conversation. His wisdom and guidance continues to inform part of a broader community-based research study for my doctoral thesis.*

*It felt important to share his story in the context of this Aboriginal Healing Foundation publication. Bill had expressed the desire to write a book of his Indian Residential School experiences, called No One Heard the Children Cry. When I asked him, where would you begin the book? He openly and vividly described his first memories of residential school.*

## **The Float Plane**

It was in the early fifties when my mom and dad told my brother and I that we were going to be picked up by a floatplane to go to school in Moose Factory. My brother, Reg, had already

spent the previous year there, and this would be my first year. My mom told us how the learning was going to be limited in Attawapiskat or Lake River where our family wintered. There was no chance to get educated, as the school was a one-room shack, cold and heated only by a wood stove. She said, we would have to go to residential school in Moose Factory.

I remember we were all dressed in our Sunday best as we crossed the river by canoe to go to the floatplane. My brother, Reg, started crying. It was to the point that he was crying uncontrollably. I was a mommy's boy and I wanted to cry too because I didn't want to leave home either. I didn't want to leave my mom. My mom was having a hard time with Reg, so I decided I was going to be a big boy and not cry. I didn't want to give my parents a harder time than they were already having. I boarded the floatplane first. Reg started crying harder as they got him out of the boat and into the plane. I just smiled at my mom and dad as we waved goodbye. And on we went to Moose Factory. I didn't know what was in store for me at school.

The floatplane landed in the evening. A farm hoe tractor with a wagon came to pick us up. It was getting dark. It drove us to the school, which at that time was called Bishop Horden School. It was the last time I saw Reg that night. He went to his dormitory and I went to mine. He was a senior and I was a junior. They made me take a shower. I couldn't see all the other children but I could see lumps under the blankets. I got into one of the beds that was empty and didn't see anybody until daylight.



School started the next day and there was a line up based on grades one, two, three and so forth. Kids were made to line up in their grades. My brother had been there already and he lined up in the grade 3 line. Not really knowing what grade 3 or 4 meant, I stood next to Reg shoulder to shoulder on the grade 2 line. I just wanted to be with him. I had no business being there of course but that's where I wanted to be, I wanted to be close to him. I ended up in grade two. It wasn't until years later at a family gathering where I told my family that I wanted to stand close to Reg. He said, 'I didn't want to talk to you or put my arm over your shoulder because I knew you would have bullies in your dormitory, and when we were separated I couldn't control what would happen to you. Of course, I didn't want you to get in trouble with the bullies'. He had his own bullies and didn't want to be seen with his younger brother.

In grade 2, I had a teacher called Ms. Thompson, a grey haired old lady. I didn't even know how to spell R-U-N. I guess she was going to make it a project: I'm going to get this young kid through grade two. She was a kind old lady. She never yelled at me. I didn't know how to spell, but she kept up with me. She never ran out of patience with me. I belonged in kindergarten if anything else. At the end of the year, I was the top student in grade 2, only because of Ms. Thompson. There were some nice people in residential school. It's hard at this point in my life to say anything nice about residential school, but I can never forget Ms. Thompson. There were nice people like that to me, which was a saving grace during that period of my life.

During March of that first year, my nephew Andrew had been brought to the Moose Factory hospital because he had been sick. He had been raised by my parents and to me he was my brother. After they released him from hospital they brought him to Bishop Horden School because there was not going to be any flights to Lake River to take him home. I met him outside, he was crying and scared, he held his arms out to me to pick him up but the supervisors wouldn't let me hug or pick him up; to this day this still haunts me. These people looking after us were supposed to be God loving people, so why were they so mean, I wondered?

A year or two go by in residential school and there were bullies in class that would intimidate me. I didn't want to say the wrong thing. If you talked, you had to talk right otherwise, you'd get a punch in the head. Little by little I got scared of them. I was easy pickings of what went on later. Although this can be hard to say out-loud, I was sexually abused by some of the bullies. It was just until last month that my brother asked me, 'how come you never talked about it?' Well it's not something that one wants to talk about or that I wanted to talk about. So I kept silent for at least 60 years. It is not a proud moment in my life, though I was a victim and did not do anything wrong.

I often wonder where was my mom when the abuse was taking place? That is what I missed. She wasn't there to turn to after the events so I had to pretty well put myself to sleep. That's the part that I don't talk about very much either. They took me away from my mom and when the bad things happen no one is there to put me to sleep and to care for me. Actually later on

in life, I did try to take counseling. 'I don't need counseling', I told myself. I am a man, a tough guy. But this lady from out west, said, 'you know, Bill there is baby inside of you that wants to cry'. And here I go crying in front of you as I sing my mom's and grannies' lullaby.

### **On Being A Man**

As I developed into a young man, I started having second thoughts about what it meant to be a man. Did what happen to me mean that I was less of a man? So I went around being punchy and being another bully. As I grew to be an adult, I picked on people that were weaker than I was. And most of the time, I found them in my relationship punching somebody proved that I am man. I just punched somebody else this must mean that I am man. I would say, men don't cry. Especially what happened to me, I thought I had to prove that I was a man. In my early years, my father gave me a talking to about one of the troubles I got into. He said, 'you know, Bill, walking away from a fight doesn't make you less of a man, it fact, it makes you more of a man if you can walk away from a fight.' It was then, I started re-evaluating the way I lived my life.

This illusion of being a man connected to picking fights with anybody started to change. It was somewhat of a hard transition and I don't know if I survived that period. I think I largely defeated this illusion of what I thought it meant to be a man especially raising my 3 boys and now 2 grandchildren. Later in life I would learn that it was easy to apologize if I spoke harshly

to my children or grandchildren. When I started to say I am sorry, I felt better about myself. So now I say it to my children and grandchildren, I say I am sorry if I spoke harshly. I think I am comfortable now knowing that I am not less of man because of what happened in residential school.

### **Akipoulala**

One of the things they did in residential school is entertain us with movies. The movies were usually about Cowboys and Indians. And of course, the Indians were the bad guys. Our heroes were always the cowboys because they beat up the bad guys. That's what we were made to feel. We would clap our hands and wonder why are these guys running around with bows and arrows? Bad guys. Crooks. Savages.

We did not always know the thoughts behind the story of the movie. Until one time, they showed a movie where the American cavalries and the Indians were negotiating some sort of a treaty. The Indian Chief wasn't going to give up what he was demanding and he stood nose to nose with the commanding officer and he said, Akipoulala. As far as I know, this word doesn't mean anything. It is made up. To us in the playground, this word meant defiance; the Indians were not going to be pushed around. What was powerful here was a Chief standing up to a white man. After, the show ended, every child in the playground wanted to be the Chief who would stand up to the commanding officer. I was only about nine years. I got my turn and my friend agreed to be commanding officer. And I'd say

AKIPOULALA. It felt good. We don't have to be passive. It's okay to stand up against authority if you think they are doing wrong. I was proud for the first time in my life since I left my mom's place to be an Indian, to be an Aboriginal person. I started looking at things differently.

### **Aski (Meaning the Land)**

Growing up, I remember the trips between Lake River and Attawapiskat in late June. We'd set up our tents on sheets of ice. I remember hearing the beautiful songs sang at night by my mom and her best friend, Theresa. We were in the territory of the polar bears, and at the time, if I had thought about it, I would have been scared but the men were quite prepared with a rifle right outside the corner of the tent. Even after I left residential school at 16 years old, I got to continue to experience this. It was a beautiful time in my life regardless of the dangers we were putting ourselves to travel on the waters. But I was enjoying it and it was an adventure. There was a lot of responsibility on my parents and old people to ensure safety of mothers and children in the tents on the icebergs, such as watching out for sudden tides, and a polar bear wandering into camp. I can now appreciate that when I take my grandchildren to Toronto, their lives depend on me to keep them safe.

Today being out in the land, I am walking the banks of the rivers of the Cree where you can see a squirrel checking you out, or a partridge. When I see a wolf in front me, I get scared but the wolf is scared too. I want to tell you, I had just done

the unmentionable. I was walking up the river to check my rabbit and fox snares. The snow is so packed now that I carry my snowshoes because I walked it so many times. One early morning I left before daylight and started to reach daylight far from home. And a polar bear reaches my trail that I am walking on just a few feet in front of me, the polar bear is staring at me. I feel so helpless, I have my gun but it's in a gun case, unloaded and no shell in it. Even if I search frantically for my bullets in my bag, I will have to rip my gun case off and it's no use to even try it. The bear looks at me very bored. I am so scared; the bear just looks at me knowing that he or she is the master. It can do whatever it wants, rip me apart or just continue on its way. At that moment, that bear is in charge of the encounter. He looked away and slowly ambled on its way. It made its point, "don't mess with me buddy." Lately I make sure that there is a least a bullet in the magazine of my rifle and ...it is loaded at all times. Even if I had shot the bear, it would have been a useless waste of anything. I would have probably shot it but it would have been a waste of a life, the bear's life, I mean.

My father would tell me in my late teens. It's all very simple, Bill, we live in their territory. So yeah, you will run into a bear and a wolf. He said, 'do you carry a tea kettle and an axe with you?' I said, yes, of course, I have to cut bush. I carry a tea kettle because I can't go without making tea. He says 'bang your axe against the kettle and it will scare the bear off, they don't like metal against metal. I don't know if I could or will ever have his coolness of thought.

Maybe to a degree I am like my father, but I realize he was so knowledgeable of the land, and the animals. He taught me so much. Today, the land represents peace. It is the greatest and best stress reliever. A place you can go to where no stress management workshops can replace. It is where (for myself) I am constantly re-learning my language because when you see things out there, the plants the birds and the animals, you think of it in Cree. You see a certain kind of bird, you say *weenchepisheesh* rather than lapland longspur. You think of it in Cree. It is natural that way.

The wilderness teaches me about the land. The land is my language. When you are out there, you retain and you refresh your language. It is a saving grace to get back to the land as it reminds me of the language and what a particular tree is called or what that other plant may be called or what the remains of an old camp may be called or what a new camp may be called. It helps me not to forget all these words. It refreshes the mind when you go back to the land. Yet it seems that the language funding and allowances as Cree translator is the first to go. Personally, I try to notice when I am using the correct Cree word, but I have lost so much of the Aboriginal in me. I am starting to think, why aren't my children just as influenced in Cree as I am? I think it is because I am starting to live in another language without even thinking how it is affecting the future generations.

## A Story Before My Time

This is before my time, but I want to share this story as well. It was told by my Elder, Joseph, who speaks ancient Cree which is largely forgotten today. I couldn't always understand the meaning of the old Cree words so in our conversation, I'd have to ask him to explain. I remember the story he is telling me is when he was nine years old. At that time, he was up this certain river, north of Attawapiskat, 100 miles deep up the river. It was late February. They had nothing not eat. There were no squirrels and no whiskey jacks. These are birds that scrounge around for crumbs. They come on you and land on your hands to eat bannock. There was no fish in the river. The ice was too thick. They tried to make a hole through the ice but all they found was gravel. No fish. No rabbits. He was telling me that story. They were getting weak. We were just drinking water, he says. One morning my father goes out in the morning. They were in *askigan*, it is like a teepee covered with dirt. I have been in one and it's pretty warm in there, don't laugh. His father went out and as he stepped out, he grabbed a gun, and I was lying under my covers, he says, I heard a shot. Shortly after, my father comes in with a big smile on his face. A moose had walked right up to their door within a few feet.

Fast forward to spring time after breakup. They paddle down a little further down the river to what they call Marten Falls today. It was called agoki then, where his father went to visit his old friend. I was playing at their feet, the men are talking and I was listening to them at the same time. I listened to the old man ask my father, 'did you see that moose I sent you'. My father



said, 'yep'. That man 100 miles away knew his friend was starving and sent that moose up there. The food lasted them until spring time.

It was before my time but those things happened a lot. I used to hear those kinds of stories. Then he talked about the telephones at the same time that is called today a shaking tent, in Cree known as *kosapachikun*. He would explain that he would get into a tent and he could hear his grandfather have a conversation with someone in Fort Severn. It was 300 miles away. They were talking, I heard that, he said. So we have lost so much that old man said.

I did get into one of those tents, but this one was called a night lodge. When a voice spoke, someone said, 'Bill that sounds like your grandfather'. I didn't think he was speaking to me personally; it seemed he was speaking to the group. He said, 'Don't be afraid'. Maybe it is in reference to all that is going on, standing up to our rights.

There is growing awareness of our inherent rights and cultural learning happening in the community, but not fast enough and not quite enough, to be honest. I found a quote by Chief Dan George that was quite powerful. It said, 'To take care of Mother Earth because it doesn't belong to you, it is on loan from your children and grandchildren'. I typed it up on font 24 and pinned it on my door. Take care of Mother Earth is important but we pay lip service to her. At the same time we say take care of Mother Earth, we chuck out our styrofoam cup or plastic water

bottles. It seems easy until you start practicing taking care of the land, paying lip service to it, won't do us any good.

Sometimes it feels that the challenges are so far ingrained. We have grown dependent on the electronic gadgets that we have. Even though we take the children on the land, we find in the packsack a DVD, laptop, and iPod. I don't know if we can reverse it, but like I said, being out there is the best stress manager of anything you can find.

### **Is there hope?**

My two sisters went and my two brothers in law went to the Truth and Reconciliation event in Edmonton. I didn't think that I was emotionally strong enough to go. I guess that thing about men don't cry is still in my psyche or my background somewhere. As far as the formal government procedures go, including the apology, common experience payment goes, this may be over, but I am still going through the process of the Independent Assessment Process (IAP).

My lawyer just confirmed that my court date has been set for next July 2015. There are five levels of compensation. They put me at number two. I don't know what the outcome there will be. I am doing this for my grand-children, so there is something I can leave them. It is my simple way of giving something material to them.

My lawyer told me that the one thing that will work against me is that I have never been unemployed for any great length of my life. For my 48 years of working I was unemployed for one year by choice. He told me that they will hold that against me saying that my residential school experience did not affect the earnings after residential school, and I never suffered any broken bone. Sometimes I wish I had suffered a broken bone rather than the other stuff. My lawyer also told me that it can be difficult to talk about the hard experiences in front of the adjudicator. Right now, I feel like I am looking forward to it, I have nothing to hide. I am no less of a man. I have a lot of support. My granddaughter, Laura, who lives in Timmins, she started bossing me around, taking off of my coat when I come over. It's her way of telling me to stay around. Laura always wants me to play with her and crawl on the floor under the table. She will be 2 years old in April. This is the little girl I was singing a lullaby to as a baby. I have a lot of support from my family on this next stage of the residential school process.

Sometimes I wake up and especially when I am alone, I do wonder about the future. Is there even a future? Is there hope? When I look forward, right away I think of my grandchildren. I have grandchildren that will turn into men and women. Knowing that I may have shaped their life in a positive way, I think maybe it is worth staying around a little longer. I do everything for them. For them, we have to stand up for our rights, and like that voice said, don't be afraid. There are people out there in power that perhaps wish there was no Indian problem. I don't know if you can call it a problem. I don't.

### **Concluding reflection**

As an Indigenous scholar, I have observed how the stories of our elders have the power to still the mind. When the mind is still, the truth can be heard and felt from deep within. Bill's sharing evokes a renewed understanding of hope. Beyond, the clichéd notions, that are so often constructed out of a place of restlessness, tolerance and desperation, hope here is both active and passive. Hope emerges here from an inherent knowing, an intelligence that is as ancient as the stars. Like Bill's granddaughter who already knew the old Cree lullaby that journeyed through many generations, and thus she was able to surrender to a peaceful state of sleep.

These old lullabies are being re-claimed both locally and globally as they are recognized as cultural knowledge that connects us to the language of our ancestors. Bill reassured us in our conversations that "it is like the song is built into her." As we reflected on the power of the song and the simple way in which chanting the song activated the intelligence of Creation, the vastness of the land awakened within us an infinite love story. A life force beyond what the human mind seeks to comprehend. Yet, the old people, seen today as our Elders, know it is real and exists in every living thing. Bill closed our sharing by saying "the connection will never be broken no matter happens." There is hope in such a conviction.

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## Biography

**William Louttit** is an Omushkego. While myself and another were born in Moose Factory, my two older siblings were born in Hannah Bay, two in Fort Albany territories, and the two youngest in Lake River. The varying location of birth speaks to a traditional nomadic way of life. We lived both in the bush and out in the bay; therefore needed two pairs of snowshoes. Our family wintered in Lake River and spent the summers in Attiswaspikat. I am a member of the Albany Band. I currently live in Moose Factory, Ontario, located on an island in the James Bay region. I am a storyteller, a man, a father and a grandfather who enjoys making people laugh. I continue to serve my community as a Cree speaker and language translator as well as sing the old Cree lullaby once sung by my ancestors.

**Janice Cindy Gaudet** is working with the community of Moose Factory, Ontario, as part of her PhD research at the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Health Sciences. I am a Métis woman from a farming community in Saskatchewan. My current research interests explore the evolving practice and legitimization of Indigenous theories, philosophies, and methodologies. In 2013, I won the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for my efforts in sharing and promoting Indigenous teachings as a means to health and well-being. I am a board member of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and a student of Indigenous knowledge keepers. These experiences offer hope for today and the generations to come.

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**Katsi'tsákwas Ellen Gabriel**

# *Ka'swènhta*—The Two Row Wampum: A Reconciliation Through an Ancient Agreement

*Ka'swènhta* or the Two Row Wampum Treaty is a significant agreement in the history of the relationship between European monarchs and Indigenous peoples. *Ka'swènhta* is more than visionary. As a principled treaty it is grounded in an Indigenous intellect providing an insight and a vigilant awareness of the inevitability of the evolution of society. *Ka'swènhta* is an instrument of reconciliation for contemporary times if openness, honesty, respect, and genuine concern for present and future generations is a foundational priority.

During the initial interactions and relationships with Europeans, our ancestors had the fortitude and wisdom to foresee the necessity of creating an agreement that would nurture a peaceful coexistence between two peoples; however, it was grounded on the existence of our survival. The people of the Iroquois Confederacy live and follow *Kaianera'kó:wa*, or the

Great Law of Peace, whose pillars/foundations include **peace** at its heart; **strength, respect, and love** for all our relations that *Shonkwaia'tí:son* (the Creator of all living beings/things) placed upon Mother Earth.

It is upon these three pillars that *Ka'swèn:tha* is grounded. In order to implement *Ka'swèn:tha* each nation must respect, understand, and work diligently to uphold the spirit and principles of peace. Having been created by a matrilineal clan system, *Ka'swèn:tha* includes the equal rights of both men and women and all our relations, as our ancestors were well aware of the patriarchy they were dealing with.

The Iroquois Confederacy created *Ka'swèn:tha* with the Dutch in the 1600s, and when the British took over “New Amsterdam” in 1664, they agreed to continue to uphold this treaty.<sup>1</sup>

As is customary among Indigenous peoples, everything has purpose; nothing is done haphazardly when it comes to the recording of agreements through wampum, as they are considered sacred spiritual trusts for present and future generations to uphold. However, the wampum's simple yet not so simplistic imagery is meant to instill simple reminders in our minds of how to keep the relationship alive and healthy. The *Ka'swèn:tha* is composed of two straight rows of purple beads flowing upon a white background. There are three rows of white wampum beads between and beside each row of purple beads, which signify peace, friendship, and respect and which encompass the

two nations. The purple wampum beads represent the vessels of the Iroquois nations (a birchbark canoe) and that of the British (a ship) that ride upon the waters of life together, never crossing or touching to allow the other to move forward or grow throughout their existence.

However, white also represents purity and can also represent the land. In fact, the word for treaty in *Kanien'kéha*<sup>2</sup> is “*Ionkwatonhontsaráh:kwen*,” meaning that which our lands lie on top.

*Ka'swènh:tha*'s imagery represents how each nation agrees to never interfere with the other's beliefs, customary laws/ government, way of life, spirituality, culture, and language; elements and principles that comprise and underline the right to self-determination.

To further strengthen and enhance *Ka'swènh:tha*, the peoples of the Iroquois nations created, what we might call today, a traditional dispute resolution clause called the “Silver Covenant Chain.” The SCC is a timeless form of access to justice through a mutually agreed-upon procedure to resolve conflicts. It too contains symbolism as a reminder of each nation's commitment to peace through its imagery of each nation steadfastly holding the end of each chain:

...that they would take care to keep it from breaking, or from getting any rust or filth upon it. That they would be as one



flesh and blood so that if any enemies should intend to hurt or strike one party, the other should immediately give notice, rise up and help him and that a good road should always be kept open between them.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the embedded conflict resolution of the agreement delineates each peoples' obligation to clear away any deterioration in the relationship through a designated annual meeting whereby an in-good-faith discussion based upon peace, friendship, and respect will be established to "clear the air" of any hurt or umbrage committed by either party. Therein lays the foundation of reconciliation: strength, love, and respect in which the absence of one will destabilize the peace.

[It is also clear from *Ka'swèn:tha* that the Iroquois peoples were not the Queen's children but allies and equals of the British Empire; in fact, an ally that has never conquered nor surrendered its lands and resources to the British Empire or the Commonwealth.]

Like many historical treaties with Britain and Canada, the treaties were broken almost immediately after signing. European doctrines like the Doctrine of Discovery,<sup>4</sup> Doctrine of Conquer, and Terra Nullius founded in dogmas of "racial superiority" provided justification to the brutality of the colonizers to those who refused to assimilate and "surrender" themselves to a Christian god.

This brutality manifested itself through the Indian Act policies that created the Indian Residential School System, which was designed to “Beat the Indian out of the Indian.”<sup>5</sup> Since the onslaught of colonial policies, *Onkwehón:we* (Indigenous peoples) have experienced a continual assault upon their identity, values, laws, languages, and culture for one of the largest land grabs in human history. The violation of the spirit and intent of a peaceful coexistence that are embedded in *Ka’swènh:tha* was instituted through the implementation of the Indian Act and remains the status quo of the current relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples.

In order to achieve the goal of assimilation, the core of Indigenous peoples’ identity became a target that attacked the sacredness of the family unit and undermined the roles and authority of Indigenous women, thereby causing deep multi-generational wounds to the pillars of *Onkwehón:we* identity. Colonialism continues to promote cultural self-hatred by insidiously disguising assimilation as “progress” while continuing to de-legitimize Indigenous traditional customary laws, languages, culture, and ancestral teachings of survival and peace that were firmly established for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

The Indian Residential School System was an act of genocide that has distorted the white lines of peace, friendship, and respect and has caused *Ka’swènh:tha* to become more of a museum relic rather than a living treaty of peace between two nations.

So how do we begin a process of decolonization and reconciliation within Canada when there is still so much to be done within our own nations and communities? Awareness, knowledge, and understanding of what the intentions and foundational principles of *Ka'swènhtha* is a good place to start. It provides a framework of reconciliation to sensitize and educate society and must reveal the roots of Canada's genocidal policies and how they impact both Indigenous and Canadian contemporary society. As one elder put it, "it took over a hundred years for our people to get to this state because of the Indian Residential schools, and maybe it will take that long for us to undo its impact."

Real "reconciliation" requires a process whereby the economic cost is eliminated from the equation and whereby a concerted effort is made to bear through painful discussions in the spirit of peace and friendship. History must expose how Indigenous peoples, under duress and coercion by Canada, were forced to implement colonial assimilative policies under the Indian Act. Reconciliation must be done among Indigenous peoples as well, and not just with Canadian society.

Contemporary society bases its version of "peace" and "prosperity" on economic priorities rather than those found in Indigenous philosophies, which requires us to work in earnest for peace to create and maintain a healthy environment. *Ka'swènhtha* includes "All Our Relations" from the waters, green plants, medicines, fruit, insects, birds, fish, four-legged,

and trees: all that sustains life. These too ride in the river of life with the *Onkwehón:we* peoples.

Given the rate of development upon Indigenous peoples' unceded territories, it is imperative that we renew the Silver Covenant Chain as soon as possible, although it still seems that there is no political will to do so. There is a misconception that monetary compensation for the harms done by colonialists through the Indian Residential School System is reconciliation, but the harm done to the collective human rights of Indigenous nations must be addressed as well. As the door of understanding and compassion begins to open through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, society has a wonderful opportunity to once again breathe life into *Ka'swènhtha* and the Silver Covenant Chain.

The wisdom of our elders imparted in this historical treaty is as relevant today as it was when created. It is a gift meant for all generations to use and keep alive. But like any human rights instrument, the *Ka'swènh:tha* needs the spirit and will of the people to breathe life into it; otherwise, it becomes a museum relic that, although symbolically recognizable, has lost its meaning and spirit.

As we witness the fast-paced changes of contemporary life and of Mother Earth trying to heal herself through climate change, remembering the original intent of *Ka'swènh:tha* and renewing our respective nation's commitment to a peaceful coexistence is a precious legacy for present and future generations to enjoy.

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## Notes

- 1 Written manifestations of the Kaswentha Treaty were seen as early as 1664: page 7, “Council Fire,” copyright 1989 Woodland Cultural Centre.
- 2 *Kanien’kéha* is the Mohawk language; *Kanien’keháka* means the people of the flint, otherwise known as Mohawk.
- 3 Petition to the Governor General of Canada from the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, 1888, cited in “How democracy came to St. Regis,” *Akwesasne Notes*, 1974: page 7, “Council Fire,” copyright 1989 Woodland Cultural Centre.
- 4 Papal Bulls of the 15th century gave Christian explorers the right to claim lands they “discovered” for their Christian monarchs. Any land that was not inhabited by Christians was available to be “discovered”, claimed, and exploited. If the “pagan” inhabitants could be converted, they might be spared. If not, they could be enslaved or killed. <http://www.doctrineofdiscovery.org/>
- 5 Duncan Campbell Scott, deputy superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932.

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## Biography

**Katsi'tsákwas Ellen Gabriel** is a member of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation, Turtle Clan, Kanehsatà:ke Mohawk Territory, and an artist, an author, a teacher, and an Indigenous human rights activist. Katsi'tsákwas holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Concordia University. She worked as an illustrator and curriculum developer as well as an art primary school teacher for grades 1 to 6. She has also worked on videos illustrating legends of the Iroquois people and the local community stories and is an active board member of Kontinón:sta'ts—Mohawk Language Custodians and First Peoples Human Rights Coalition. From 2004 to 2010 she was president of the Quebec Native Women's Association.

For the past 22 years she has been a human rights advocate for the collective and individual rights of Indigenous peoples and has worked diligently to sensitize the public, academics, policing authorities, and politicians on the history, culture, and identity of Indigenous peoples both nationally and internationally. She is well-known to the public as a spokesperson during the 1990 "Oka" Crisis. Katsi'tsákwas received the Golden Eagle Award from the Native Women's Association of Canada (2005), International Women's Day Award from the Barreau du Québec/Québec Bar Association (2008), and the Indigenous Women's Initiative "Jigonsaseh Women of Peace Award" (2008).



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**Tony Belcourt**

# The Métis Victory Daniels v. the Crown

*The following text was originally posted on Tony Belcourt's personal blog, immediately following the Crown's historic ruling. The text is available online at <http://tonybelcourt.com/2013/01/the-metis-victory-daniels-v-the-crown/>*

## **I'M ECSTATIC ABOUT THE MÉTIS VICTORY IN THE FEDERAL COURT IN THE CASE OF DANIELS V. THE CROWN**

Yesterday when a reporter asked me for comments about the then pending decision by the Federal Court on the “Daniels” case, I was rather blasé about it. Having gone through 42 years of victory, then setback, in our quest for federal recognition, I have become quite jaundiced about things. Jaundiced, or simply tired of it all.

But when I had the Decision on the screen in front of me and started to tweet and text messages, my hands were trembling. I don't know if I have ever felt this ecstatic since first coming to



Ottawa in 1971 with a mission echoed by our ancestors—get our land back, get our land back!

We, the prairie Métis leaders at the time formed the Native Council of Canada, expressly to gain recognition of the obligations of the federal government to the Métis people—its obligations to regard us as “Indians” within the meaning of 91.24, which sets out that the federal government has exclusive jurisdiction to legislate for “Indians and Lands Reserved for Indians.”

This, we felt, was the only way we could get restorative justice for lands taken away or swindled away from us. This, we felt, was the only way we could gain access to sorely needed health, education and economic development benefits. Benefits in lieu of opening the way for the Government of Canada to bring into Confederation all of the lands of Rupert’s Land... all the territory of the rivers and tributaries that flow into James Bay and Hudson’s Bay and the resources and wealth that came with those territories—a huge land mass stretching from the northern parts of today’s Québec and Ontario and most of present day Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

But despite our many victories, they have regularly been followed by setbacks. We achieved victory in gaining Constitution recognition as one of the Aboriginal Peoples whose Treaty and Aboriginal Rights are “recognized and affirmed” in the Constitution Act, 1982, only to see the Constitutional Conferences that were called to articulate and elaborate what

those rights were, come to an end in abject failure later in that decade. We achieved success in negotiating a Métis Nation Accord as an addendum to the “Charlottetown Accord”, only to see that watershed agreement defeated. We gained overwhelming support by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, only to see that report shelved by the Federal Government. We gained victory in R v. Powley, only to see Provinces continue to frustrate or deny our rights to hunt and fish for food. We again achieved an incredible success in the Kelowna Accord, only to see that trashed by the current federal government.

Why then was I blasé yesterday but completely elated today? It’s because I see in writing for the first time, an unequivocal declaration by the Federal Court of Canada that issued the following decision: “that Métis and non-status Indians are ‘Indians’ within the meaning of the expression ‘Indians and lands reserved for Indians’ in s 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867.” And seeing that in print gives me hope once again.

But while I see hope, I also know that waves of discrimination against us will be manifest. I know that the federal government will fuel fears of the consequences of this recognition and that their message will be rampant throughout the media. I especially regret the impending backlash we will experience from some First Nations leaders.

When I first came to Ottawa as the newly elected President of the Native Council of Canada, I sought a meeting with

George Manuel, then National Chief of the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations). When we finally sat down for a coffee, George told me that everyone was cautioning him not to meet with me. His Chiefs were against it and especially so were the federal officials. George told me they said that if the Métis were recognized... “well, George, there is a loaf of bread here for you but if the Métis are recognized, then some of that bread will have to go to them.” I said, “George, Ottawa is not a loaf of bread, Ottawa is a bakery!”

It is so true that every time we come near to gaining what are rightfully our entitlements, the First Nations are pitted against us. They are led to believe that anything we gain must be at their expense. As I said to George over four decades ago, he, his people and the Métis were not getting their fair share of the bounty reaped by Canada through the Treaties we made with it. We don't see an equitable return of our taxes that go to our schools or support our continuing education. We, the Métis especially, lack equitable access to health care. We don't see the kinds of investment in our economic self-sufficiency that is regularly provided to corporations.

In addition there is reason to question why I would be so elated, the reality being that the federal government will almost certainly appeal this decision and it will therefore refuse to take any positive action consistent with it. I'm overjoyed because I have finally seen the day when the mere declaration that the federal government has jurisdiction for Métis has been made and in

my soul, I know there is no turning back.

We are victorious today. I celebrate this victory and I toast to all those who have fought to see this day, especially my dear friend, Harry W. Daniels.

*January 8, 2013*

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## Biography

**Tony Belcourt** is a Métis from Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta. He was the first president of the Native Council of Canada (1971–1974); vice-president of the Métis Association of Alberta (1969); and founding president of the Métis Nation of Ontario (1993–2008). As a member of the Board of Governors of the Métis National Council, Tony served as Chair to the Métis Rights Panel. After his retirement in 2008 he was appointed to the post of Métis Nation Ambassador for International Issues by the Métis National Council. Over Mr. Belcourt's distinguished career, he has established a reputation as a successful corporate leader, innovator, entrepreneur and communications specialist. Mr. Belcourt has played a key role in establishing a national voice for Canada's Métis and Non-Status Indians. His efforts were an important contributing factor in the Métis being recognized in the Constitution Act, 1982, as one of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Mr. Belcourt has been successful in lobbying the federal government for the recognition of various Métis rights, including gaining access for Métis and Non-Status organizations in the federal government's core-funding program and working to ensure the Constitutional protection of the Métis' right to hunt. Mr. Belcourt is a skilled and experienced communications professional. In the mid-70s, he established a research company and began his career as a writer, producer and director in film, video and radio production. Most recently, Mr. Belcourt served as President of the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO), an organization that he founded in 1993 and led until early 2008. Under Mr. Belcourt's direction, the MNO rose from obscurity to prominence. In 2006 Tony received a National Aboriginal Achievement Award for public service; he also holds an honorary Doctor of Laws from Lakehead University. Mr. Belcourt became an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2014 in recognition of his leadership and activism over the years and lives in Ottawa with his partner, Danielle. He has two daughters, a son and is a proud grandfather.

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**Mark Abley**

# *On Conversations with a Dead Man: The Legacy of Duncan Campbell Scott*

## **Contextualizing Essay for this Volume**

A few people have asked me why, in writing a book about the prime architect of Canada's Indian Affairs system, I wanted to haul the man back to life. Duncan Campbell Scott died as long ago as 1947: couldn't I let him rest? Instead of writing a conventional biography of a figure from the Ottawa past, I had chosen to make his ghost show up in my living room for a series of edgy, wide-ranging conversations. Scott had been in charge of Indian Affairs when the residential school system was at its height; he had enforced laws banning the potlatch and the sun dance; he had abolished the traditional Iroquois system of government at Six Nations; he had calmly told a House of Commons committee that the aim of federal policy was to "get rid of the Indian problem." One Aboriginal friend, on learning of my intention, asked "Can you waterboard a ghost?"

The reason involves not only Duncan Campbell Scott and the issues underlying much of Canadian history, but also how we live as citizens in the 21st century.

This is a strange time to be alive. If you have access to the Internet, you're bombarded with a never-ending onslaught of data. Our fingertips can give immediate access to more facts (not to mention more cute pictures of cats) than anybody living in a previous century would have dreamed possible. The truth is out there—the truth, I mean, about how Aboriginal people across Canada were abused and exploited for many generations. But facts remain inert until we begin to act on them—until, if you like, they migrate from our brains to our hearts. At some level, most Canadians know that our country was built on a colonial system of enormous injustice, a system that remains largely in place to this day. But that knowledge is like the latest news about the Vancouver Canucks or the Academy Awards. It leads nowhere. Data is not wisdom. Knowledge is not understanding.

What I wanted to do, in bringing Duncan Campbell Scott back to life, was to provoke or prod readers towards a deeper understanding. If you were confronted by the spirit of such a man, what would you say to him? If he explained to you why he acted as he did, how would you respond? A conventional biography can get across the relevant facts. I wanted something more. I wanted the information I could offer to be suffused by feeling.

Scott was a poet. Indeed he was one of the finest poets in Canada in the early 20th century. He was also a hard worker,

a loyal friend, a man who loved the natural world. He wasn't a monster. Evidently, to his own daughter, he was a devoted father. Up to a point, I sympathized with the man—Ottawa was a lonely place for him. And at first, when I was researching *Conversations with a Dead Man*, I wondered if he really knew what was going on in the residential schools. Maybe, I thought, he was isolated in his big office on Sparks Street or Parliament Hill. Maybe he didn't receive adequate information from the agents who were stationed on reserves. Maybe, if only he'd known about the dire conditions endured by tens of thousands of Aboriginal children, he would have insisted on change.

Not so. It's clear from the hundreds of complaints and reports that landed on his desk that Scott *was* aware of the terrible quality of school buildings, the lack of ventilation and heating, the scanty food, the physical abuse, the rampant diseases. He knew. He had no choice but to know. And if reporters occasionally pushed him on the matter, he merely denied the problem existed. On one occasion he did reluctantly admit that more than half the children who attended residential school had died before enjoying what he called the system's "benefits"—but, he added, that was no reason to alter the government's policies.

How could he do this? Part of the reason, I think, is that Scott never allowed himself to feel what he knew. When he hung up his blazer on the hook of his office door, he shut off his emotions. He was intellectually convinced that Aboriginal culture was doomed, and that assimilation was both necessary and desirable; therefore, whatever injuries the policy caused must



be trivial compared to the larger goal. The phrase “collateral damage” hadn’t been invented in his day, but it applies to his behavior: for him the thousands of Aboriginal children who died, the tens of thousands of families who were wounded, were merely collateral damage. What mattered was the department’s mission, the ultimate goal.

As a poet Scott allowed himself to feel. As a deputy minister, he couldn’t let himself feel a thing. Whatever other people wrote or said to him, he was confident that he knew best. He believed in an ideal. And the ideal blinded him to the truth.

In my book, Duncan Campbell Scott is forced to listen. His ghost arrives in my living room hoping I will strive to change the bad reputation he gradually acquired as the details about his work at Indian Affairs became a matter of public record. He learns that I can do no such thing. I will do no such thing.

There is, I realize, an arrogance of my own in writing these words. I don’t have all the answers. Nobody has all the answers. But for Canada as a whole, I would venture to say, the first step towards healing involves listening. When I was a boy, growing up in Alberta and Saskatchewan, most white people thought that Indians were very quiet. (Perhaps a lot of them were quiet because their language had been ripped out of them.) The Hollywood stereotype of an Indian was someone who looks stolid, says “How!” and disappears in the face of white settlement. As things turned out, Aboriginal people did not disappear

and they still have much to say. The question is whether they will be heard.

From time to time political leaders are fond of remarking, “This must never happen again.” When they say it with reference to Aboriginal people, they mean the obvious abuses, the blatant misjudgments, the crimes that required apology. They don’t mean the underlying know-it-all attitude of superiority. But I think this may be the most urgent quality in need of change. A few years ago Margaret Wentz, a columnist and former managing editor of *The Globe and Mail*, told her readers that Aboriginal spiritual beliefs were “absurd” and added: “Neolithic culture cannot possibly give them a future. And it’s time for us to face that.” Evidently her readers—“we”, “us”—were not supposed to include Aboriginal people. “We” were the ones with the power to decide. “They” were the ones who would adapt and obey.

For healing in this country to get underway, we all have to listen. I’m not going to tell Aboriginal people what they should or shouldn’t do. But I can promise to listen. I can promise to let their words enter my heart. I can promise not only to speak out, but to fall silent.

**Excerpt from *Conversations with a Dead Man: The Legacy of Duncan Campbell Scott* (adapted from Chapter 3)**

Easter came and went, and I began to wonder if Scott would indeed return. The final vestiges of snow had vanished from shady corners of the yard, and robins made an outdoor concert on mild evenings. Had I been too hard on the man with my angry outpouring, my refusal to grant him any sympathy?

“I see mud under your fingernails,” a voice said nearby. “You have been busy in the garden, Mr. Abley.”

I turned and found the ghost standing, as before, in the living room. The afternoon light played across the creases of his face. Silently he moved to join me by a window overlooking the garden, unkempt with the furious energy of April. A cardinal sang his heart out from a branch of the white pine. Scott listened: a brief smile made his lips appear less narrow than usual.

“We do our best,” I said. “My wife is more of a gardener than I am. But the place needs more attention than we ever manage to give it.”

“You have not yet cleared away all the leaves that fell last year.”

“No. We leave some of them. My wife says that keeping a few wild areas in the garden is helpful to the bees.”

“I did the same,” he said.

I turned my head in surprise. “Yes indeed,” he added, “even though I lived not far from the centre of Ottawa. That’s a beautiful pine. Though somewhat cast into shadow by your maple.”

“It’s a sacred tree. Sacred to the Iroquois, that is.”

Long ago, it is said, the Peacemaker asked the warriors of five warring nations to throw their weapons into a pit where the roots of a great white pine had stood. Having done so, the warriors formed the Iroquois Confederacy. An underground river took the weapons away, and the Peacemaker put the tree back in the ground.

“I am aware of this. I was not as ignorant of Indian legends as you seem to think. Supposedly the tree is sacred because of the actions of the peacemaker—Dekanawida was his name, was it not?”

“It was,” I said. “Although some people prefer not to speak that name. Out of respect.” “Do they, indeed.” I noticed a steeliness in his voice. “Respect for what?”

After only a minute or two, our conversation had already veered towards hostility. “I could give you an answer,” I said, “but perhaps we should bury the hatchet. So to speak.”

He nodded. “I dislike confrontations, and I would shake hands with you if these hands were not a form of illusion. Shall we sit down?”

I wanted to ask him how he could see and hear if the eyes and ears before me were illusory, but I knew there would be no point. Nor could I ask him how he was. He was dead.

“Well, Mr. Scott. I’ve read lots more of your work.” It seemed a safe beginning. Eventually I would have something unsafe to say. “A few essays and short stories, and nearly all the poems.”

“And I hope you enjoyed what you found. I fear my work must seem very old-fashioned to you.”

“Some of it, I admit. It’s hard for me to relate to the poem you addressed to the mothers of Canadian soldiers who died in the First World War—I mean, we look back on their deaths as a sickening waste, but nobody would consider them ‘the Immortals that have saved the world.’ You made them sound like superheroes in a video game.”

He was looking blank.

“A comic book, I mean.”

“At times I did have a weakness for rhetoric. Are you immune to it yourself?”

It was unfair of me to pick on one of Scott’s worst pieces of writing—except that beyond its facile and sentimental fondness for the British Empire, something else had bothered me about

“To the Canadian Mothers, 1914-1918” and several of his other poems. An air of certainty, even arrogance, clouded his impulse to tenderness and his close observation of nature. This was a writer who could, metaphorically speaking, decide who was immortal and announce who had saved the world. Such poems show little trace of doubt or hesitation.

“No, I’m not immune,” I said. “It’s a common weakness. And what amazes me is that you wrote so many good poems while for decades you held a senior position in the government.” Scott gave a rueful nod. “I came across a novel by your friend Madge Macbeth in which she referred to the Ottawa civil service as the home of the living dead.”

“Ah,” he said. “Perhaps she had me in mind.” He glanced out the window at my unruly garden. “It’s true I was happy to leave the city when I could. Sometimes in the wilderness, it was as if my soul could expand. A canoe brings enormous freedom. Mind you, the wilderness can also induce fear ... I don’t know what your own beliefs are, Mr. Abley, and I wonder if you might quibble at my use of the word ‘soul.’ But I can tell you that Lawren Harris and Alex Jackson were among the leading artists who agreed with me. Emily Carr, too. Daily life in a city acts as a constraint on the imagination. Do you not find this?”

“At times, sure. And I love Thoreau’s line ‘In wildness is the preservation of the world.’ But I can also be excited by the sights and noises of city life. If you could walk today through

downtown Montreal or Vancouver or Toronto, or even Ottawa, you'd be amazed at the mixture of foods, clothes, languages."

Scott frowned. "Alluring, perhaps. A touch of the wider world. Yet also somewhat incoherent, surely."

"It's been more than forty years," I told him, "since the Canadian government gave a special preference to British immigrants. To white immigrants from anywhere, in fact. The colour of urban Canada is not what it used to be, except in the corridors of power."

"I see. Even in my day a good deal of mixing took place in the larger cities. Winnipeg, for instance—the Gateway to the West, they liked to call it. Icelanders and Jews. Ukrainians and French. Some Germans lived in the vicinity too. Not to mention the proud Scots who founded the place. The triumph of Canada is that once they had settled here and made this country their own, all these people were loyal to the Crown. They became Canadians. They assimilated."

*Made this country their own.* I wondered whether to challenge him on the point. Instead I took an oblique approach.

"You know, I was in Winnipeg a few weeks ago," I said, leaning forward and watching him closely.

"An interesting place, I always thought. Despite its failures of beauty." I wasn't sure I'd heard him right.

“Beauty, or duty?”

“Its somewhat discordant appearance, I mean. When an early journalist named Bob Edwards got off the train there and looked around, he said, ‘So this is Winnipeg. I can tell it’s not Paris.’” Scott paused. I could have sworn he sighed. “And what did you want to tell me about Winnipeg?”

“One morning,” I said, “the friend I was staying with—she’s a social worker—took me to the head office of CancerCare Manitoba. They have a lecture theatre where experts come and give talks to doctors and nurses and medical students. My friend kind of sneaked me in.” “Sneaked me in,” he repeated. It must have been a novel turn of phrase for him. “Yes. But that day, the talk wasn’t given by any of the usual experts—not by anyone directly involved in the practice of medicine. It was given by a judge, Murray Sinclair.” “A good Scottish name.”

“Absolutely. As well as serving on the bench, he teaches law at the University of Manitoba. He’s widely respected across the country.” “I imagine so.”

“He has another name too,” I said. “*Mizanay Gheezhik*—meaning ‘the one who speaks of pictures in the sky.’ My Ojibway pronunciation isn’t what it should be.”

Scott was silent.



“Of course it’s a good idea for medical professionals there to be familiar with Aboriginal issues, because Winnipeg has more indigenous residents than any other place in the country. And Murray Sinclair is not only a judge, a professor and an Ojibway elder—he’s also the head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.”

He remained silent. I forged ahead.

“That commission is at work as we speak. Its mandate is to find out everything it can about what really happened in the Indian residential schools, and to see if there can be some kind of reconciliation at the end of all the truth-telling. The commission has its headquarters in Winnipeg. But it’s been holding sessions in a variety of places to listen to the testimony of survivors. I’ve read the report it released in 2012. I expect its final report will be even longer and more detailed.”

Scott had recovered his voice, though now it had a tense edge again. “And why should there be such a commission at this point in history, many years after the last school was closed?”

“Well, it’s part of the compensation package the federal government and the Assembly of First Nations agreed to. The deal was not only that the survivors would receive some money—it’s also that a commission would be set up, giving them a chance to speak. To share their story. And besides, it’s important for Canada as a whole that these testimonies should be on the

public record. Should be heard. Should be preserved. So that nothing like this could happen again.”

“Hmm.” Scott stirred uneasily. “And what did the Honourable Mr. Sinclair have to say in the lecture you attended?”

“He spoke about the different types of negative impact the schools had on the children who were sent there. Being victimized directly is the most obvious one. But there are others too. Judge Sinclair explained the fear of disclosure—children were threatened with consequences if they told their families what went on behind closed doors. Sometimes they were afraid to return to their communities, especially girls who had been violated and were now pregnant. When they did get home, boys and girls found they were inadequate at the traditional skills and tasks—they’d never had a proper chance to learn. And of course the children suffered a loss of faith, a loss of trust, a loss of belief in their parents and the extended family.”

I paused for a second, giving my words a chance to sink in.

“Judge Sinclair said that he and the two other commissioners hear these stories by the hundreds. And they feel the suffering each time.”

“The Honourable Mr. Sinclair has evidently done well in the world. May I ask what the current state of affairs is for the majority of his fellow Indians?”

“Interesting you should say that,” I replied. “Another thing he mentioned was the intergenerational effect of the schools. Because it’s not just the survivors who were scarred. He used the phrase ‘residual impacts in the lives of their children.’ And even grandchildren.”

“You must enlighten me.”

“Well, he showed a film presentation about an Inuvialuit elder from Tuktoyaktuk. The man –”

“From where?”

“Tuktoyaktuk, on the Arctic Ocean. I suppose it had a colonial name in your day. Today we take it for granted that most of the communities in the far north go by their Inuit names. Anyway—until the day of the hearing the man had never spoken about his experiences at residential school. His own wife didn’t know what he’d been through. He recalled being put on a plane one morning, flown south and, like all the children, given a number. In a sense that’s all he was: a number. For Judge Sinclair, the most powerful moment of the man’s testimony came when he said, ‘I’m not Number 142. I’m Paul Voudrach.’”

“I don’t see what any of this has to do with—what was your phrase?—intergenerational effect.”

“Paul was sexually abused in the school. Later in life he contemplated suicide. But the point is, when he became a father, he

mistreated his own children. He admitted, you see, he didn't know how to be a parent. Judge Sinclair said that when they testify, at least 80 percent of the survivors talk about how they went on to behave, or misbehave, with their own families in later life. So the shame they experienced as children gets compounded by the shame and guilt caused by their own actions."

Scott sniffed. "I'm surprised at how you keep on using the word 'survivors.' Admittedly an Indian school could be a difficult place for children, but it's not as if they'd been through the trenches serving their country in the Great War."

"Isn't it?" I said.

He stared at me. "No. It isn't."

"All right," I said, staring back. "Let's think about what they went through. Imagine that instead of being raised by your loving parents, as you were, in the company of your sisters, you were hauled away by strange men when you were six or five or even four years old. You were terrified, because you had no idea where they were taking you. The journey was long, and when you finally arrived, you were locked up inside a large, cold building. Your hair was hacked away. The clothes your mother had made for you were stripped off and you had to put on a foreign uniform. You wore this uniform all through your childhood and adolescence. There was no alternative. There was no escape.

“In your early childhood you’d lived outside much of the time. Now you could leave the school building only when the adults granted permission. You were given a number. You were known by that number. If you dared to use your own name, or if you were caught speaking a sentence in your own language, you were beaten. ‘Spare the rod and spoil the child,’ your teachers said. Gradually you forgot your language. When you were sent home in the summertime, you couldn’t understand your own grandparents. Nor could you tell them what you were going through.

“Back at school you were told, day after day, year after year, that you belonged to an inferior people—you had no culture of your own. You were a savage, and your teachers were civilized. They understood God; you did not. And the God they understood was a jealous God who intended to consign your own parents and grandparents to the fires of hell. A few of the teachers were kind, but only a few. Most of them were incompetent and two or three were downright sadistic. The fear of them was so great, you could never entirely relax.

“You learned to live with constant hunger—the food was bad and there was never enough of it to fill your belly. The clothes you wore were ragged and dirty. The building where you spent most of your life was dark, ugly, infested with cockroaches, and in perpetual need of repair. At night you slept under a thin blanket in a miserable bed, with children coughing all around you and no fresh air. Over the years a few of the children in

your dormitory died, or perhaps more than a few—but nobody was ever allowed to talk about their deaths. The absolute rule was silence.

“Let’s suppose you were one of the lucky ones. Let’s suppose you somehow managed to avoid coming down with tuberculosis, and that you weren’t sexually assaulted by a teacher or one of the older boys. Of course you knew this was happening to many of the other children. Everyone knew it. You lived in fear, continual fear, that one day it would happen to you.

“More than anything else, you were isolated. From the first day you arrived at the school, you were lonely. You were always lonely. But Mr. Scott, if you endured ten years of this and were able to walk out the door at the end, wouldn’t you call yourself a survivor?”

I swallowed hard and glanced out the front window at the tree-lined street. When I looked back, Scott was no longer there.

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## Biography

**Mark Abley** was born in England and raised in Alberta and Saskatchewan and is a poet, a newspaper columnist, and an award-winning author living in Montreal. A former Rhodes scholar, he became a contributing editor of *Saturday Night* and *Maclean's*. He spent 16 years at the *Montreal Gazette* working as a feature writer, literary columnist, and book review editor for which he was awarded a National Newspaper Award. Mark has written or edited ten books including poetry, travel, children's fiction, and the bestselling photographic book *The Ice Storm* (1998); other books include *Spoken Here: Travels Among Threatened Languages* (2003) shortlisted for both the Pearson Writers' Trust Non-Fiction Prize and the Grand Prix du Livre de Montreal and *The Prodigal Tongue: Dispatches From the Future of English* (2008).

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**Mary Simon**

# Remarks in House of Commons, Jun. 11, 2008

Mary Simon, the President of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, offered the following statement in response to the Government of Canada's "Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools."

Mr. Prime Minister: *[Ms. Simon spoke in Inuktitut]*

*[English]* Mr. Prime Minister, I spoke first in my Inuit language because I wanted to illustrate to you that our language and culture are still strong.

I have to face you to say this, Mr. Prime Minister, because it comes from the bottom of my heart. It took great courage for you to express your sorrow and apology to our people, the Inuit, to First Nations, and to Métis, and we thank you very much for it.

*[Ms. Simon spoke in Inuktitut]*



*[English]* I am one of those people who have dreamed for this day. There have been times in this long journey when I despaired that this would ever happen.

However, after listening to the Prime Minister and the leaders of the political parties, I am filled with hope and compassion for my fellow aboriginal Canadians as I stand among them here with you and your fellow ministers today, Mr. Prime Minister.

I am also filled with optimism that this action by the Government of Canada and the generosity in the words chosen to convey this apology will help all of us mark the end of this dark period in our collective history as a nation.

Let us not be lulled into an impression that when the sun rises tomorrow morning, the pain and scars will miraculously be gone. They will not.

But a new day has dawned, a new day heralded by a commitment to reconciliation and building a new relationship with Inuit, Métis and First Nations.

Let us now join forces with the common goal of working together to ensure that this apology opens the door to a new chapter in our lives as aboriginal peoples and in our place in Canada.

There is much hard work to be done. We need the help and support of all thoughtful Canadians and our governments to

rebuild strong and healthy families and communities.

This can be achieved only when dignity, confidence and respect for traditional values and human rights once again become part of our daily lives and are mirrored in our relationships with governments and other Canadians.

I stand here today ready to work with you, as Inuit have always done, to craft new solutions and new arrangements based on mutual respect and mutual responsibility.

Thank you. May wisdom and compassion guide our efforts.

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## Biography

**Mary Simon** was born in Kangiqsualujjuaq, Nunavik, and is known for advancing critical social, economic, and human rights for Inuit regionally, nationally, and around the world. For over four decades she has held such senior leadership positions as president of Makivik Corporation, president of Inuit Circumpolar Council, Canadian ambassador for circumpolar affairs, and Canadian ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark. She also led Canada's negotiations during the creation of the eight-nation Arctic Council in the mid-1990s. She was president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami for six years.

Mary is currently the chairperson of the National Committee on Inuit Education. In this capacity, her mandate is to implement a comprehensive national strategy aimed at improving Inuit educational standards and achievements.

Mary Simon is an Officer of the Order of Canada and a recipient of the Gold Order of Greenland. Her other distinctions include seven honorary doctorates from Canadian universities and service as the chancellor of Trent University. In 2013, the Famous Five recognized Mary as one of three great nation builders from Canada's Arctic.

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**Stephen Lewis**

# Honorary Witness Statement, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

*Stephen Lewis offered the following statement at TRC National Gathering in Vancouver, BC, in September, 2013.*

It's an enormous privilege and an honour to be an honorary witness and to participate in these proceedings, as overwhelming, I will admit, as I've found them to be. I'm delighted to be here because, if I may be intensely personal, I've lived with a great deal of guilt and remorse over the last number of years for my failure to address Aboriginal issues.

One's life tends to take unexpected turns from time to time and I ended up doing things internationally, and in the process, neglected the overriding struggle of First Peoples. But in truth, it is that international work that gives context to what I want to say. I noticed that the interim report of the Commission has a section

addressing the international connections. Indeed, as many of you will know, Chief Littlechild was at the UN Council on Human Rights yesterday in Geneva addressing these very matters.

In terms of truth and reconciliation, necessarily in my United Nations work, I followed for example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, dealing with the horrendous era of the apartheid struggle, when the brutality and the barbarity visited upon Africans was beyond description. And it is almost impossible to imagine that reconciliation could evolve after the era of apartheid. But that is in fact happening in South Africa. And it is happening in part because of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Because of my work in the UN, I've followed the Truth and Reconciliation process in Rwanda. A little country that was given to the horrendous genocide in 1994. And again, it is almost unimaginable that from the depths of that despair, there could arise a conciliatory spirit of reconciliation.

I remember well, being in the capital Kigali shortly after the genocide, entering the little mental health clinic associated with the hospital, and meeting with a group of adolescents who, under the tutelage of an Italian NGO, were using art therapy to express the emotions about what they had seen, which no young person should ever see. When I picked up the art books, I was dumbstruck by the extraordinary similarity of what they had put on the page. Page after page contained the picture of

a man's head with a machete in the head and blood dripping down, page after page after page. You wonder, in that context, how those youngsters could ever live full emotional lives. You wonder how there could be some conciliatory exercise in a country so fraught with rage and hatred. And yet, using a process called kuchacha, which is essentially a truth and reconciliation process at community level, that little country of Rwanda is somehow overcoming the burden of the past.

In my UN work, I followed the truth and reconciliation process in Liberia where in the immediate aftermath of the civil war just a few years ago, young girls between the ages of eight and twelve were regularly and methodically raped by the rebel forces that still survive. And yet, the reconciliation process that has been engendered is gradually bringing an end to that phenomenon.

And as a part of the UN, I've watched the truth and reconciliation program in Sierra Leone, where back in 1991 the rebel forces entered the capital of Freetown and amputated the limbs of 20,000 children in order to intimidate the population and force them into collaboration with the rebels. Yet, now all these years later, truth and reconciliation is bringing a sense of stability to an otherwise fragmented and disintegrated country.

I mention all of that because I think there is a tendency to believe that this is all valid for countries apart from Canada but it isn't as necessary or valid within Canada. I want to say

to you that the residential schools were a ghastly, unforgivable, unconscionable episode. And they were not an aberration. This was Canada. This was an extension of the colonial apparatus designed to expunge Aboriginal culture and people from this land. It was written into the fabric of the country. Let no one think it was some kind of aberrant moment; it was something that became part of the country. It was sheer, unadulterated evil, a clerical state conspiracy of sadists and pedophiles.

And I listened, as you listened, to the testimony today and yesterday. I've listened to the testimony of hundreds of women who survived the genocide in Rwanda. I spent six years in the last decade watching people die and hearing heart-rending stories of the struggles around HIV and AIDS, and I want to say to you again, as a friend, that I have rarely heard anything so eviscerating, so overwhelming, as the stories of yesterday and today.

I'm reminded that yesterday Margaret described episode after episode of rape and she said, with the poignancy and the dignity that was heart breaking, "I was just a little girl and he took so much away from me." The unendurable, episodic, methodical, repetitive raping, of course, altered her whole life and her capacity to relate thereafter. Leonard said, "I was an orphan. I was 11 years old when he took my pants down." Again, episode after episode of raping wrecked his adult life for much of that life: he turned to alcohol; he struggled; and he had intense difficulty establishing human relationships.

This morning Verna Wallace said, with an intensity that was unflinching in its force, “My heart has so much hate, I don’t know if I will ever be able to forgive.” She talked of the stories that will never be told, stories of suicide and disappearance. Jackie Adams said, “I lived with suicide as a constant companion. I don’t want an apology from politicians, I want an apology from Sister Ruthanne.” In that quintessential moment, one felt all of the depths of anguish and agony that renders the human soul.

You know, I just want to say this as it has haunted me for many years since I was part of a panel investigating genocide in Rwanda., Everybody has apologized for what happened in that genocide from Bill Clinton to Kofi Annan, from the governments of France and the governments of Belgium. The only group that has never apologized for the genocide in Rwanda and it played a huge part in the genocide, is the Catholic Church. The only group that has never apologized.

This morning we also heard from Chief Fred Robbins, who said, “No amount of money will heal me from the memory of sexual assault.” And from Agnes Edwards, who was sexually abused so young that she contemplated suicide at the age of seven. What in god’s name was this all about? And it wasn’t simply contained in the residential schools as though the political elite and the church elite didn’t know it was happening. It is all emerging now, in detail that is so life altering. But it was known, at least by extension, by those who had the power and capacity to alter it. Debra Jones said, and by god that was a beautiful



and exquisite testimony, that her entire life was hurtled into a frenzy of disarray on her first day. Five years old. What possessed these demons of hate to do these things to children? She said, “When they cut my hair they did something to my being.”

I want to admit to you why I am here, because I am filled with an incandescent rage. What happened in the schools, in the residential schools, these are crimes against humanity. I’d like haul all these people up in front of the International Criminal Court because these are terrible things that happened. All these damaged minds struggling to reassert family and human relationships. But as Trisha Wilson pointed out this morning, there is this astonishing resilience and courage and generosity of spirit. In Gillian Harrison’s words, “liberation lies in our testimonies.” I’ve seen it many times before that out of the vortex, the cauldron of disarray, there arises this intense generosity of spirit, and courage and determination to overcome. It is part of the human fabric. But the struggle for reconciliation with the non-Aboriginal world will be very, very difficult especially where it must occur and that is at the political level in order for the changes, the profound changes that are required, to be made.

There is still insensitive, almost criminal behavior, against the Aboriginal people in ways that are a continuation of the past. For example, the refusal to negotiate land claims and treaties in good faith. For example, desperate conditions in health and education and water and food in so many reserves; witness Attawapiskat, witness the issues which were raised in the Idle

No More movement. For example, the disappearance and murder of 600 Aboriginal women chronicled not only by commissions in British Columbia but also by that powerful document from Human Rights Watch released in February called *Those Who Take Us Away: Abusive Policing and Failures in Protection of Indigenous Women and Girls in Northern British Columbia*.

I will admit to you, this is not a political spasm. This is a description of how I personally feel. I don't understand. You have everyone calling for an inquiry into the disappearance and murder and rape of nearly 600 Aboriginal women over the decades, forty percent of the crimes having occurred since the year 2000. The authentic documentation of the disappearances is everywhere available, and all of the provinces and the territories say that they would collaborate in an inquiry yet the Federal Government of Canada refuses even to meet on the issue. And the dimension of contemptuous indifference for Aboriginal rights has never been quite so profound. I do not understand it. I ask myself how much bad faith can a government display?

The apology of June 11, 2008 withers on the proverbial vine in the face of the ongoing insensitivity, hostility and racism. And you know, all of that is embodied in the aftermath of the residential school legacy. So reconciliation is not easy but what you are doing here, and what the commission is doing, is unique. Because you see, in all those other Truths and Reconciliation Commissions to which I have made reference, the perpetrators

came forward and apologized and were in large measure, forgiven. I find that process astonishing but it worked in the most demonic moments in South Africa and it has even worked in the genocide in Rwanda. But this commission has no powers of subpoena. There is not the capacity, as Chief Littlechild told me this morning, there is not the power to bring perpetrators before the Commission. So the Commission has fashioned something which is entirely unique and tremendously powerful, and that is having the non-Aboriginal community come together with the Aboriginal community in a coalition of good faith to discuss the approaches to reconciliation in a fashion which is remarkably unusual.

It seems to me that you can't restore the soul of a country through continued oppression on the First Peoples of this land. But you can restore the soul of a country in this elaborate design by bringing non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal forces together to understand, to conciliate, to share. The Commissioners and the Survivors and those who have come forward are so filled with love, generosity, courage, human decency in the face of everything, that it's almost supernatural, I can't get over it. I live with rage and I admit that. I have an emotional span that moves from rage to rage. But what I saw here in the last two days is truly memorable—it is the triumph of the human spirit over the worst that has been done to human beings. Thus, we look forward to the future rising from the ashes of the past.

I believe frankly, I've really learnt something. I've suffered a kind of happy conversion as I've witnessed what I have witnessed. I actually believe that the commission will prevail. It will be seen as a remarkable exercise in reconciliation. I undertake and promise the commission, in your presence, to do whatever I can over the course of the remainder of my geriatric life to pursue the findings and recommendations and heart and soul of what the Commission is doing and what it will ultimately say.

This is an astonishing exercise and I feel immensely privileged to have been a part of it. Thank you.

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## Biography

**Stephen Lewis** is the chair of the Stephen Lewis Foundation. He is a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Ryerson University in Toronto and is co-founder and co-director of AIDS-Free World in the United States. Mr. Lewis is a Senior Fellow of the Enough Project. He is a past board member of the Clinton Health Access Initiative, and emeritus board member of the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative. He served as a commissioner for Global Commission on HIV and the Law.

Stephen's work with the United Nations has spanned more than two decades. He was the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa from June 2001 until the end of 2006. From 1995 to 1999, he was a deputy executive director of UNICEF in New York. From 1984 through 1988 he was Canada's Ambassador to the United Nations and from 1970 to 1978 a leader of the Ontario New Democratic Party, during which time he became the Official Opposition.

In 2003, Stephen was appointed a Companion of the Order of Canada, Canada's highest honour for lifetime achievement. In 2007, King Letsie III, monarch of the Kingdom of Lesotho, invested Stephen as Knight Commander of the Most Dignified Order of Moshoeshoe, the country's highest honour. He was an inaugural recipient of Canada's Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012.

Mr. Lewis is the author of the best-selling book *Race Against Time*. He holds multiple honorary degrees from Canadian and American universities.

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Cassandra J. Opikokew Wajuntah

“It’s like two sides of an eagle’s feathers. Both are needed to fly.”

*Nimosōm (my grandfather), Louis Opikokew, attended Beauval Indian Residential School in Northern Saskatchewan for nine years. Though it scarred him, like many other survivors, he tried to take what lessons he could from his experience to help him be nēhiyaw (a Cree person) in a new world. In our family, that meant giving everything a dose of Cree humour, and pursuing the new buffalo—education—while always remaining nēhiyaw. When my dad went to university and became the first member of his family to get a degree, “Grandpa O” couldn’t have been more proud. He knew that education would be the new way forward and he recognized that things would change. Nimosōm is my hero. I dedicate this story to him.*

In my previous life, before I drank the Kool-Aid and joined the dark side of academia, I was a journalist. Wait a minute—is that another dark side too? Note to self—analyze your attraction to the dark arts, also known to Indigenous people as the media,

policy, law and research. Anyway, when I was a journalist, sometimes people would say, “oh, you are a storyteller.” But, in actuality, the whole reason that the world of graduate education and research grabbed me was not because I’m a storyteller, so much as a perpetual “question-asker.” Some might say that it’s just my biological inclination as a mouthy Cree woman, but asking a question is a full admission of not knowing something, so I find it’s always a good place to start since expectations are low. So let me start with a question. What do I think is reconciliation and how do I suspect when it’s happening? I think about these two questions a lot since that word “reconciliation” now seems to get thrown around everywhere in discussions about everything from child welfare policy (“how do we reconcile the objectives of the community with the objectives of the ministry?”) to personal diets (“how do we reconcile your need to eat a whole cake with your desire to be skinny?”). I think one of the possible answers to both of the questions I pose is “a rebalancing of power.” When we speak of reconciliation, I don’t think we’re talking about compromise or bringing two disparate goals together, such as eating whole cakes while getting skinnier or forcing community child welfare objectives to match up with those of the government. I mean the *rebalancing of power* by rectifying an unjust relationship that has resulted from the uneven distribution of power. In this case, the “uneven distribution” I’m referring to is the forceful and violent removal of Indigenous power via self-determination from our communities and the relocation of it in the hands of a settler government.

## Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Doing

Let's go back in time. Prior to First Contact, Indigenous peoples around the globe had their own ways of knowing and doing things. These were not haphazard approaches. There were actual methods and rationale behind every action from how to hunt the buffalo to how to set up camp (Kovach 2009). Many of these activities tend to get classified into two categories by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike: (1) Indigenous laws or (2) cultural practice. I take issue with the notion that there are really only 2 places to put things as it were—sacred laws gifted by the Creator or cultural practices that sound like they could change on a whim. How does a whole community agree upon the best way to follow those laws? How do you decide what is an accepted cultural practice and what is not? There are many more categories to be sure, but one that is often overlooked is *policy*. Policymaking, broadly defined, is a “set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specific situation where those goals should, in principle, be within the power of those actors to achieve” (Jenkins as cited in Howlett and Ramesh 1995). Essentially, it is a person or group of people who has the *power* to make decisions. The purpose of developing such policies, though it may seem forgotten from time to time by our elected officials, is to “create the good life” (Manuel 2008). Well, our Indigenous ancestors did that. They had policies and processes in place prior to First Contact that guided the practices of the communities and were responsive to and shaped by their own laws. They also created the policies for similar reasons to what our modern day



political leaders (theoretically) do—to promote the greater good of our communities and environment. For example, in the Cree language, this can be expressed by the term *mino-pimatisiwin* which, loosely translated, can be understood as the seeking of the “good life” or “living right” as nôhkom (my grandmother) says (Hart 2002; 44).

Using that broad definition of policymaking, prior to contact, Indigenous peoples had the *power* to make their own decisions and govern their own communities accordingly. That power, or perhaps more aptly, responsibility, was seen as a gift bestowed upon them by a higher power. This belief is quite common amongst Indigenous communities around the world and has been articulated by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) in their “Declaration of First Nations” where they state “the Creator has given us the right to govern ourselves and the right to self-determination...The rights and responsibilities given to us by the Creator cannot be altered or taken away by any other nation” (AFN 2013). Treaties were seen as nation-to-nation agreements, not fee simple transactions, since the power of self-determination was not a gift for Indigenous people to give. Of course, we all know what happened next. Colonial governments wanted what they could own and colonial public policy became the reason and the justification for the “eradication of the Indigenous population by eradicating Indigenous difference” or the so-called “Indian problem” (Episkenev 2009). The right to create policies, the right to govern their own communities, and the power that went with those things, was forcefully removed from Indigenous communities and usurped by an external colonial

government. Sadly, this framework is still largely how decisions are made today in regards to Indigenous peoples—within the confines of a centralized federal government under colonial, paternalistic legislation such the Indian Act without meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples. In other words, power was extracted from Indigenous communities and then subsumed by a colonial government.

### **Canada’s “Dirty” Policymaking System**

In and around the 1970s, due to a series of Indigenous actions like the backlash against Pierre Trudeau’s white paper in 1969, the espoused goals of Canada’s federal government began to shift. It was goodbye to the old policy rhetoric of yesteryear and hello to encouraging Indigenous self-government. Wait—what? If you missed that policy shift, it’s probably because the words changed but the actions didn’t really follow suit but allow me to elaborate. As a supporter of the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights, Canada has reaffirmed Indigenous peoples’ right to participate in decision-making and to “develop their own Indigenous decision-making institutions” (UN 2008). This position was also articulated domestically back in 1996 in the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples which stated that “Canada’s claim to be a fair and enlightened society depends on it” (UN 2008; Canada 2006). These words seem to express a commitment to changing how business is done but it is still business as usual. In other words, Canada’s strategic goals do not match up with its operations because the system is still largely the same.

For example, prior to the 1970s, the strategic goal of the Canadian government was the eradication of the Indigenous population. Using a framework based on Western European values and norms, policies were then created to help achieve this goal, such as the residential school policy (see Table 1). The goal of that policy was essentially to “kill the Indian, save the child” (Canada 2008). Abhorrent as that goal was, it was aligned with the strategic goal of the government at the time and the system was set-up to help achieve it. The outcome of that policy was the destruction of Indigenous cultures, languages and family structures—again, consistent with the strategic goal. While we disagree with the goals, the system itself worked quite nicely for achieving what it set out to do—dealing with the “Indian problem.” Post-1970s, the strategic goal changed, but the system stayed the same and the real problem becomes apparent—the *policy* problem. The system set up to eradicate the Indigenous population is not set up to also achieve Indigenous self-determination. Let’s apply the same basic system to another Indigenous education policy, this time in the post-1970s era—the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP).

When the PSSSP was created in 1977, the goal of the program was to increase the employability of Status Indians by providing them with funding to pursue post-secondary education (INAC 2008). Upon first glance, this program appears to align with the strategic goal of the federal government. The more educated the First Nations population becomes, the more social and political capital we have to be self-determining. But upon closer examination of the PSSSP’s operational goal, the real objective

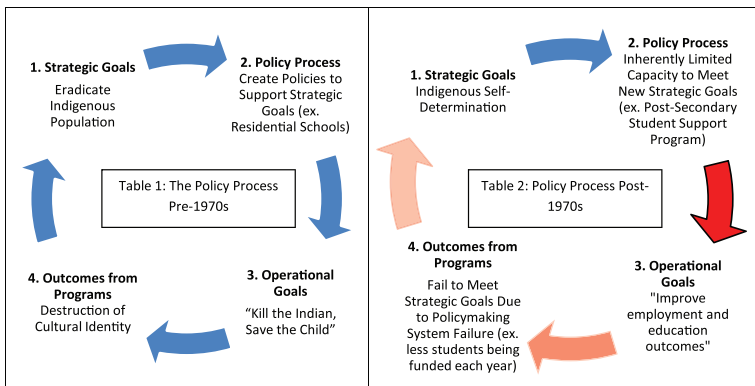


Figure 1: The Canadian Policymaking Process—Then and Now

was employability—increased participation in the labour market—not the altruistic goal of attempting to right colonial wrongs such as the residential school policy or recognizing treaty rights to post-secondary education. What difference does that make? Well, it sets up a policy landscape whereby First Nations people were “broken down” by the residential schools and then “encouraged” to participate in a Western capitalistic system by engaging in the labour force. One might say this approach is consistent with self-determination, while a cheeky nēhiyaw might say it’s a really good recipe for assimilation and colonization. Even today, Indigenous education is almost always tied to the needs of the economy by federal and provincial governments—take a look at the recent federal budget. Gentle reminder folks, your strategic goal is self-determination for Indigenous people and by automatically assuming you know the prescription (engaging in the labourforce at the levels and points which fulfill Canada’s economic needs), you are undermining

your very own stated strategic goal. So, as far as the PSSSP's operational goal goes, we already have a problem—it's tied directly to labourforce participation, which is not to be confused with Indigenous self-determination, the government's espoused strategic goal.

However, as demand from First Nations people grew, the PSSSP was actually funding more and more First Nations students to attend post-secondary from 3,600 in 1977 to almost 30,000 at the peak of the program in the mid-nineties (INAC 2009; AFN 2011). That's the great thing about Indigenous students—the government can fail to have its strategic and operational goals align and we will just keep on truckin' and make the best of it—par for the course to borrow a golf term. But as part of a series of cutbacks to federal departments and programs in 1996, the PSSSP's budget was capped at 2% growth (AFN 2005). While this cap has been lifted from other programs, it has remained in place across a variety of First Nations funding programs, including the PSSSP. What do you get when we you take increasing demand for a program from the fastest growing population in Canada, increased living costs, annual tuition increases of 4.3% a year and a stagnant budget capped at 1996 levels? Less and less students funded by the program each year and eligible Aboriginal students (students meeting the requirements to attend PSE institutions) citing financial barriers as the top reason for not pursuing post-secondary education (AFN 2011). As of 2006, less than 22,000 students were being funded through the program and I've heard anecdotally that it's now closer to 19,000 (AFN 2005). As a result of a faulty policymaking system

with mismatched operational/strategic goals and poor policy judgments (you cannot hope to fund any major federal program effectively at 1996 levels for the following twenty years), the program outcome is failing to keep pace with the government's strategic goal—Indigenous self-determination (see Table 2). Therefore, Canada's policymaking system is like a dirty filter—you can put in whatever great idea you want on the front end, like Indigenous self-determination, but as soon as you put it through a flawed system that was never set-up to achieve that kind of goal, whatever comes out the other end will always be mangled.

### **The Indian Solution to the Policy Problem: A Rebalancing Act**

At this point, you're either depressed or enlightened (remember how I wanted to keep expectations low?). But fear not. Let's come back to my perception of reconciliation as a rebalancing of power. In its simplest form, take the example of victim and perpetrator. In the course of an action during which one party ends up with the label "victim" and the other "perpetrator," a shift of power has taken place. Now, when those two parties are brought together in the spirit of reconciliation, like a bowl full of water tilted to one side, power must first shift back over to the other side in the process of making the bowl level, or balanced again. I use this analogy not to slot Indigenous and the Canadian government into simplistic roles, but to clarify. As long as that bowl is tilted to one side, you can add as much more water as you want, it will just increase the weight of one side more than the other. In other words, for rebalancing to

occur, the perpetrator must relinquish some sort of power, and the victim must take it back. When we really start to see that power shift between Indigenous peoples and the rest of Canada, I believe we will really start to see reconciliation. Indigenous self-determination must be located within our communities and if it is also the strategic goal of the Canadian government, then it must also be embraced and recognized there too. The “dirty” policymaking system we have now does not work, and we know that because it’s similar to policymaking systems in other countries like Australia, New Zealand and the United States where governments have set up similar policy arrangements with similar effects—Indigenous populations lagging behind the rest of the country in terms of health, education and economic outcomes.

Okay, now you’re just depressed, and I should have stopped at enlightenment. But this is the point where I like to cite a study done in British Columbia where researchers examined the widely varying youth suicide rates across 196 First Nations communities in the province. They wanted to know why, within one province, some communities had rates 800 times higher than the national rate “while in others suicide [was] virtually unknown” (Chandler and Lalonde 1998). The obvious starting point for a policymaker might be to look for evidence of things like suicide prevention programming or education completion rates. Instead, these researchers scored each community on a scale of what they considered to be six markers of cultural continuity: (1) involvement in land claims; (2) some level of self-government; (3) education services; (4) health services; (5) police and fire services; and

(6) cultural facilities (Chandler and Lalonde 1998). Cultural continuity is the sense a person has of belonging to a past and a future in cultural group beyond their own personal sense of self-continuity (Chandler and Lalonde 1998). The researchers found that communities that had all of these markers had the lowest suicide rates while those without any of these markers had the highest (Chandler and Lalonde 1998). Examples like this one prove two key things: the pursuit and realization of Indigenous self-determination can improve healing amongst our communities and big, “wicked” policy problems require big picture thinking beyond the usual “go-to” solutions.

### **Reframing the Rebalancing Act**

It’s not often discussed, but policymakers and policymaking systems are implicit with values and assumptions (Stone 2002). For example, there has never been an “Indian problem”—that was just a biased framing of an issue reinforced by a biased system. There is, however, a “policy problem” because the policymaking system used to eradicate or engage (depends on the fashionable trend in policy) Indigenous people does not work, particularly when it comes to realizing Indigenous self-determination. But it’s not even just us. This policymaking system has also done a poor job of accounting for impacts of policies on gender, future generations and even the environment to name a few. It’s important to point out here that the policy criteria many Indigenous groups applied when making decisions included the how policy options would affect women, children, the elderly and their environment not based on a four-year election cycle, but across



generations. Though the policymaking system is now trying to incorporate some of these values, I think many would agree it's doing enough. I suggest looking to Indigenous policymaking practices since there's no point in reinventing the wheel and to be frank, some of these Indigenous practices are just dang good ideas for policy period.

If we wish to move forward, if we wish to reconcile, then Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing and doing must be centered in a new policymaking process and relationship. The rebalancing of power is like the water shifting in the bowl, and the failing policymaking framework we use is like the bowl—we need a new one (this one has a lean to it). The resulting new relationship and process will benefit not only Indigenous peoples, but non-Indigenous people as well since many of the keys to the wicked policy problems all countries struggle with can be found within the Indigenous knowledge that sustained our communities from time immemorial. For meaningful reconciliation, we all must agree to a new balance. Indigenous power/right to self-determination/responsibility must be within the hands of its rightful steward if any real progress—*healing*—is to take place. But like nimosōm said, it takes both sides if we hope to fly.

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## Biography

**Cassandra J. Opikokew Wajuntah** is from Canoe Lake Cree First Nation and was raised in Meadow Lake in Northern Saskatchewan. She graduated in 2009 with her Certificate in Indian Communication Arts and a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from the University of Regina where she was awarded the James M. Minifie award for being the most outstanding graduate in her class. In 2012, she completed her Master's of Public Administration from the U of R Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy where she is now a PhD candidate researching Indigenous health and education policy. In 2013, she was awarded a Doctoral Research Award worth \$108,000 by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research—Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health to fund her PhD research entitled, "The Indian Solution to the Policy Problem: Developing an Indigenous Policymaking Model to Address First Nations Health and Education Gaps." Cassandra is also Associate Director of the Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre (IPHRC) where she assists with knowledge translation, policy development and the strategic initiatives of the centre. She resides at Echo Lake, SK, with her husband Justin, a member of the Standing Buffalo Dakota First Nation, and their pack of five dogs

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**Shelagh Rogers & Glen Lowry**

## *Speaking My Truth: One Room at a Time*

*During 2013-2014, Shelagh Rogers and Glen Lowry traveled across Canada meeting with diverse groups of readers to discuss the AHF publication *Speaking My Truth: Reflections on Reconciliation & Residential School*. Often with coeditors Mike DeGagné and Jonathan Dewar and other contributors, Rogers and Lowry visited book clubs, church gatherings, various organizations, and student groups to talk about truth and reconciliation among non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal communities. The following dialogue draws on these travels to offer recollections and insights.*

*Rogers and Lowry acknowledge, with deep gratitude, the AHF for making this journey possible. And we want to thank the individuals and groups we met on the road. You welcomed us into your homes, meeting rooms, classrooms and communities. Your generosity, courage and understanding have inspired and transformed us. Thank you, Merci, Nakurmiik, Meegwetch.*

**Shelagh Rogers:** I'll just begin by saying, I'm so grateful and gratified by what *Speaking My Truth* was able to do as it was let loose into the world. I've been very surprised going into people's houses, or into schools and offices, and seeing the book there,

knowing that we hadn't placed it there. As you know, because you were on the literal receiving end, responding to large numbers of people ordered this book. I don't know who they all were or are, but it's been a very nice thing to see the book being taken up and read, to see it out there. It has also been gratifying to encounter people who had been sort of hard-core—who begin by saying *this thing* [residential school system] *is over, why can't we all just get on with things?*—opening up to the truth embedded in the book.

**Glen Lowry:** In the circles I travel—in universities and academic circles—people are more cautious. They don't often come out and say that *this*—whether we call it Residential Schools, Colonialism—is over. More generally, I come across colleagues and students who recognize that injustice and brutality exists but who are not sure what they can or will do about it. So I don't see direct denial as much as an inertia or complacency. What I have noticed, what has surprised me is how this book—the stories shared by residential school Survivors within—can shift a space. There is a temperature change that happens when this book enters in the room.

**Shelagh:** Yes, I think that's true. At our book clubs, the biggest heat, if you will, came from the person in the room who would say, *Why don't they get over it?* Or *This is history*. As bracing as that has been to hear, I think those comments were the springboard to some of the strongest dialogues—those dialogues that were not just with you and me, but involved or animated the rest of the book club or the gathering. When we

saw others try to take this and extend the conversation beyond the immediate, to dig deeper into our colonial past (and present), to excavate... that was exhilarating.

**Glen:** The best conversations were the ones we were not driving.

**Shelagh:** Yeah, exactly.

**Glen:** Perhaps, what we have been able to do is to provide a little bit of cajoling—poking and inviting people to open up. In part it is simply showing up and being willing to talk, to hang out and listen. Our role seems to have been about giving license to other people to have a conversation, allowing them challenge some of their ideas. Sometimes, they do an *about face*.

**Shelagh:** I think of the book club that was held in Tammy DeGagné's living room. One of the people there had been quite rigid in her thinking about Aboriginal people—blaming the victims. Over the course of the evening, you could see her bending to a more open understanding. The lesson for me in this, one I need to understand again and again, is that dialogue does move things along. If you're just hanging out with people who think the way you do, I don't think your own ideas are going to crack (in a positive sense) and that makes it very difficult to create the opening for broader experience. I may have learned the most in exactly those moments of about face. It was a gift to be in people's houses and to witness these shared personal, often emotional, breakthroughs. The effect was profound. And we were immediately drawn into it together. I mean, you and me,

Glen. We were strangers to each other at the very beginning.

**Glen:** An amazing process. What a way to meet. As the people we visited were sorting things out, we were sorting things out, getting to know each other. A gift.

**Shelagh:** Yes, often they were unpacking a lot before our very ears. A great honour. I liked the fact that we weren't there to deliver a lecture (which may have come as a surprise to some of our hosts!). We were there to kindle a dialogue.

**Glen:** The idea of dialogue is nice. Faced with difficult public issues, we tend to want easy answers—to be told we can do this or do that—and we often default to the old binary: progressive or conservative. In terms of residential schools, there is a sense that *this is history* [the fault of other people, maybe even parents or grandparent] *but we have moved beyond it*. However, when you enter the dialogue, you realize problems still exist and one conversation isn't going to solve the matter. The lines between past and present, culpability and responsibility, blur. You realize there is no such thing as *the* Residential School experience. This is something Laurie McLaren just reminded us of. It is a lesson that we were fortunate to hear from the Survivors who shared their stories with us. The question of Residential Schools—or of intergenerational Survival—is multiple and complex. There are so many different stories and so many different ways of being with the trauma and healing.

**Shelagh:** I want to pick up on the question of knowing and

not knowing? Who did and did not know? I've heard [Justice] Murray Sinclair say in reference to the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada]: It was really impossible not to know that this [the abusive residential school system] was going on at some level. When Murray was interviewed on *The Sunday Edition* [CBC] a couple of months ago, he said the clergy knew, of course, the government knew, the school administrators and teachers knew, the media knew—and people still chose to ignore it. He didn't get into whether this was a conscious choice or not. But as he says, it was possible to know, that's something we need to deal with. People can no longer ignore the facts, or pretend they are removed from the violence... I don't think I took that possibility for many, many years. I just moved on with my own little life.

**Glen:** That's something we've heard, *How could we not we not know this? How can we* [a community, nation, group talking about a book]... *how can we not have known about Residential Schools?* Certainly, people might not know all the facts. But the general lack of curiosity is troubling. Not to ask? On an affective level, that's huge. We can know things and be afraid to examine them. It takes courage to open a discussion.

**Shelagh:** I really wanted to say that before you did (laughs).

**Glen:** (laughs) We heard from people who remembered childhood neighbors or playmates who were suddenly gone. The book brought these memories back, and people needed to think about the silence, a silence that has lasted decades.



**Shelagh:** I'm trying really hard not to go into interview mode, but I wonder if you feel as though something changed in you over the time we were out visiting communities?

**Glen:** Absolutely. The deepest kind of speaking that I've experienced through the process is...not speaking. In fact, emotional collapse. That has been a difficult and interesting lesson to come to terms with. You spend a lifetime trusting in words, books, radio, scholarship, or whatever, and then you realize that that knowledge can only take you so far. Other kinds of communication are actually more articulate—and important. You've heard me talk about being unprepared, wondering how I'd come to be on a stage with you, Mike, Drew Hayden-Taylor, and Alice Williams in the Great Hall at Trent, for example? Or sharing the floor with Survivors in that low-ceiling room at Children's Aid in Ottawa? What looking glass did I fall through? I am not Aboriginal. My family did not go to residential school. What do I know? How can my words or thoughts mean anything? At first these questions came up a lot. There was a great deal of self-doubt and fear. But over and over, we were greeted with such overwhelming generosity. Now I don't think about the doubt so much. Really, what else would I want to do? This has been such an important transformation. At this point in history, what other conversations would I want to be a part of? What other situations would I want to put time or energy into? Until we see big changes in this country and clear recognition of Survivor leadership—of their truth—it's important to honour the generosity we've been shown.

**Shelagh:** Truth is a word that can be teased apart in so many ways. Understanding, I think as far as *Speaking My Truth* went, or goes, volume one, understanding that the book was only the beginning. Our rush to finish it, to get it published, that was the start of a process that is continuing. For me, the experience of traveling with this book was... a kind of opening, an availability. I have lived my professional life in, I would say, twenty minute chunks of dialogue, and I always knew where I was going. I knew the beginning, I knew the end. I had a strong sense of the arc in between. To be in these groups where I didn't know what was going to happen and to be comfortable not knowing was very challenging at first. But it was a really interesting and profound place to be, a place that was out of my control. I didn't have to watch a clock, and someone's thought could be long or short. It was a very... it was a kaleidoscopic experience because not only am I experiencing the moment you talk about—of how all these experiences led you to where you are now. But I was also seeing that it was the same with everyone in the room and how the dialogue became spherical not circular. There was another, bigger dimension. It was really exciting. Now that we are not on road talking to groups, I feel I'm a bit in withdrawal. I liked how *Speaking My Truth* pushed us forward. After the book was published, we began to travel. There was something else coming, something to work toward. We were building on the momentum generated by each group. We could take messages from one group and bring it to another. Often the readers we visited didn't know where to start either. Think of that group on Quadra Island, you were the only guy in the room—the first guy at their book club. Not knowing exactly how I would start

to draw the picture of the experience— then and there, to find a narrative arc—was a big question. There was no answer to that, certainly no right or wrong answer. To be comfortable with that indeterminacy has been personally illuminating and very rich.

**Glen:** I like what you're saying about not knowing where the dialogue is going. Usually, you are driving a message and hoping to get it somewhere close to where you want it to go.

**Shelagh:** ...popping it in the basket. These engagements we've had with people across the country have made me listen differently because I was not anticipating the thing I already know. That's been really exciting.

**Glen:** I was going to say something about working *in media res*, learning to be comfortable with the power that comes from it. As we traveled, we found ourselves in the midst of reading groups each of which had its own history, each living room had its own family. Being welcomed into these spaces allowed us not to feel too much pressure and to surrender to wherever the conversation was taking us. In a sense, we learned to go in and take whatever was coming—with the cookies. Despite my initial misgivings, the process wasn't so bad (laughs).

**Shelagh:** (laughs) The cookie tour of Canada.

**Glen:** Giving up the need or ability to always have something to say was instructive. As a writer, teacher, academic, I'm used to responding to situations with chunks of language. I've been

trained to listen to something and then to place it in a little package of meaning, saying, *Ok, there. I've done something, made sense of something.* Very quickly changed. In the context of *Speaking My Truth* or a larger discussion about Aboriginal healing and justice, I no longer think about going in with the intention or desire to explain. Learning to listen, learning to take pleasure in people's attempt to comprehend is amazing. Hearing an idea or topic go around the room and listening as people arrive in amazing places—that's cool. I'm thinking about what comes next?

**Shelagh:** Good question. I don't know. My instinct would be to try to tell you something. But we need to be comfortable with not knowing as well...I want things to move forward but I don't even know what I mean by that. What shape does that take? I do think books are important. Obviously I think that having something that people can hold in their hands, instead of something abstract, has been good. There was such wealth in what the Aboriginal Healing Foundation was publishing and getting it into the hands of many more Canadians than might have happened before was a really good thing. I have high hopes for volume two [*Reconciliation & The Way Forward*] because I think people want to get a hook into understanding what reconciliation is and how it is working. I remember thinking, as I was hosting a couple of events for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, if anyone were to ask what will reconciliation look like, I wouldn't have an answer. It wasn't a question I wanted to address particularly because it suggests an end point. Again, it's about getting on the train and being into the journey—trusting

that this is a process. The more people know or understand and are willing to participate in dialogue, the clearer I am that good will come of the process. To de-colonize, we need to reimagine our relationships and then do more than imagine and talk about these. We have to do something, but it starts with conversation and respectful listening. I think reading is a form of listening.

**Glen:** I had an interesting conversation with Mike DeGagné about books, *We had completed Aboriginal People, Residential Schools and Resilience*—or maybe *Origins of Lateral Violence*—and Mike said he thought the Foundation should have started publishing these types of books earlier? I think these books needed to come along when they did. This form of publication works with a shift in approach, a desire to reach broader audiences—non-Aboriginal audiences. Mike has spoken about this on different occasions. But to fulfill its healing mandate the earlier reports helped produce or establish a type authority. The AHF needed to be credible to government and legible to communities. Focusing on research reports was a good strategy. The AHF back catalogue is really amazing, and it underwrites these books. *Speaking My Truth*, this volume, and some of the later publications represent an expanded capacity or social focus. These publications are about activating the broadest range of readers—this is what we’ve been talking about. On the other side of equation, there has been capacity developed around these books that has transformed the way some of us see the work of literature or political possibilities of a focused publication. This little thing [*Speaking My Truth*] is really a large collaborative venture. Working alongside it has

involved learning how to take these stories, Survivors stories, and put them in a book and how distribute them in a way that is respectful and true. Thanks to the vision and guidance of the AHF, we learned you can't stop there, with the publication. We needed to walk with the stories and the story-tellers. Having the opportunity to make these books and to participate in distributing them—to do it in the beautiful way that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation does, without charging people, recognizing the value of sending authors and editors, recognizing that people need to travel with the books—that was an amazing gift. It enabled me to look at books in a new way and to think about their amazing capacity. A book is really a collection of all the people who produced it: writers, editors, designers, printers, the people who organize readings, readers, audience members. It is a powerful social network. We need to remember how important these objects can be to communities—small or large groups of people. In fact, they might be integral to the social structures we are trying or need to create. Working with the AHF has reminded me that producing a book is about all of the energy that goes into creating it, and the people involved. *Speaking Our Truth* has gone out to more than forty thousand people. Given its focus, the sociopolitical terrain it enters, this is impressive. This humble publication that can be passed from hand to hand has the capacity to matter deeply.

**Shelagh:** That's so interesting, because you know where I sit as far as books in Canada go. I talk to the author, or I read the book and then talk to the author. But then what happens afterwards is also extremely important. I'm interested in the kind of

layers of discussion that start to build around books. It's linked to what Laurie was saying—having the chance to think of the circles upon circles and the important connections a book might work through. Getting out to readings and festivals, facilitating people coming together to listen to an author read from a book, is still enormously exciting. I can't think of anything that duplicates the experience. The fact that this book is... that you're holding Survivors' stories in your hand... The Foundation collected many stories; books like these are a good places to put stories. Mike said something very similar to me. He's said, "I wish we had been in the book business a lot earlier." To see what books can do has been a amazing opportunity. This book went from coast to coast to coast, and you and I got to see its immediate impact on people. That has been really gratifying—a huge gift and a great honour. Because this is going to go down in print, I want to say that I am very thankful—in this sort of random set up of our lives—to have come into contact with you and Mike—and the all the wonderful people who said, "Ok, I'll open up my doors, I'll host you." The people who wrote to say, "You can come into our living room," dining room or kitchens... Those who invited us into their halls and auditoriums. They all did it so openly and so generously, from Bella Coola, to Curve Lake First Nation, to Dartmouth.

**Glen:** Thank you for saying that. I couldn't agree more. It has been an amazing gift. What I find extraordinary—and I might never have thought about before we started down this path—is that openness, that confounding generosity. Even though we've participated in many, many difficult conversations, there was

always a generosity of spirit. People were willing to take on the emotions and uncertainty. Everywhere we went, we met people who put up with the awkward beginnings—who tolerated whatever misspeaking of one of us or the group might have to offer. The involvement of Survivors and community leaders was key to this. Earlier in the summer when Mike, Sara [Fryer], Amy [Bombay] and I were in Sioux Lookout for the launch of *Origins of Lateral Violence*, I thought about these books. Garnet Angeconeb spoke of this important AHF study as “Good Medicine.” The release of the book started with a sunrise ceremony. The book went to Sioux Lookout before anyone got it. It was embargoed by the Board of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation until after these events, until the book could be properly blessed. To travel with a book like that and to have the chance to think about how a book matters in a specific place was a powerful lesson for me. You travel a lot, you go all over this country carrying books, talking to authors, I get to travel a fair amount, but to think about the very specific places that these books live and how absolutely important they are in these smaller... I don’t want to use the word community here, smaller spaces. To be aware of that. The experience is connected to what we saw at the TRC in Vancouver. One of the most powerful, moving experiences in my life was what happened after we put our books in the bentwood box. As you know, I broke down after I said my short piece. I was mortified. Yet, when I came off the stage, everyone wanted to talk to me and to get a copy. They each took a book or, in many cases multiple copies. Then they gave me a story and a hug. I was struck by how almost everyone said, *I want this for somebody else. I’m taking*



*this back home to my kids. I'm taking this back to father, my aunt, my uncle.* That's not how most books are received. The idea that the book would automatically be for somebody else, that it might be going back to a particular place—a house, a school, and community centre—for me, this was transformative.

**Shelagh:** Yeah, it was neat. I was powerfully moved by your openness, once again. The other thing I remember specifically from Vancouver was people wanted your autograph (laughs). This is a book about reconciliation and residential schools but yeah, they wanted your autograph and there were like thirty-five people lined up. It was amazing.

**Glen:** (laughs) This was disconcerting.

**Shelagh:** Well, the way that first volume began, first edition, there was such agreement between, Jonathan and Mike, then me and you, we had almost like a secret ballot of what should go in, we only disagreed on two pieces. So right from the beginning there was a sense of solidarity, momentum, and I think support, a vision. You know, talking to people who read it, the smartest thing we did was to put Garnet's story first. People are blown by away him, so touched by his story. That momentum has carried us all forward. As I think about closing this off, I think of an Inuk woman who said, "You know, you don't have to shape everything like an interview." So I'm going to stop right now.

**Glen:** I'm comfortable with that—stopping in the midst.

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## Biographies

**Glen Lowry** received a PhD in English from Simon Fraser University in 2001. He has published widely on contemporary Canadian Literature and Culture—literature, photography, film, and television. His research investigates new forms of cultural expression and social contexts, particularly around questions of social justice and spatial practice. As a scholar, writer, editor and organizer, Lowry’s work centres on collaboration and social engagement. Having helped developed media platforms to link scholars, artists, and audiences across cultural and geographical distances—e.g., *Maraya* (<http://marayaprojects.com>) an artwork connecting urban waterfronts in Vancouver and Dubai—Lowry’s most recent work interrogates questions of reconciliation, or more particularly negotiations around cultural production that acknowledge and work across differences among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants. Lowry currently holds a position as an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Culture and Community at Emily Carr University of Art + Design, where he is Chair of the Research Ethics Board. From 2002 to 2011, he edited the cultural journal *West Coast Line*. In 2009, he published *Pacific Avenue*, a collection of poems looking at image-based memory and geography.

**Shelagh Rogers** is currently the host and a producer of the CBC Radio program *The Next Chapter*, devoted to Canadian writers and songwriters. Over the years as a journalist on flagship programs such as *Morningside*, *Sounds Like Canada*, and *This Morning* Shelagh has travelled the length and breadth of Canada interviewing thousands of Canadians and collecting and sharing their stories, which she believes enlarges our understanding of each other. She has received many awards for speaking publicly about a private story: a decades-long battle with depression. Shelagh holds honorary doctorates from the University of Western Ontario (2002), Mount Allison University (2011), and Memorial University (2012). In 2011 Shelagh was named an Officer of the Order of Canada for promoting Canada’s rich culture, for her volunteer work in adult literacy, for fighting against the stigma of mental illness, and for pushing for reconciliation. She is

the first-ever Ambassador-at-Large for the Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterborough and sees the canoe as a beautiful symbol of a new relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. She has committed herself to working toward reconciliation from coast to coast to coast and plans to devote the rest of her life to this cause. Native Counseling Services of Alberta has given her their Achievement in the Aboriginal Community award. She is also proud to be chosen as an “Honorary Witness” to the brave and essential work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

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**Lorena Sekwan Fontaine, Lisa Forbes, Wendy  
McNab, Lisa Murdock, Roberta Stout**

# AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS AMONG DAUGHTERS OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS

*“Authentic Connections” is about five women, all daughters of residential school survivors. They gather at one of the women’s homes to talk about how their work to promote intergenerational healing has impacted them since they began their explorative journey together, almost four years earlier. An underlying theme in all aspects of the women’s conversations is the notion of unearthed connections to their mothers as survivors, to their roles as mothers, to their families and communities, to their sense of belonging and self-worth, and, most dearly, to each other.*

## BACKGROUND

In 2010, an Indigenous-centred, arts-based and participant-focused research project was carried out to explore the intergenerational effects of residential schools on adult daughters of residential school survivors. The project, *kiskinohamâtôtâpânâsk: Inter-generational Effects on Professional First Nations Women Whose Mothers are Residential School Survivors*, brought together six First Nations women from Winnipeg to talk about what it was like to be parented by a mother who had survived residential school. As part of the project, each woman created a short video—a digital story—illustrating how she was affected by her mother’s residential school experiences. After the digital stories were completed, the women decided to launch their collection of videos in a public screening for all to see. The community presentation was extremely moving for all in attendance.

Recognizing the healing properties of the digital storytelling process, the women felt inspired to share their stories far and wide in order to promote healing and intergenerational reconciliation from residential school experiences. Since the launch of their video collection, the women have participated in over 50 presentations to various groups; locally, nationally, and internationally. As well, the digital storytelling project was replicated with an additional 26 First Nations women and men from across the country, a summer institute on the art of digital storytelling was implemented, a digital storytelling tool kit was developed to teach others how to use digital storytelling to explore the intergenerational effects of residential schools, and a

digital storytelling website was created to promote intergenerational healing and reconciliation.

## **CHARACTERS**

**LORENA:** Early forties. First Nations woman of Cree and Ojibway ancestry. From Manitoba. Daughter of a mother who attended St. Albans, All Saints, and Elkhorn residential schools. Mother of one daughter, aged eight years. Professor at a university in Winnipeg.

**LISA:** Mid-forties. First Nations woman of mixed heritage: Cree, Métis, Scottish, and English. Daughter of a mother who attended Birtle Residential School. Human rights advocate. Works in the field of community economic development in the North End in the city of Winnipeg.

**WENDY:** Early forties. First Nations woman of Cree and Saulteux ancestry. Family roots in Saskatchewan. Daughter of a mother who attended Lebreton and Marieval residential schools. Mother of a teenage son. Graduate student at the University of Winnipeg.

**CLAUDETTE:** Deceased. Passed away suddenly, in 2012, at the age of 47 years. First Nations woman of Cree ancestry. Daughter of a mother who attended Sturgeon Landing and Guy Hill residential schools. Mother of four children and grandmother of two children. Sun Dancer. Drum Carrier. Community

advocate. Worked as a Program Coordinator for a university community campus at the time of her passing.

**MURDOCK:** Late forties. First Nations woman of Dené and Danish ancestry. Daughter of a mother who attended St. Henry's Mission and St. Joseph's residential schools. Mother of two sons and a daughter, aged 11, 22, and 12 years; respectively. Married to her life partner of 21 years. Works as a consultant for the provincial government.

**ROBERTA:** Early forties. First Nations woman of mixed ancestry: Cree, English, and German. Daughter of a mother who attended Blue Quills Residential School. Mother of one daughter, aged seven years. Initiated the exploratory research project that brought this group of women together and led all subsequent digital story processes that evolved from these preliminary inter-generational explorations.

## **SETTING**

*Int. Cozy living room of a well-maintained house, present.*

Warm lighting and earth-toned colours create a peaceful and relaxing atmosphere in the livingroom. Traditional art pieces and framed photographs depicting a history of ancestral connections line the walls. Well-built individual pieces of furniture fill the room. Handcrafted blankets are draped over the backs of the couch and two arm chairs. Two large floor pillows add

ambiance to the seating arrangement. A luxurious area rug covers the centre of the hardwood floor. A pot of sweet-smelling potpourri, a large flickering candle, an assortment of dessert dainties, and condiments for hot beverages fill the top of the large, wooden coffee table.

### *Time*

The present. One cool and breezy, Saturday evening in mid-April. The sun has set, but light from the early-evening sky creates a cloudy-outside appearance through the windows.

### *Précis*

Several weeks earlier, five women were invited to submit a chapter for an upcoming edition of selected readings on reconciliation. Having decided to submit a reflection piece on their digital storytelling efforts, the women have gathered to talk about their own experiences through this work over the past four years.

### *Fade In*

Following a satisfying dinner, they move from the dining room to the living room to stretch out and settle in for an evening of personal reflection and intimate conversation. While the dialogue flows between the women, they each consume several cups of coffee and a modest supply of after-dinner sweets, which are replenished at varying intervals throughout the evening by LORENA.



**WENDY:** So, what questions are you gonna ask us?

**ROBERTA:** We're going to think of this as a final chapter to our collective work. It's our conclusion. It's our overall reflections on four years. Let's start with this question: "What has impacted you the most about being a part of this project for the past four years?"

**LORENA:** When Roberta said she was going to do a research project on residential schools, I was really excited. I came back to Canada in 2002 when I finished grad school. I recognized the silence of the impact on the children of residential schools, and yet the evidence of the impact was all around me. I started working with Aboriginal people on residential school claims. I would hear stories about the experiences that took place in the schools from a variety of people. After a while, I started to feel really sick from the stories. I felt like I kept getting hit on the head. I was being banged into the ground. The stories I heard were also my family's stories. But, also, the part that was missing from all that is: "Well, what's happening to their children? And their grandchildren?" And at that point I could identify the impacts on my life, but the issue was that I had no one to talk to—I had no voice. I remember sitting at a meeting one day with lawyers for the churches. There were church representatives, Aboriginal people, lawyers for Aboriginal people, government and their lawyers, and I was hearing a lot

of disagreement. I looked across the room and I saw this guy about my age. I think he was with his mom. And we looked at each other and we nodded, recognizing each other. I think we recognized that both of us were hurting. And there was a silence in the room about our generation. I recall thinking about the discussions during the meeting that, “The impact, the fallout from the abuse, is also sitting right here in front of you.” At that point, there was no discussion. There was no forum. There was very little research done on the legacy of the schools. There were no books or anything. And so, when Roberta said she was going to research on this topic I was like, “Right on! This is so important.” I had no idea, really, about the impact of such a project.

**MURDOCK;** When I was asked to participate in the project I wasn't too sure about what I'd be able to contribute, given I knew very little about my mother's experiences of residential school and even less about intergenerational impacts. I mean, she rarely talked about her time in residential school, so how could that have affected me? Still, it sounded like an interesting project. And given some of the crazy things I witnessed from my mother, I figured that I did know a bit about the effects. It didn't take me long, though, to figure out that the project was more about us than our mothers and what we had survived. What was it, like, an hour into it when it all started coming out? Our experiences and what it was really like to be parented by our mothers who, little did we know at the time, were struggling

and trying to deal with their own trauma of residential school. Before then, I never thought about my mother as a survivor, and I definitely didn't think about her parenting abilities.

When I think about the project overall, I have to say that I am extremely grateful, Roberta, that you contacted me to see if I'd be interested in being part of that initial project. Otherwise, I never would have had this life-changing experience. And that's exactly what it was for me: life-changing. It was a very moving experience for me to go through probably because I never opened up like that to anyone—ever. At the same time, I never had anyone share such deeply personal pieces of themselves with me either. Through this process I've learned a lot about my mother. I mean, she spent eleven years in residential school and was truly affected by her experiences. I know that now. But growing up, I didn't really understand anything about the ways she was affected. It wasn't until university that I started to hear about residential schools. And it was a long time coming before I even thought about linking the way my mom was to what she went through as a kid from just before her fourth birthday. It makes me mad. Who snatches a kid at three years old? And without anyone knowing it?! My mom did tell me a couple of things, like about how she used to darn socks, but not really anything else until just this past year or so. I think maybe she was trying to protect me from knowing the ugly truth about what happened to her as a kid. Or maybe she was just embarrassed or ashamed because it was far from good stuff. Anyway, this project helped me in so many ways, and my mother, too. I learned a lot about my family, and more importantly, about me. I was able to do that personal exploring

because I felt safe in the company of other women who shared similar experiences with me. And that helped me to find that sense of belonging that I was so desperate to find. For that I am grateful to all of you for taking the time to show how much you care about me, even though I didn't really know you all that well at the time.

**ROBERTA:** I feel I gained five sisters through this process. That was completely unintentional. Though looking back, how could it have gone any other way? I remember the first time you all came together for that first learning circle. I was the researcher and I got to listen to your stories. There were so many times I wanted to jump in and say, "I know. That happened to me too." While you all did the work of shattering the silence of your experiences, you were telling my story too. I can't tell you how much comfort you each give me. I feel that I am with kindred spirits who understand me, even when I don't understand myself. And I know that the bonds we have formed together have deep, deep roots. I really feel like one day we will be like our little aged mothers, still sharing our stories together, as our grandchildren sit listening at our feet. We are so connected and it is hard to explain this . . .

**LISA:** I have an idea about why our group of women storytellers has a connection. When people feel safe enough to show their vulnerabilities, they can share the stuff that's important to them, even if it's not easy. So the pain, loneliness, all of those kinds

of things, those are the things we are able to share. People can go lifetimes without having that kind of connection, but having space dedicated to create and tell stories in a safe space allowed us to connect and banded us into a little community. It's uncommon in our world to get together for the purpose of being real and sharing our human-ness. But I think I got comfortable pretty early on with just crying together.

**WENDY:** Being vulnerable created a space to be able to create such a powerful connection. I think about how we all put ourselves out there. For me, I struggled to trust in myself because, I have discovered in these four years, I have become more of who I am supposed to be. It has not been smooth and easy. It has been an internal fight with myself. As much as I wanted to be who I am supposed to be, I was and still have moments of feeling terrified of me. Like I said, I do not feel alone anymore but I also do not feel as crazy as I used to, which is something I want to stop telling myself when I'm experiencing strong emotions. Anyway, I must remind myself, for each year that passes, those strong emotions, feelings of being alone or what I self-label as crazy, are just plain emotions, I will still go through them and I will get through them.

**LORENA:** I have always been a floater. I floated through school. I never really had close friends. And when I did meet someone that eventually became a friend, it was only for a short period of time. I didn't realize how much of a floater I was until we

became close friends. I finally felt safe enough to land and connect with you women. Part of the reason why I was able to do this was because I broke the silence around what had been harming me all my life. The abuse I experienced as a little girl by a family member kept me hostage, and I found it hard to trust anyone. I realized that I needed people in my life that would acknowledge my childhood experiences. I needed to know that someone would believe me and understand me. For most of my life I stuffed my feelings. I stuffed my experiences because that's what everybody did in my family. We didn't acknowledge the violence, the sexual abuse, or the pain we endured. Although we are a big family, I felt very alone. Family life was often so crazy with the drinking. I would often wonder who would protect me if things got out of hand. Because I was so scared all the time, I shut down and became a floater. This research project allowed me to talk about some of that stuff. I was able to connect with the experiences of you other women and the challenges that you were able to overcome. I recognized myself in the stories you all shared. Every time we share our stories, it is a release.

**WENDY:** I remember one time when we were presenting our videos to the commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and I was sitting beside CLAUDETTE. I don't know if it was her or me but we both felt the same, that . . . we felt . . . I can't even remember if it was me or if it was her that said, "Wow, look at these women. They wanna be my friend." Something like that.

**LORENA:** I think it was Claudette.

**WENDY:** And the reason I couldn't remember who said that is because that's exactly how I felt. I felt like these women want to be around me. I have bared my soul to stuff that I did not think was appropriate to share or I just never was asked how I felt, and to be able to share without judgment and that this has never been turned into information used against me, which is what I have experienced a lot throughout life.

I made a decision a long time ago to be extremely selective and protective about who to let into my life. With us, I love that some of us can go without seeing each other for a long time and still feel so strongly connected. This unique relationship we have created opened a door a little bit and I got to try it out. And now the door's wide open and I feel like . . . you know, when I talk about becoming my authentic self, I am becoming more and more like my authentic self, the person that I am supposed to be in this world. As we present our videos and spend time together, our authentic self comes out more and more. My self-growth is and will always be ongoing, but since day one of being together it has accelerated. And, most importantly, I don't feel alone anymore.

**MURDOCK:** I didn't think I could have a relationship with a bunch of women I could call my friends. Before you, I didn't really have any friends. I have hundreds of acquaintances but not friends. I look forward to our meetings for lunch or

dinner or whatever. And not just that, it's also the relationships that we've built together, with other people who have played a part in our work around intergenerational effects. That's important to me. That's why I stay committed to this work. A lot of good has come out of this. I've encouraged my mom to share little bits about herself with me, and there's things that she would never have told me had it not been for this project. I often think about all the people we've touched—the little community we've created—just like Lisa talked about before, and about how this project evolved into this last one and about how all of the storytellers through our various projects have contributed a little piece of themselves in our work by providing input, sharing reflections, helping to facilitate, writing, or doing videos. I really like how this little community has come together. When there's an event, they're there in the audience. That's very meaningful to me because it tells me that we're all connected. We share common experiences. We needed to talk and get it all out, and our projects provided that safe place where we can be together and know and trust that what we have to say will be respected and valued.

**ROBERTA:** You know, Murdock, I need to say quickly that the commitment that this group has made to this project continually amazes me. When you think about it, the project started out as a three-day research project and I thought that was huge. I remember saying on the phone with each of you, “It’s three days. Are you okay with that? Like, I know that’s a huge time commitment.” Now I think about how many weeks, months,



and years we've put into this process. To me, that is a very beautiful piece of this project. Four years have passed. A lot has happened in our own personal lives, but we can honestly say that this project and our relationships to one another have been constants.

**MURDOCK:** In addition to finally finding my sense of belonging, I've learned how to share my feelings. I don't just mean letting people know when I'm upset. I mean the intimate stuff, like being able to show how sad or hurt I feel and that I need a hug. I never got so many hugs from anyone as I did in the last four years! I've come to love being greeted with a hug and hugging people when I leave them. Lorena once talked about the learning circle providing an opportunity to bare our souls for a whole morning because we were with people whom we felt comfortable and safe with. I'm really glad we all connected right away, because if we hadn't, I don't think I would have been able to do the public presentation pieces. You women really do help me get through those tough times. And through all of our presentations, I've learned that it's okay to care and to show my family how much I love them. Not my husband and my children. We always do that. But I mean my mom and my sisters. I love the way we are now. Since that day when my mom attended our video launch, I'm not kidding, almost every day my mom will tell me she loves me. And that makes me feel really, really good. And I'm comfortable now with saying, "I love you too, mom." We have such a great relationship now. I feel so privileged to have had this opportunity to get to know my mom and to

love her for who she really is, the way she deserves to be loved. For me, that was the best thing that I could have ever wished for—that renewed relationship with my mom and finding you wonderful ladies too, of course. That’s a bonus!

**LORENA:** I wonder what it was that changed everything that day we first showed our videos. It seems like the project provided an opportunity to get to know each other and our mothers a little deeper. Do you think that’s it?

**MURDOCK:** Oh, yeah. For sure. And to see a different side of one another. And maybe for my mom to say, “Oh, I am really sorry. I didn’t know that I affected you that way.” And for me to say, “I understand what you’ve been through. I didn’t know what you had been through and now I know.” We got to know each other. And I think for me putting my story in a video and for her seeing that video really helped both of us to transition to this renewed, loving relationship with each other. That initial project helped to set all that in motion. Starting with the learning circle allowed us to remember and reflect, for the first time, on our upbringing and relationships with our mothers and how we’ve been impacted, albeit indirectly, by the schools. This was a really emotional journey. It is very healing to remember.

**ROBERTA:** For me, this project has been about honouring the little girl my mom once was. Every time I present the video I

try to tell the story of little Madeleine, well as much as I can muster up from the snippets that have been shared with me. We can't forget that the survivors were once five, six, seven year olds, already forced to make their own way in a very foreign world. I am amazed, and angered, every time I think of the little children being marched two-by-two into dormitories, cafeterias, churches, and classrooms. And I just imagine the regimented silence, the loneliness, the hurts, and the homesickness that the little children endured for years. I still don't know very much about my mother's experience in residential school. I truly feel like this is now a closed book for her, and I respect that. But what I know for certain is that she found something deep within herself to survive that place. And when you think of all the bullying that goes on today in schools, can you imagine what it would have been like for the kids who were in a residential school. What was it like for them to have no one to talk to or protect them? I guess, ultimately, it makes me really appreciate that we can mother our own children and walk them through the tough times.

**WENDY:** The strength and influence that vulnerability has on connection is powerful and contagious. When I think about the impact on my mothering it reminds me of a story about my son. I have always talked to my son about the residential schools. I remember one year, when he was ten, I brought him to a University of Winnipeg residential school mini-conference. I mentioned to him, "I'm a little worried. I'm not sure what people will share and what you'll hear." He's like, "Mom, I

know about residential school. I'll be fine." Then somebody actually was very graphic, and I remember the next day he said to me that he couldn't stop thinking of what that person said the night before. And he felt so sad for him. He was almost in tears. He was carrying that pain for that person the next day. But I told him, "That pain is not your pain. That's that person's pain, and you have no right to carry their pain because that's not yours. So you need to give it back. That's not yours to carry." And he's like, "Oh, okay." I was amazed he instantly understood. His ability to express what he was emotionally experiencing with me and to understand how to not carry someone else's pain, and in that moment I was able to teach my son how to not carry someone else's stuff. I have to share one more thing about relationships, in particular, my relationship with my partner, who is also part of this project. The intergenerational impact of residential school has also impacted relationships. As children of survivors, we, or I should really say I, have to relearn how to be in a relationship. And it has made me hypersensitive to my role and my contribution to the relationship, how I respond or react, and to look at why or what is attached to my responses or reactions. This is my relationship with myself. Relationships cause you to reflect on yourself so that you, again, become your authentic self as a partner.

**MURDOCK:** When we started this project I recall thinking, "What the heck are intergenerational effects?"

I'm not affected. Then boom! It hit me, this bag of mixed emotions. I remember sitting down to write my story and

thinking, “Are you frickin’ kidding me? How can I write a story? I don’t even know what I’m doing here!” I was so confused. My mind was racing. All these things that I had stuffed in the far reaches of my mind were resurfacing. Until then, I thought everything was normal; there was nothing wrong with me. I soon realized that my mom’s experiences did trickle down to me and affect every single thing about me—like making sure everything around me is always so perfect. I mean it. That’s how I function. At home, with the kids and my husband, they do everything the way I like it just to avoid upsetting me. They’ve come to know me, but we know now that that’s an impact. I used to stay up until four in the morning because I couldn’t leave one of the six loads of laundry for the next day. I’d work until it was all done just so the kids have fresh clothes and empty laundry baskets on Monday morning, not Saturday or Sunday, not Tuesday or Thursday, but Monday. And Thursday night is bathroom-cleaning day, so I can relax after work on Friday knowing my bathroom was clean. And I realized that those behaviours go back to my childhood. I developed those practices as a kid growing up because of what was going on at home and because my mom wasn’t able to keep things together in a clean and orderly fashion. Anyway, having to reflect on my past experiences to tell my story really helped me to see that there was something wrong there. Things weren’t as perfect as I thought they were. And once I dealt with those intergenerational effects, I was able to move forward in a really positive way. I have renewed relationships where there was once tension and anxiety. I know who I am, where I come from, and

where I belong. And I've been able to just let things go. I've found a sense of peace within myself and with everyone around me. I don't feel the need to work so many long, hard hours as I did in the past. I don't get so stressed out about little things, like scrubbing the toilet every Thursday night. This isn't to say that I don't still have my anal moments, but this need to have a place for everything and everything in its place . . . well, that's still there.

But the need to get it there this very instant? That's all gone. I have no problem leaving a few loads of laundry or my work on my desk for another day. I've learned to just sit back and enjoy my life with my family, even if half the time it's on the fly. You know what I mean?

**LISA:** Things that have changed for me over the course of the four years that we've been telling our stories about being daughters of residential school survivors . . . hmm . . . well, before we started I felt like, "my voice isn't really important" or "I'm not Indian enough to have a voice" or "I didn't have enough of the difficult things happen to me." And so, what I found is that I was able to explore aspects of my life that are very important to me but that seemed to never move forward—to continue to be in a spiritually and emotionally unhealthy place. My personal family relationships, like parenthood, and being a spouse are healing and growing. Also, my personal approach to life and work has been radically altered. Similar to Murdock, my workaholic tendencies that have greatly affected my physical and mental health have really been tempered. It's because of

this project that I do less self-abusive actions, like constantly working and obsessing and worrying. Maybe it's because I don't have to prove myself anymore. I don't have to spend 14 hours a day showing that I'm a good worker or that I'm worth something. It's been nice to leave a lot of that very harmful behaviour behind.

**LORENA:** You know, when you close one door or you end a relationship and then you move towards the future, you've created space for something new. But until you let go of those things that are holding you back, you don't have the space to add anything new in your life. For me, on reflecting back, the project created a dumping ground where I could spew harmful things in my life. I was able to let some of that crap go. It made me realize other unhealthy patterns in my life, too. And so I've been able to dispose little bits of crap and have created space to put new crap in.

But, hopefully, it's better crap. So what I'm saying is that all the legacy of the residential schools, all the harm, the dysfunction, we all need some sort of process to let the harm go so that we can create space for healthier things. When I look back, it hasn't been one pivotal moment, it's been the ability to keep on reflecting and to shed some of the stuff that's been weighing me down. And so I can't say at one particular point that it's been "aha! I've shed everything." I think it's been accumulative. I've gained courage to make changes. I have a good foundation of people around me. I can think back on your stories, or just reflect on friendship, and to know that even if things are really bad that I still have

all of you. Like Murdock touched on earlier, we have created a community. When you think about all the people that have come to work on the project or invest time in doing videos, we were once five sisters, and now we've got brothers and uncles and other extended family members, anyone who has gone through the process of the project. There is an unspoken bond. You know, I went to go see our other digital storyteller, RYAN, yesterday, and I barely said two words to him throughout the project, but I went and sat with him and we talked for a long time. I feel comfortable around him. And that's the way it is. It's like everybody from the project has become a really important part of my life. Do you know what I mean? We are a close family.

**WENDY:** How we came together and the process of creating the digital stories is why I feel strongly that it is—has been—extremely therapeutic. Each time we share or talk about the project I have unintentionally used it as a means to explore my emotions. One major contribution of that process, I believe, is finally applying to grad school after talking myself out of applying. I am now in grad school. And the other thing is, this is just in the last maybe year and a half, I have never felt so ... even though I don't speak Cree or Saultaux, I have never felt so Cree. That sounds a bit funny, I think, but I have never heard so much Cree as I have in the last year, so much so that Cree words are spoken in my dreams. This all has reconnected me to my Cree-ness.



**LORENA:** I went to a presentation by a holocaust survivor. He was speaking to an audience of Aboriginal peoples and the general public interested in the legacy of the residential schools. He said so poignantly that “The holocaust was about targeting Jews, it was racism, targeting people and trying to kill them simply because of their identity.” Just as residential schools were created to kill Aboriginal identity—to get rid of Aboriginal identity. And so when Wendy said that she feels more Cree than ever before, I thought, there’s a perfect example: the residential school has not completely destroyed our culture. And that’s one thing the man said to the audience, “The most powerful thing that you can do as Aboriginal peoples is to live your culture and to say to the government you have not destroyed Aboriginal cultural identity.” The project has not saved our culture, but it has set us on a path to recognize our culture and embrace it when we see it. Like Wendy says, we are on the path of becoming our authentic self, whether it’s connecting with our stories or hearing us speak or being able to make connections to family patterns, not feeling alone.

**LISA:** A culture that has related its history and ways of being orally for thousands of years needs to talk and be heard. Speaking in front of people is one of the ways storytelling has power. Having others to witness one’s own life and to create and weave one’s own strand into our collective community’s history also has healing power. The stories serve as a way to navigate the new, unknown landscape of a wound that was created with the cut to our culture by residential schools. Wendy

says she feels Cree through this process. That’s a triumph—culture wasn’t eradicated for her. And if storytelling gets reborn, then that’s another part of culture that didn’t die. Sometimes, when someone would come up after we told our stories and say, “Oh, that meant so much to me” or all of a sudden remember things about their own lives or their past abuses or feel their identity, of being that for someone else, sometimes it was good and also bad. It was heavy to be part of the communal healing.

**MURDOCK:** The videos still help me. Every once in a while when I just need to be alone and feel sorry for myself . . .

In order to feel better about something or just to calm down a bit, I’ll go to the Prairie Women’s Health Centre of Excellence website and watch the videos just to be alone and block out everything else, even if it is only for a few minutes. The videos always seem to rejuvenate me. And aren’t you amazed at how they turned out? We didn’t plan what stories we would tell, but in the end when they were all put together in a collection, they tell a complete intergenerational story about residential schools. Did you ever notice that? It’s like we were destined to come together to tell our story—the complete story about our common experiences as children of survivors, our authentic connections.

**LORENA:** Yeah, from beginning to end.

**MURDOCK:** Yeah, and ending with that cultural piece—that hope. Coming back to the drum, as Claudette always said.

**LORENA:** Well, I don't know if I told you guys this, but one time I was in the car with Claudette and we were coming back, I think we were at The Keg, I don't know what we did before but we had supper at The Keg and I drove her home. And she said she was really excited because she was telling me about this dream that she had about seven drums. And I was like, "Yeah, isn't that kind of freaky that there's seven of us." There's five, and then Claudette, and then we had the other woman who didn't make her video public. And her eyes just lit up because she was like, "Yeah, that makes a lot of sense!" And what she was saying is that she was really hopeful about what the project could do for other people. And so it was like that prophecy of healing. And I think about that every now and then. And when I do, I almost feel like she's around. But that was a really special moment that I had with Claudette when we were talking about that. So yeah, I think that there's still more to come.

**LISA:** I've never had the loss of a person who I felt was so integral to me personally, and the community broadly, as a teacher of traditional culture and spirituality. It still feels to me incredibly unjust. We didn't just lose a friend, a mother. Our culture generally has such a hard time—needs so much healing—and we had someone who was willing to work for the community and to work hard at maintaining the cultural roots.

It makes no sense that we don't get to keep her when there's been so much loss in the culture. There's been real personal loss for me in my life, but the loss of what one person would mean for everybody, for our larger community, I never felt that before.

**MURDOCK:** Remember the story she shared at the International Storytellers' Festival?

*A peaceful silence fills the room as the women, with tear-filled eyes and heavy hearts, remember their dear friend Claudette, courageous and powerful and oh so beautiful, with a microphone in one hand and a fistful of hope for healing and reconciliation in the other.*

**CLAUDETTE:** I'd like to welcome each and every one of you. My spirit names that I was given are Rattle that Glows in the Dark and Turtle Shooting Star Woman. My English name is Claudette Michell. My mother attended the Guy Hill and Sturgeon Landing residential schools. It's important for me to tell my story because it's a part of what I'll call my own healing journey. This is a journey that began, I guess you could say, when I was born. I was born a survivor. I was two pounds. And I was born into a family of alcoholism, dysfunction, and violence. I lived that life for many years. I lost an identity. My mother didn't grow up in her community. After she left residential school, she didn't go back to her community. So I wasn't able to grow up with my aunts and uncles. I wasn't able

to get the language to get that family-kind of feeling that you would get being close to other members in your community. And I grew up in a community that was quite racist. I grew up being called a Black Indian. Most of my young life I never belonged to the community that I grew up in because I was, of course, Native. I was also living very close to another community, but I didn't belong there either because I wasn't born into that community. So I didn't have an identity. It's very important for me to share this story because, for me, part of this healing journey is about reclaiming that identity that was lost to me. A big part of reclaiming my identity happened when I started university, when I started learning about residential schools, about the history of Aboriginal peoples, about the history of law and Aboriginal law. It was then that I began taking a few steps on my own journey by being welcomed into the ceremonial circles of my people. And that opened doorways for me in my spiritual life. I was able at that time to begin understanding a little bit about pain and suffering and doing that for the betterment of my family, for the betterment of my community, and just for all the good reasons. My spiritual practices have helped me to learn about who I am as a Cree woman. I left my family at age twelve and grew up on the streets. I became a runaway—and a survivor—on my own at that time. I lived in violence. I lived in dysfunction. And part of reclaiming who I am was helping me to deal with all those things and to understand the reasoning behind why my mother was the way she was. This digital storytelling journey has opened many doors of healing for me and for my mother. Recently, I was able to reconcile with the Catholic

Church and to understand that it wasn't the church itself that was responsible for the effects that plague our people; it was the systems that were in place at the time, during the era of residential schools. My mother came with me to a conference on reconciliation, and it was really good for us to go there and to see how healing can incorporate both the church and traditional ways. And it was good for me to see my Mom, to be able to understand that. It just felt so good. It's part of that healing that I'm talking about that was able to happen. Doing this digital story opened that doorway for my family. We still have a long way to go, my family and I, on that healing journey. It's going to be a lifetime. It took us a lifetime to get where we are today, but we're going to continue to try and do our best to be loving towards one another, to be understanding of our cultural and spiritual ways, and to keep going. I've grown a lot, sitting in this circle with these wonderful ladies. These ladies are, to me, like role models. When I was younger, I never imagined that I would have a university degree, be sitting in a circle with women like this, and talking about a healing journey. I would never have imagined that this could be something that I could be involved with. A big part of doing this as well is my hope that other people will begin to look at their own lives and begin to understand a little bit about their own stories. One of the teachings that I got from an Elder was that the drum, to our people, is a governing tool of how we self-govern ourselves. To me, it's a big piece because that drum has allowed me to begin to govern myself in a way that is healthy, in a way that my family, I know, is going to grow towards being healthier. I hope that when you see people walking on the streets who are

alcoholics and not in a good place, you can look at those people as human beings and know that there's a reason why they are the way they are. Something happened in their lives to make them that way. Some people are not lucky, like we have been lucky, to be able to come to this place of healing in our lives. I have people in my family that will never reach this place and will die of alcoholism and stuff like that. But I have hope that you'll carry a little bit of that in your hearts. My hope is that we can all come together in our humanity and see the need for healing, for all of us—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples—to heal together as human beings. We need to see what's occurring with Mother Earth. We can all come together and work to make a better place for ourselves, for our future, and for the future of Mother Earth.

*The lights dim and the scene fades to black. This chapter in the women's digital storytelling journey has ended.*

FADE OUT.

THE END

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## Biography

**Lorena Sekwan Fontaine** is Cree/Anishnabe from the Sagkeeng First Nation in Fort Alexander and the Opaskwayak First Nation in The Pas. Her mother attended St. Alban's and All Saints residential schools in Prince Albert and Elkhorn residential school. Lorena is a professor of Indigenous Studies at the University of Winnipeg, Manitoba.

**Lisa Forbes'** roots are Cree, Métis, Scottish, and English. Her right to Indian Status was restored in 1987. A member of Peguis First Nation, Lisa works in community economic development with SEED Winnipeg and is a long-time human rights activist and member of Amnesty International. Her mother attended Birtle residential school.

**Wendy McNab** is Cree/Saulteaux from Treaty 4 Area (Gordon's/Cowessess/Peepeekiss First Nations). Her mother, Pete, attended the Marieval and Qu'Appelle Indian Residential Schools in Lebret, Saskatchewan. Wendy works with the First Nation Health & Social Secretariat of Manitoba.

**Lisa Murdock** is an off-reserve member of the K'atl'odeeche First Nation, located in the Northwest Territories. Lisa was born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where she continues to reside with her husband and three children. Lisa's mother survived St. Henry's Mission in Fort Vermillion and St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Residential School in Fort Resolution. Lisa's professional background includes social research, policy development and program administration aimed at improving life outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. She currently works as a consultant for the Province of Manitoba.



**Roberta Stout** is Cree and a member of the Kehewin First Nation in Alberta. Her mother, Madeleine Dion Stout, is a survivor of Blue Quills residential school. Roberta works as an independent researcher and consultant.

**Claudette Michell** (1966–2012). We dedicate our work to Claudette who passed away suddenly in the fall of 2012. A Cree woman from The Pas, Claudette's mother attended Sturgeon Landing and Guy Hill residential schools. Claudette was a Pipe Carrier, a Sundancer, a mother, a grandmother, an educator, a community role model, and a sister and friend to us.

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**The Right Honourable Paul Martin**

# Aboriginal Canada Today: Changing the Course of History

*The Right Honourable Paul Martin was the 2013 Recipient of the Symons Medal. This is the acceptance speech he delivered at the Confederation Centre for the Arts, Charlottetown, PEI, Thursday, October 10, 2013*

Lieutenant Governor Lewis, Premier Ghiz, Chief Justice Jenkins. Senators, MPs, MLA's, Board Members of the Confederation Centre of the Arts, Ladies and gentlemen:

Before beginning my remarks, I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq peoples.

Let me also congratulate Wayne Hambly, Chairman of the Fathers of Confederation Buildings Trust, George Kitching, and members of the Symons Medal Committee, Jessie Inman, Chief

Executive Officer of the Confederation Centre and all those who are involved with the organization of this magnificent event.

And finally let me say how good it is to see Tom and Christine Symons. As a new and very young President of Trent University, Tom Symons revolutionized the context and teaching of post-secondary Native Studies in Canada. It was not easy. He was up against the most regressive form of conventional wisdom, the abrupt dismissal that there could be anything worthwhile in Indigenous studies beyond a bit of archeology. But he persevered and he triumphed. Quite simply, he didn't only teach history, he made it.

You will not be surprised therefore at how honoured I am to have been asked to deliver this year's Symons Lecture on the State of Confederation and Aboriginal Canada. Nor will you be surprised if I tell you how pleased I am to be the recipient of this year's Symons Medal. You will be surprised however, when I tell you that I thought twice about showing up.

Tom Symons, was a great influence on me when he taught history at the University of Toronto, and he is a great friend. That is, he became a great friend, once he was no longer able to grade my papers, criticize my prose, and point out that occasionally one is supposed to show up for tutorials.

Now you understand my dilemma. It is one thing to receive the Symons Medal, it is quite another to deliver the Symons Lecture thereby giving its namesake, some 50 years later, the chance

once again to pour salt on my poor bullet ridden carcass.

That being said, I thought: if I show up, I will have his medal, as reparation for the injustices I suffered so many years ago, and with that I begin....

### **The Paradox of Confederation**

We are here today to celebrate the vision of those who almost a century and a half ago met to create a Maritime union and the larger vision that emerged from all sides when the delegations from central Canada joined in.

Confederation three years later was the remarkable result. It was the coming together of the descendants of two European nations often at war with each other and a scattering of religions that certainly had their differences. Yet from this, or perhaps because of it, was created a new country that opened its doors to the world and which stands today as a beacon of equality and freedom.

The paradox in all of this is that the First Peoples of this land, the First Nations, the Métis Nation and Inuit whose ancestors had been here since time immemorial were not invited to the party. Yet, they were major players. For instance the Royal Proclamation of 1763—250 years old this year—recognized the powers of the “various Nations or Tribes of Indians” to make treaties, and established that before a settlement of tribal lands could take place a treaty needed to be entered into. This was no

minor acknowledgement.

Given this, it would have been understandable in both 1864 and 1867 had the representatives of Aboriginal Canada asked: Why weren't we invited to your meetings? Just as their descendants a century and a half later are asking with rising impatience—What is our place in Confederation today?

To answer this last question there are a number of key and inter-related issues that need to be addressed. Let me briefly mention three of these, all of which must be dealt with equitably if we are to build a stronger and more cohesive Canada, a Canada where the First Peoples are truly included. They are: the treaties, the *Indian Act*, and the Inherent Right of Self-Government.

### **The Treaties**

First, the Treaties and the different perspectives pertaining to their spirit and intent. The Aboriginal perspective, on the one hand is that the act of Treaty making recognized the pre-existing sovereignty of the various “Nations or Tribes of Indians.” For them a treaty did not mean subjugation but rather the agreement to coexist and to share the land and its resources.

On the other hand, for some Canadians, treaties are seen simply as land surrenders wherein the First Peoples relinquished whatever control they had over their lands save for small reserves which were to be managed by the Crown until their owners

were assimilated into the dominant society.

Clearly the Aboriginal perspective is the right interpretation. This for many reasons, of which I will mention but two:

First of all, for Indigenous Peoples throughout the world, land is not simply a commodity to be bought or sold. As the great Warrior Chief Tecumseh said, it could no more be sold than air.<sup>1</sup>

Second, during the latter half of the 18th century the British were worried about tribal rebellions, continuing loyalties to the French, and, later, that their colonies could fall to the United States. In short, the British needed tribal allies. Knowing this, clearly the Proclamation in 1763 wasn't about the First Peoples giving up their land. It was rather about the Crown trying to keep the "Nations or Tribes of Indians" on side as partners, by unequivocally acknowledging their rights. Hence any interpretation that violates established Aboriginal rights is a violation of the Crown's honour and, ultimately, Canada's honour.

### **The *Indian Act*.**

Second, The *Indian Act*. First enacted in 1876, The *Indian Act* is the antithesis of the original treaty relationship. It is certainly not an appropriate mechanism to address the governmental relationship between the First Nations and Canada. Quite simply, the *Indian Act* treats Indians as wards of the state and places an enormous amount of power and responsibility in the hands

of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs to make all the important decisions affecting them— from birth to death. Decisions that if any government tried to make for you or me, we would be out in the streets.

Indeed it would not be an exaggeration to summarize this part of our history with the First Peoples by saying that the purpose of the *Indian Act* was their assimilation and the creation of Residential Schools its accomplice.

I hear you say: ‘Well if the *Indian Act* is so bad why we don’t just repeal it?’

And so we should. But to do so first we will have to answer the question: “What replaces it?” A question which cannot be answered without taking into account the inherent right of First Nations to govern themselves. Because to move beyond the *Indian Act*, without genuinely implementing the inherent right of self-government would be to compound history’s denial of the First Nations place within Confederation.

So it is to the Inherent Right of self-government I now turn.

### **The Inherent Right of Self-Government**

To begin with—although Aboriginal rights are recognized and affirmed in section 35 of the Constitution Act 1982—the fact is the First Peoples have always had the inherent right to govern

themselves, a fact we acknowledged long ago by entering into formal treaties with them.

The Supreme Court in *Van der Peet* made this abundantly clear when Justice Lamer said, and I quote:

the doctrine of Aboriginal rights exists and is recognized and affirmed by s. 35(1) because of one simple fact: when the Europeans arrived in North America, the Aboriginal peoples were already here living in communities on the land and participating in distinctive cultures as they had done for centuries. It is this fact which...mandates their special legal and now constitutional status.<sup>2</sup>

Justice Williamson of the B.C. Supreme Court took this a step further in what is the most comprehensive decision dealing with the inherent right of self-government stating that:

Aboriginal rights, and in particular a right to self-government akin to a legislative power to make laws, survived as one of the unwritten 'underlying values' of the Constitution outside the powers distributed to Parliament and the legislatures in 1867.<sup>3</sup>

In short the inherent right of self-government exists. It has long existed. And section 35 was put in place to protect it.

So wherein lies the problem?



It lies in the reality that these matters are political as much as they are constitutional. And so the answers to the complex question of how to truly recognize the First Nations place in Confederation will not be found only by going to court, but, unfortunately—if history is to be our guide—will require negotiation. Even with a succession of favorable court decisions in the First Nations' back pocket.

And it is here that the rubber hits the road. For the history of too many federal governments is one of refusing to acknowledge the inherent right in any meaningful way. This is what occurs virtually every time you hear the Aboriginal leadership accuse the government of acting unilaterally or of pretending to do consultation but without substance. This is why we need to release the First Nations from the shackles of the *Indian Act*. Because, strange as it may sound, it appears not to be enough to recognize the inherent right *constitutionally*. It must be recognized *politically* as well.

The point to underline here is that acknowledging the inherent right is not a gift to First Nations, a luxury, or simply fodder for some academic or legal debate. It is a necessity, if Canada is to move on from its colonial past, and First Nations are to take their rightful place within Confederation.

And it is happening. But it is happening ever so slowly. There are now some 40 First Nations governing outside of the *Indian Act*. Most of these were able, through negotiation, to complete a modern treaty with Canada or the provinces or territories.

There are also practical and working examples of First Nations confirming their inherent right outside of the process of treaty making. For instance, in British Columbia, the Westbank First Nation achieved its inherent right of self-government through an agreement not a treaty.

Now at this point you may ask, if some can transition into self-government, wherein lies the problem?

The answer is these represent but a small minority. And, at the rate at which self-government negotiations are going, it will take a hundred years, for all the First Nations that seek it, to have in place even rudimentary governance beyond the *Indian Act*.

### **What to Do About Self-Government**

So what to do? There are three alternatives to an interminable series of separate self-government negotiations.

One, a First Nation can simply act without recognition from Canada, while running the risk of legal challenges to its decisions, from both within its Nation (i.e.: from its own citizens), or from the outside: from third parties and other governments, for example.

Two, a First Nation can go to court to seek a declaration of its powers to govern and the subject matters over which it can make laws. The problem here is, although the courts have said the inherent right exists, it is not really feasible to test in court

every power of government for every First Nation, and as I've already said, history demonstrates that a court decision won't necessarily bring needed closure.

And, finally, the third alternative—which could have merit, although it appears to require a level of governmental goodwill not yet demonstrated—is one that has been suggested by many First Nations Leaders. It is the need for self-government recognition legislation by the federal government, stipulating that, at the instigation of a First Nation or a group of First Nations, Canada would recognize their inherent right and deal with the transition from the *Indian Act* on pragmatic terms where Canada no longer plays the reluctant gatekeeper.

Why do I say on pragmatic terms? It is because given the vast differences that exist across the country, a cookie cutter approach will not work. Some communities are not ready for comprehensive self-government and would rather do it in steps, taking on for example responsibility for certain areas of jurisdiction first, such as land management. Others will seek different levels of self-government on a permanent or semi-permanent basis and finally there are those who will simply seek guidance as to the 'How' of it all.

This should not surprise us and in each case all should be accommodated.

## **Building for the Future**

To this end there has been much discussion by academics, politicians, bureaucrats, and lawyers on the inherent right of self-government. But by far the best work is being done by the First Nations themselves.

As we speak, many of them are already actively building for the future. This hit home to me one day when I spoke to the British Columbia Assembly of First Nations. After I finished my remarks I sat in for the rest of the meeting as Regional Chief Jody Wilson-Raybould explained to the assembled chiefs how the inherent right could be established and acted upon in different ways, in different communities, in different stages of decolonization, moving through what she called the post-colonial door.

At the end of the session she gave every Chief there a document entitled “*The Governance Toolkit, a Guide to Nation Building*”. It was a step-by-step guide to self-government, and by the way it is one of the most practical political science textbooks I have ever read. A warning though: it is really thick. I almost broke my back carrying it home!

## **The Federal Government’s Role**

The next question is—given the court decisions, and the obvious fact that opening the space for pluralism within Confederation is the only way of breaking the state of dependency which

afflicts so many communities—why is it that Ottawa’s traditional attitude is one of inhibiting self-government rather than encouraging it?

The answer is that some of this is a hangover from the paternalism of the past, some of it is ideological, and some of it is fiscal. In other words, one of the reasons that Canada acts as gatekeeper is rooted in the fear of unknown costs. The real question however that should be asked is: what will it cost if we don’t support appropriate First Nations governance?

The answer is the cost will be staggering, as can be seen in the current government policy of substituting jail cells for schools when dealing with the most rapidly growing segment of our population. Clearly the solution lies in a true partnership and thus the commitment to a new fiscal relationship with the First Peoples. One along the lines we see between other orders of government where Ottawa plays its part, so that it doesn’t matter where you live or who you are, you receive comparable services to other Canadians.

At the present time, Aboriginal Canadians are expected to do more with less. This is morally repugnant. Or, as someone put it: we need to stop punishing the victims of a broken system, and fix the system instead.

## **The Kelowna Accord**

This was the reason I put in place the process leading to the Kelowna Accord.

What was the Accord about? It was about a seat at the national table confirming the modern relationship. And it was about ensuring that the inherent right of self-government had the equitable funding required, without which it would be an empty vessel.

Why an Accord? Because we knew to get there would require a full partnership between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, the Aboriginal Peoples and their leaders.

The first step in the process was to host the Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable in Ottawa, which was the first meeting of its kind ever held in Canada. It involved 147 participants embodying federal representatives, senior provincial and territorial representatives and participants from the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), the Métis National Council (MNC), the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), and the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP).

Instead of *telling* the Aboriginal leaders of Canada what the challenges were, we *asked* them. Then we listened. In terms of the solutions, we asked them what they believed they might be. And again we listened.

The discussions were open, the will to succeed was shared on all sides, and, as a result, the following priority areas were established: healthcare, housing, clean water, education, economic development, and accountability. Breakout sessions were then initiated in each area and the negotiations began without delay. All the while acknowledging that, as the needs of each province and territory differed, so too did the needs of each Indigenous community.

In November 2005 after almost eighteen months of negotiation, the unprecedented First Ministers meeting involving the leaders of the national Aboriginal organizations, the provincial and territorial Premiers, the Prime Minister and members of the cabinet took place in Kelowna B.C. and confirmed agreement in all priority areas.

Some have asked why it took so long to arrive at the Accord. It was because the decisions were not made unilaterally. And because the Aboriginal leaders were given time to consult with their respective communities. For these were *their* issues and *their* answers.

In summary, we committed to raising substantively the standard of living for Aboriginal peoples over the course of the next ten years, with a strategy that included measuring annually the results of our progress for the first five years, such that the subsequent five years would build on that improvement.

Measurable targets were set in all priority areas and a down payment of \$5.1 billion was booked for the first five years by Finance Minister Ralph Goodale, with the second five year funding to be confirmed at a greater amount depending on the results obtained.

When we met that last day in Kelowna to confirm our understanding, all at the table could feel the emotion of the event. The country had come together. We were a colonial power no longer.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that it had the unanimous support of the Aboriginal leaders and the provinces and territories including those with Progressive Conservative governments, the next federal government walked away from the agreement and expropriated the \$5.1 billion that had been committed to improving the living conditions of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada.

In both substance and in the unprecedented collaboration by all parties, this was a huge loss.

You only have to look at the core areas under discussion to see this. For instance, let's discuss three of these—health care (and the continuing, deplorable social indicators related to health), education, and the economy—to understand what a difference in approach can make.



## **Health Care**

What do we know about Aboriginal health care? Well we know that the lack of funding for health care in the North and elsewhere is evident in the virtual absence of measures of prevention and in the void of health care professionals where and when needed.

And we know the results of this: Inuit children and teenagers are eleven times more likely than others to succumb to an infectious or parasitic disease. First Nations type 2 diabetes rates are three to five times higher on-reserve than elsewhere in Canada. Infant mortality rates are as much as four times higher than the national average in some Aboriginal communities, and life expectancy is five to seven years less than that of non-Aboriginal Canadians.

But it isn't only the health statistics that leap out at you that are where the problem lies, it is also within the wider determinants of what makes a healthy body.

### *Children's welfare*

Children's welfare for instance, where the federal government continues against every notion of what is right to defend itself to this day before the Human Rights Tribunal contending that it's per capita welfare payments which are 22% lower on-reserve than provincial payments off-reserve, are not acts of overt discrimination.

Give me a break!

### *Clean water*

A few months ago, Montreal had a boil water advisory. It made the headlines nationally and it was fixed within two days.

What happens on-reserve? As of the spring 2011 (the last numbers available) there were 111 First Nations reserves under drinking water advisories. The public ignored them, hence governments did too, and their average duration was 343 days. True, the government recently passed new Drinking Water Legislation, but then it failed to adequately fund it. It's called passing the buck. In other words, if someone is to be blamed, let's make sure it's the First Nations community. The government can point to its new clean water legislation and no one will realize that the First Nation didn't have the wherewithal to fix the problem.

### *Housing*

The tuberculosis rate among status Indians is 31 times higher than that of non-Aboriginal Canadians. Why is the transmission rate so viral? Could it be the over-crowded substandard housing of the kind found in Attawapiskat and too many other Northern communities?

What was the government's reaction when Attawapiskat hit the headlines? It was to complain about the band's accounting, as if that will keep you warm in the winter. Unfortunately, the diversion worked. Public attention strayed and didn't return, not to Attawapiskat or to the multitude of other communities where deplorable housing is the rule, not the exception.

What makes the government's use of the bands' accounting as a diversionary tactic even more unacceptable is the fact that accountability was one of the key areas in the Kelowna Accord. All sides recognized that capacity-building in this area was essential. Furthermore, the then AFN Grand Chief Phil Fontaine suggested the creation of an Aboriginal Auditor-General to ensure transparency and the accountability of First Nations government's to the people of their communities. We agreed and so did Canada's Auditor General Sheila Fraser. Despite this, the new government wouldn't even look at it.

Even more to the point, when the new government walked away from the Kelowna Accord, the group dealing with accountability asked that their work continue to be developed. The government refused! Enough said!

Wherein lies the problem in so many of these issues? It is the blend of societal indifference compounded by a government paternalism which exists even to this day.

### *Substance addiction*

For instance, take substance addiction, a problem throughout Canada. How do we deal with it in remote Northern Aboriginal communities? We do so largely by sending those addicted, to treatment centers down south, despite all the added stress this places on young people who have never been away from home, ironically repeating the failed policy of the residential schools- i.e.: that you must leave your community in order to receive help.

There has to be a better way? At least the Ministry of Health in Nunavut thinks so!

Last fall in Cambridge Bay a new substance addictions pilot project was launched. The program trains Inuit Elders as counselors who in turn provide treatment rooted in traditional values. They mentor patients and organize traditional activities like ice fishing to relieve the stress. By integrating community elders and traditional values, patients are provided regular access to a support network that is open and familiar to them. Of course the elders are not experts in every facet of addiction. But by all accounts the treatment is an improvement. And why, in the name of common sense, if other experts are required, can't they be available on site?

### *Cultural identity and health*

A last point on health. There can be no greater example of paternalism than the question too many ask when confronted with the insistence by Aboriginal Canadians on the retention of their languages, their traditions, and their culture. That question is: 'Why can't they be more like us?'

My normal reaction to that question is to ask: 'Why in heaven's name should they be?'

But of course there are deeper answers, beginning with the injustice of one society trying to take away another's culture. In failing to understand a people's need for their identity to be

grounded in their traditions, languages, and culture, we end up dismantling their sense of belonging and confidence. As a result, they lose resilience, and hope, and become enveloped in a sense of isolation, the root cause of addiction, and, too often, worse.

For instance, the suicide rate among First Nations youth is six times that of other Canadian youth and incredibly the multiple is even higher for Inuit.

However a recent study among British Columbia First Nations showed that whereas the staggering suicide rates exist in communities where language skills have declined, in other communities where native culture flourishes the youth suicide rate is much lower, in fact close to nil! The reason for this is not hard to find and it is one more argument for the inherent right of self-government: that control of one's destiny and confidence in one's identity is essential if a people is to thrive.

That's why they shouldn't have to be more like us!

This reasoning applies to the health care system. It applies ever more so to the education system.

## **Education**

The most effective way to respond to the current marginalization of the First Peoples of Canada is through the improvement of educational outcomes. For this reason one of the goals of

the Kelowna Accord was to close the staggering high school graduation gap between Aboriginal students and others by 2016. Unfortunately we have now lost almost seven years towards this goal.

There are many reasons for the poor outcomes. One of the most important, is the discrimination evident in the shortfall in federal government funding of on-reserve schools, which in some provinces is in a range of 20-30% per capita when compared to the greater funding provided by the provinces to schools in their jurisdiction.

Indeed in some provinces the shortfall is even higher. For instance, Premier Wall of Saskatchewan and Chief Perry Bellegarde of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations recently announced that they were joining forces to convince Ottawa to bridge the “40 - 50% gap”<sup>4</sup> that exists in their province.

As a result of these funding shortfalls, First Nations students across the country attending on-reserve schools can be taught by unqualified teachers, they often do not have school libraries, proper gymnasiums or science and computer labs. There are virtually no specialists and few programs for students with disabilities. Finally, as if all of this was not bad enough the physical conditions of many schools are so grim that most Canadian parents would not allow their children on the premises.

The question here is not simply why shouldn't a school on reserve receive equal per capita funding when compared to a public school ten kilometers away? That should be a given! Free elementary and secondary school education is a universal right in Canada. Given the requirement that exists for catch up funding, the more pertinent question is: why are reserve schools not receiving their funding based on need?

What is the reason the Federal government refuses to properly fund reserve schools? Well the first thing you will hear is that we have a deficit. I know a little bit about deficits! And let me tell you: there is spending you can delay and make it up later in order to deal with a faulty balance sheet. But when you delay the funding that enables six-year olds to learn how to read and write by grade three, you are telling them that they will have to play catchup for the rest of their lives. And no government has the right to do that.

I defer to no one on the issue of the inter-generational unfairness of deficits. But to balance the books on the backs of the education needs of the most vulnerable segment of our population is not only immoral, it is an economic absurdity. The fact is Canada's aging population cannot afford to waste a single talent, certainly not the talents of the youngest and fastest growing segment of our population. For instance, in 2016, the number of Aboriginal students in Manitoba entering grade one will be over 30%. In Saskatchewan 45% of all students entering kindergarten that year will be Aboriginal. So if anyone thinks this is not an economic issue, they had better think again.

What is needed?

The Aboriginal education system requires three things: It needs adequate funding. It needs to be freed from the government paternalism that makes it impossible for the growing body of skilled Aboriginal professionals to take ownership of the effort and it needs a partnership with Canadians to accelerate the process.

With the latter in mind, let me tell you about the initiative some of us started five years ago. While accessible education at our colleges and universities, our technical and vocational institutes has improved dramatically for Aboriginal students in the last two decades, unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the pillars on which all of this higher education is built. For this reason, when we created the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, we did so to focus on elementary and secondary school outcomes on and off reserve.

One of our courses is the Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program. Its goal is to teach Aboriginal students the elements of business, everything from marketing to bookkeeping, from how to raise money to how to close a sale. We started at a First Nations high school in Thunder Bay. Over the past five years, the program has expanded dramatically. It is now in eighteen schools, in seven provinces and one territory, and I am happy to tell you that this month we announced the introduction of the program in ten new schools in Saskatchewan.



One of the reasons for the success of the program is quite instructive. It has everything to do with the decision we made to develop the only set of Aboriginal business workbooks and textbooks in North America, if not the world. Workbooks and textbooks in which young First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students can see themselves. Books that build bridges.

Another one of our initiatives is the Accounting Mentorship Program, which encourages Aboriginal youth to complete high school and pursue professional or business careers including accounting. We partnered with the former Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants (CICA) now the Chartered Professional Accountants Canada and seven national accounting firms who provide mentors through their local offices. Currently, the program is offered to more than forty students in thirteen high schools, in nine cities and four provinces. Its goal is to provide mentorships such that Indigenous students who would otherwise never have the chance, can see the opportunities that could be open to them, if they pursue—and succeed—at their education.

Another program targets the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians which begins in elementary school. This program—the Model Schools Pilot Project—seeks to improve the teaching of literacy in the crucial early years on two South-Western Ontario reserve schools. The programs are based on teaching strategies and resources that originated in the Province of Ontario’s turn-around elementary schools. As a result, we’ve

seen a tremendous improvement both in student's reading and writing levels. Indeed many of the students are now achieving at a higher level than the Ontario average. This is real progress. It's happening on a small scale at the moment, but lives and futures are being changed.

Furthermore, in light of the fact that many children do not have access to the extra support the Model Schools Project provides, we are currently looking to develop a Later Literacy program as well which would work with older elementary school age children whose limited reading abilities could lead to their dropping out of school.

Finally, another valuable lesson arising out of the Model Schools Project is the importance of strong leadership skills within a school. In response to this—and at the request of many First Nations educators—we are examining the need to develop a Principal's Course, to help school leaders build the organizational capacity for increasing student achievement.

You will note how the success of one program leads to the demand for another and then another. The reason for this is not hard to find. The desire to improve the system is huge and once those teaching in Aboriginal schools see success in one area, it opens the floodgates.

That's the good news! The problem is that foundations, corporations, and groups like ours can do a lot, but if the federal government continues to underfund education for on-reserve

schools, those schools will continue to fall behind no matter what we and others do, and ultimately it is all of our children who will bear the cost.

Finally, there is one other education program I would like to mention. It arises out of the overwhelming need to increase public awareness of the issues facing Aboriginal Canadians. So far I've been talking about teaching Aboriginal students. Well this is a two way street. There are areas where non-Aboriginal students can use a leg up too. Quite simply we don't teach Canadian history very well and Aboriginal history barely at all.

In response we have partnered with Free the Children, the NGO founded by the Kielburger brothers and together we've developed the We Stand Together Campaign which teaches Aboriginal history. It has been a huge success and today the program is being taught in some 500 elementary and secondary schools across Canada.

Why is this so important? Why is it important that we understand the history of our land, in all of its shades and facets?

It is important because only if we know where we've been, will we be able to wrap our minds around the challenges that today confront the Aboriginal People of Canada and set our hearts to the cause of building the country.

## **The Economy**

Earlier I made the point that adequate funding of Aboriginal education is not only a moral issue, it is also an economic issue, given the growth rate of the Indigenous population of Canada. It is an economic issue for another reason as well. And that is the world's thirst for our natural resources.

Across our country, there are some \$650 billion worth of natural resource projects underway or planned for the next decade, mainly on or near traditional Aboriginal territories.<sup>5</sup> That these have been or will be the subject of extensive negotiation is beyond question. But let us not delude ourselves into thinking that this debate will be on colonial terms. Those days are over and so they should be.

What is sometimes difficult for those of us who are not Indigenous to understand is the spiritual nature of the Aboriginal connection to the land. Indeed the concept of preserving ancestral land and culture has been shared by Indigenous people the world over.

Unfortunately the goal of the colonial powers has been to take possession of that land by any means possible. And mostly they've succeeded.

This has always been an unfair fight—we have always known that. But now, however, we are beginning to understand that, in winning the battle, we may have lost the war. For the earth's

climate, its fish stocks, its environment are more fragile than many of us thought.

Indigenous peoples are not anti-development. They just want to leave something for the next generation. They call it their traditional values. We have only recently rediscovered those values. We call it being socially responsible. I like their way of looking at it better!

Clearly the future of a significant part of our economy now depends on how we manage the storehouse of natural resources that lie beneath the ground and in the seas that surround us. Historically the drive for economic growth has paid scant attention to sustainable development and as a result, too often it has been the Indigenous populations that have borne the burden of this, for the simple reason that much of these natural resources flow through, under and near their communities.

Thankfully things are changing, as the courts and the constitution have played an important role in protecting Aboriginal land rights. But that is not enough.

I recently spoke with a group of Aboriginal students at a high school where we had launched our business program. They were pro-resource development. But they wanted their communities to benefit from it, not to suffer from it.

Their focus was less on grievances and injustices arising from

past behavior, and more and more on what lay ahead. They spoke of their desire for opportunity, but also for choice. They placed enormous value on not just ‘fitting into’ the old industrial economy, but rather in building their future careers in sustainable industries, resource and non-resource companies that seek to grow and are profitable. But also recognize that the wanton depletion of natural capital and the gutting of social cohesion is just not on.

In most cases there is no difference on this issue between young Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. But there is a difference in whether the opportunity to benefit will be there for both. At the present time, it is not.

### **Changing the Course of History**

So how do we address this?

We do so by changing the course of history.

We do so by recognizing that natural resource development must be an opportunity to ensure that the status quo is abandoned- in favor of change for the better.

We do so by ensuring that Aboriginal Canadians are at the table from the beginning of the development process on their lands.

We do so by ensuring that they are included as key participants,

not just as laborers but also as skilled workers, managers, and owners.

We do so by confronting the consequences of our colonial past which continue unfortunately even unto today.

We do so by refusing to condone the repetitive breach of treaty rights, the damage arising from the *Indian Act*, and the political refusal to accept the inherent right of self-government.

We do so by refusing to accept the overt discrimination in the provision of the country's fundamental rights: in children's welfare, in universal healthcare, and in universal primary and secondary school education.

We do so by recognizing that whether our ancestors have been here since time immemorial or whether we arrived on these shores yesterday, that we must build this country together. That is how we will change the course of history!

We have learned much, as the years have unfolded, about ourselves, about our country and about the First Peoples of this land.

For what the founding Father's accomplished we will be forever in their debt. But the issues of rights, fairness and equality are not to be judged today as they were then. This is not 1863, it is 2013. This is not the 19th century, it is the 21st.

Our forefathers met the challenges as they saw them in their time.

Let us not be afraid to meet the challenges as we see them in our time!

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## Notes

- 1 Gregg, Allan. Tecumseh's Ghost. October 4, 2013, <http://allangregg.com/tecumseh/>
- 2 *R v Van der Peet*, [1996] 2 S.C.R. 507, at para. 30
- 3 *Campbell v. B.C. and Nisga'a* *Campbell v. British Columbia Nation* 2000 BCSC 1123; at para 81.
- 4 French, Janet. "FSIN, province push for equal education funds." *The Star Phoenix* 24 August, 2013.
- 5 "Canada Energy Summit 2012", Natural Resources Canada, <http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/media-room/speeches/2012/6736>



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## Biography

**The Right Honourable Paul Martin** was called to the Ontario Bar in 1966 after he completed his studies in philosophy and history at St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto and as a graduate of the University of Toronto Faculty of Law. Before entering politics, he had a distinguished career as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of The CSL Group Inc., the largest self-unloading shipping company in the world. Its acquisition in 1981 represented the most important leveraged buyout in Canada at that time.

After leaving his long political career, Mr. Martin founded the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative focusing on elementary and secondary education for Aboriginal students and the Capital for Aboriginal Prosperity and Entrepreneurship (CAPE) Fund, an investment fund investing in Aboriginal business.

Internationally, he is chairman of the Congo Basin Forest Fund, a 200 million dollar British–Norwegian–Canadian poverty alleviation and sustainable development fund for the ten-nation Congo Basin Rainforest. He sits on the Advisory Council of the Coalition for Dialogue on Africa, sponsored by the African Union, the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank. He is also a commissioner for the Global Ocean Commission.

He is married to Sheila Ann Cowan, and they have three sons: Paul, Jamie, and David and four grandchildren Ethan, Liam, Finn, and Sienna.

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**Wayne K. Spear**

# Time to Get Our Indian Act Together for First Nations Students

The Israeli diplomat, orator and polyglot, Abba Eban, is today memorialized in the truism that men and nations behave wisely only once they have exhausted all the other alternatives. In the case of Canada's exhausted Indian Act policies, the alternatives to a wiser course have been many as well as durable, as we all know. Thus it is with surprise, and enthusiasm even, that the Assembly of First Nations is this week absorbing Canada's late acceptance of the five "Conditions for the Success of First Nations Education," enunciated in the AFN's December 2013 unanimous resolution and enshrined in Finance Minister Flaherty's 2014 budget. These conditions are as follows:

1. Respect and recognition of inherent rights and title, Treaty Rights and First Nations control of First Nations education jurisdiction.
2. Statutory guarantee of funding.
3. Funding to support First Nations education systems that are grounded in Indigenous languages and cultures.

4. Mechanisms to ensure reciprocal accountability and no unilateral federal oversight or authority.
5. Ongoing meaningful dialogue and co-development of options.

I mentioned Eban for another reason, having to do with symmetry. For he once observed of the Palestinians that they “never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity,” and indeed it’s well worth reflecting on this dark theme of opportunity foregone as we consider the divisive and acrimonious responses to the February 7 Harper-Atleo agreement-in-principle.

Verna Kirkness, a signatory of the 1972 National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) report *Indian Control of Indian Education*, has recently recounted—in a book modishly titled *Creating Space*—the “ill-conceived plan” of the NIB to shed its leadership precisely at the moment the federal government had conceded the wisdom of the Brotherhood’s proposal of Indian parental responsibility and local control of Indian education. “To this day,” she writes:

I have no idea how we could all abandon ship at the same time. It was a disastrous move. The end result was that a new president was elected for the NIB. In time, the joint NIB-Cabinet committee was disbanded and the work of our joint working committee to revise the Indian Act was lost. I often wonder how different the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education would look today had the revision to the Indian Act been accomplished.

A mere three years prior to Indian Control of Indian Education and an abrupt federal change of course, Trudeau had introduced his White Paper, ruminating in public the extinguishment of treaties and the abolition of the Indian Department as native people were fully absorbed into the political, economic and cultural bloodstream of Canada. It took the non-violent but nonetheless resolute community occupation of the Blue Quills Indian Residential School to bring Jean Chrétien, then Minister of Indian Affairs, to the negotiating table—or as it was in this instance, the “OK, enough already” table.

Thanks to this effort, by 1972 Blue Quills was the first native-administered school in Canada, thereby converting Indian Control of Indian Education from a book title to an active public policy principle. Other schools and educational systems would gradually follow, up to the present-day and often cited example of the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, a Mi'kmaw organization that took control of education away from the province of Nova Scotia and that has been widely cited as a success, outperforming provincial indicators. The feds by the 1970s had come to an agreement-in-principle along the lines of the education model first advanced by native people in the numbered treaty negotiations, a century prior. But like so many things related to Indian policy, good words were followed by quarter measures and half-assing, as well as by the persistent under-resourcing which guaranteed the systemic deprivations of Indian residential schools. Seen in their proper historical context, the lost opportunities and exhausted alternatives of 1972 were already

well long in the tooth, and are precisely one generation longer today as we comprehend them in the call-to-action known as Shannen's Dream.

The points not to be missed here are that we must all take seriously the proposition that we are currently on a course toward failure and that something resembling political backbone and boldness must follow. On the government's side, a federal bureaucracy that in fact has no education department and no education expertise must give up its historical fondness for micromanagement; meanwhile, on the First Nation's side, the time has arrived to take both the concept and practice of self-control and self-determination to their logical conclusions. Let's call it getting our collective Indian act together. The last week has at the very least brought both halves of this proposition into the realm of the potential, a good place for a beginning.

It is unusual to write about a piece of federal legislation, in this case the "First Nations Education Act," when in fact no such legislation exists. Like the White Paper, the FNEA was a trial balloon, introduced in October 2013 under the title "A Proposal for a Bill." This proposal was widely and emphatically rejected by First Nations individuals, and in its place the February 7 principles have been substituted. What exists as of Budget Day 2014 is not "an agreement" so much as agreement itself: agreement to proceed within a fixed fiscal framework and upon five established principles. The word historical is over-used, but it happens that the principles informing this agreement are

precisely that, representing as they do the long-standing will and aspirations of native people going back generations.

The National Chief, Shawn Atleo, has characterized this agreement as “an enabling framework”—the beginning, rather than the culmination, of a discussion. “We now have a new approach,” he says, “based on the long-standing call by First Nations for First Nations control of First Nations education, respecting fully our rights and responsibilities, supported by the necessary funding to close the gap and support success for our students. This is first and foremost about our children.”

As the native population within Canada soars, and as the measurables pertaining to Aboriginal quality of life stagnate, it has become more and more urgent to—as the proposal for a First Nations Education Act was titled—work together for First Nations students. This agreement, and the federal budget framework into which it is embedded, is an opportunity to do just that—whatever one’s skepticism and mistrust may recommend to the contrary.

## **Epilogue**

Three months after this essay appeared in the *Huffington Post* and *National Post*, Shawn Atleo resigned as the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. Education was the National Chief’s signature initiative, and Bill C-33—the First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act—had become

an occasion of intense controversy. My conclusion, for whatever it is worth, is that the repudiation of the FNCFNEA is a patch of a broader cloth. From the high point of 2008, when the Prime Minister apologized for the Indian Residential School System and committed to a new relationship, we have descended to an evident state of mistrust and acrimony between this federal government and aboriginal people. Federal cuts to aboriginal-run programs and services account in part for this development, as does the government's refusal to institute a murdered and missing indigenous women inquiry. But the most critical commitment of the Harper government has been to the extraction industries, in particularly the oil sands and shale gas. The sudden-wealth politics of twenty-first century Canada, an emergent oil and gas super-power, will now play out over the coming years. The discussion for the foreseeable future will concern lands and resources, aboriginal rights and title, and this elusive new relationship. Nor will the future be a matter merely of conversation. As Idle No More has indicated, there is now an appetite for direct action and confrontation. The negotiators and pragmatists, among whom one may count the former National Chief, constitute only one segment of the aboriginal population. A new relationship between Canada and aboriginal people may indeed be on the horizon.

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## Biography

**Wayne K. Spear** was born in Buffalo, New York, and is Mohawk from the Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation, Ontario. He is a writer of essays, newspaper articles, fiction, and poetry and has worked in communications, health, and education. He is a *National Post* and *Huffington Post* contributor as well as an entrepreneur working from his home in Toronto, Ontario. His forthcoming books include *Residential School, A Children's History* (with Larry Loyie and Constance Brissenden) and *Full Circle: the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the unfinished work of hope, healing and reconciliation*.





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Mike DeGagné

## Afterword

Reconciliation, simply put, is reaching a state of common understanding. Not common agreement, but common understanding. This is a book about reconciliation and how a shared understanding of the urgency of healing and justice has been taken up.

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is drawing to a close, and has spent the past few years finding a way to engage Canadians in the process of truth-seeking around the issue of Indian Residential Schools. Not necessarily reconciliation-seeking, but truth-seeking. We are left with the notion that seeking truth, telling our story, will lead us inevitably to a better understanding of each other and reconciliation. This is a way of consigning reconciliation to the "too hard" pile of history, leaving it for another day or for another process. The idea arises that reconciliation is somehow complicated or beyond our abilities to create for ourselves. This book and its predecessor *Speaking My Truth* constitute an attempt to reach a better understanding of reconciliation as a vital process; but more importantly it demonstrates that reconciliation is not left to others, it is something that each of us creates on our own. We create reconciliation by learning to listen and then by speaking about what we have heard.

When the TRC first started its work, it held a conference in Montreal to solicit ideas for its plan of action. A young Aboriginal researcher from Dartmouth University was one of the conference speakers. He described his research and spoke about spending a summer in the national archives, reading through testimony from a 1990s look at Aboriginal life, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). He posed the question: “How many linear feet of RCAP testimony do you think are on the shelves in the archives?” The answer was 120 feet. “And how many more feet do you think we’ll need before Canadians understand us?” How many more feet of testimony? How much more *truth* do we need?

Truth telling and sharing was at the centre of the TRC’s work. But the question arises “to whom are we telling our truth, and will sharing what has happened to us bring us closer to common understanding?” No one who has heard testimony from former students of residential school has left unmoved, but we often tell these stories for ourselves and for each other, seeking solace in the catharsis of speaking our truth out loud and finding others with a similar story who nod in agreement. Truth telling is good and important to healing but will it lead to broader social understanding?

Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians began decades ago, and started with Aboriginal people understanding that healing ourselves would have to be the first step. Alongside growing political action and dissent, a small group of people started the sobriety movement and soon programs to address health issues gained momentum. In

the early 1990s leaders began to speak about the abuse that occurred at residential schools, and we examined what had happened and how it affected our communities. Some churches then recognized their role in operating the schools and began to reach out to their Aboriginal congregations with apology.

By the 2000s, the federal government had begun to create programs to address healing and reconciliation. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was born out of this moment in history. When the government settled Canada's largest class action suit, it further provided a measure of recognition and justice for former residential school students. The federal apology followed and seemed to set the ground for the TRC to dramatically shift relations among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community. As of today, the final steps are being taken to wind down federal support for healing and reconciliation.

Those of us who have been deeply involved in this process, as many of the contributors in this volume have been, are left to ask, did we reach a finish line? We realize that we are not fully reconciled and that there are many outstanding issues stilling remaining for all Canadians to discuss and explore. This book is an attempt to aid this continued exploration, to have Canadians, through the privacy of a book, read the perspectives of others and pose questions of themselves and their beliefs.

As the final federally supported healing and reconciliation programs close in the coming month, we are compelled to acknowledge the work of so many that have come before us. In the late 1980s, we entered a small stream of healing activity and

programs, and we now find ourselves carried along by a torrent of actions taken by communities, governments, churches, and of course by former students themselves. Progress towards common understanding has been made, but we are nowhere near a finish line.

We will measure our success by each person who reads a story and decides that perhaps what they thought about Aboriginal people needs re-thinking. As the individual texts collected here suggest, meaningful change will continue to grow with this re-thinking as our understanding of what is true takes hold.

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## Biography

**Mike DeGagné** was executive director of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (1998–2012), the national Aboriginal organization dedicated to addressing the legacy of Canada’s Indian residential school system. He has worked in the field of addiction and mental health for the past 25 years, first as a community worker on reserve in northern Ontario and later with the Addiction Research Foundation, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, and the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program. From 1988–98, he served as an executive with provincial and federal agencies including Indian and Northern Affairs Canada as a director, an accounting operations, and a senior negotiator. He also served as director for First Nations and Inuit Health Programs at Health Canada.

Mike lectures nationally and internationally on issues of Aboriginal health, residential schools, reconciliation, and governance. He serves on a number of boards, including Champlain Local Health Integration Network. He is currently Chairman of the Child Welfare League of Canada and a member of the board of directors for the Mental Health Commission of Canada and was past chairman of Ottawa’s Queensway Carleton Hospital.

Mike is currently Nipissing University’s seventh President and Vice-Chancellor. His academic credentials include a Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of Toronto, a Master in Administration from Central Michigan University, a Master of Laws from York University’s Osgoode Hall, and a Doctorate in Educational Administration from Michigan State University that focuses on Aboriginal post-secondary education.



## RECONCILIATION & THE WAY FORWARD

*Reconciliation & the Way Forward* is a collection of essays and personal reflections that looks at the issues of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada. As a follow-up volume to *Speaking My Truth: Reflections on Reconciliation and Residential School*, this text seeks to reframe debate by proposing a shift of focus onto civil society and those individuals who have made significant contributions to the formal and informal processes of truth and reconciliation. *Reconciliation & the Way Forward* asks, "What's next?"

The last decade has transformed our collective understandings of the Indian Residential School System and its lasting impacts on generations of peoples. Survivors have led this process of rewriting history by sharing their experiences and their resilience. As the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, the Settlement Agreement, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission wrap up, it is vital to reflect on what has been accomplished, but it is also crucial to consider the way forward and work that still needs to be done.

*Reconciliation & the Way Forward* builds on the leadership of Survivors by providing insight into how individuals from across the fields of health care, education, justice, visual arts, and literature take up the healing path and their thoughts on creating a shared, transformative vision of Canada.



Aboriginal Healing Foundation

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RECONCILIATION & THE WAY FORWARD

companion to  
"Speaking My Truth"

# RECONCILIATION & THE WAY FORWARD

Collected Essays & Personal Reflections

edited by  
SHELAGH ROGERS  
MIKE DEGAGNÉ  
GLEN LOWRY  
SARA FRYER

AHF