



# A Human Future

VOLUME 13 ■ NUMBER 3 ■ FALL 2015

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Dr. Marie Wilson has served on the TRC since 2009. An award-winning journalist and executive manager for CBC North, she was first host of the CBC's Focus North, launched the first daily northern TV news service, and developed the Arctic Winter Games and True North Concerts. She has taught in Africa and delivered training through the South African Broadcasting Corporation. She has an honorary Doctorate of Laws degree. She and her husband, Stephen Kakfwi, have 3 children and 4 grandchildren.

## *After the TRC – The Path Ahead*

### An Interview with Commissioner Marie Wilson (PART I)

The Canadian government established the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada** because it finally had to acknowledge the great damage done Indigenous people by the government-supported residential school system. It has been said that just as the schools persisted over 7 generations, it will take 7 generations to heal the damage and for a truthful national story to take hold. It's for our generation to begin. Dr. Marie Wilson is one of the 3 Commissioners who tirelessly travelled the country for 5 years recording the history of abuse. We are grateful to her for this interview. – *B. Porter, ed.*

**Beth Porter:** Canada has a new Federal government, and they have said they will implement the 94 recommendations or “Calls to Action” of the TRC. Where should they begin?

**Marie Wilson:** I think one of the first orders of business would be to make sure that all senior members of government and all in the Cabinet have the recommendations and have read and understood them. The document is not 94 pages; it's 10 or 11 pages!

There is a recommendation at the beginning of the section on Reconciliation that calls for the establishment of a National Council for Reconciliation. [See numbers 53 to 56.] That is a very important place to start because this will be the implementation body, the oversight body, and will become a place for keeping track of progress and keeping alive the need to pay attention to and measure in a far more intentional way than has been the case previously, the gaps between Indigenous and

non-Indigenous Canadians. This Council will ensure the other 90 recommendations don't disappear.

One of the things we have said repeatedly from the very beginning of our work is that the issue of reconciliation and the work of the TRC is Canadian history; it's not *Indigenous history!* Therefore to

have this government or any other government relegate all of the work going forward to one department known as “Indian Affairs” would be to really narrow-cast something that is far more foundational and broad-reaching and has bearing on Public Services and on Justice and on Health and all kinds of other major portfolios. So, it is really, really important that all of the senior leadership in this new govern-

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ment are familiar with these 94 Calls to Action and are tasked with keeping that kind of reconciliation filter in mind as they set about to do the work within each of their respective

departments and as Cabinet as a whole. I think that would be extremely valuable. We've heard the new prime minister talk about a nation-to-nation relationship as what he wants to establish. I think that would be a very good way to signal this intent. This could include the possibility of having somebody reporting directly to him—someone who would have the responsibility to be a conduit across departments, to make sure that internally the eye is being kept on the ball.

**Commission Chair Justice Murray Sinclair has stressed that all Canadians need to know about the treaties—why the Aboriginal peoples signed the treaties, and why they want to defend those treaties. I think many people, myself included, don't know much about the treaties.**

That's a perfect example of where education is needed. We don't know anything about the treaties, and yet it wasn't just the Aboriginal people who signed the treaties; the treaties were contractual and spiritual covenants between the Indigenous People and the Government of Canada on behalf of the people of Canada. Think about, for example, all of the public

coverage and conversation we had over the month before the election about the latest free trade agreement—which is a treaty. And it never occurred to us not to know about that. On the contrary, there was a great pre-election debate because we didn't have an opportunity to hear enough about it and discuss it in the House of Commons. The treaties with Indigenous peoples are also binding treaties between peoples, and yet it's been perfectly acceptable for all these years that all of us who are not Indigenous know nothing about the content of these agreements; yet a treaty is like a marriage, right! It's not just one person who gets married. Both sides get married and both sides need to know what it is they have agreed to and are signing up for. What has been said by some leaders in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and I think it very compelling, is that "We are all treaty people!"

Also, it is very important that Canadians understand that indigenous rights should not be lumped in with multiculturalism. That's not a correct way to look at the Indigenous peoples of Canada. In fact, if we want to talk about the notion of multiculturalism, all of the original European citizens of Canada would be part of this group. It would be the Aboriginal People who would see everybody else as being multicultural, not the reverse!

## Learning more about the TRC



Each of the seven flames in the circle of the TRC logo represents one of the Seven Sacred Teachings – **Truth, Humility, Honesty, Wisdom, Respect, Courage and Love.**

### Follow this [timeline](#) to learn about...

the early efforts of Canadian First Nations leaders to obtain the kind of education they hoped for, the demise of industrial schools in favour of the inferior residential schools, the ignoring of early medical evidence of extremely poor conditions in the residential schools and the attempts of the medical officer to nevertheless publish them, and from the beginning, the multifaceted deliberate policy of government to destroy the identity of First Nations people.



**Sometimes I've heard First Nations peoples say, "Our allegiance is to the Crown, not to the Government of Canada." I suppose some of those treaties were signed before Canada existed.**

The numbered treaties were not signed before Canada existed and these are the great majority, but the original friendship agreements were. The Proclamation of 1763 predates Confederation and includes a pledge by the Crown and by the King of England at the time that the Indigenous Peoples were to be left unencumbered and unhindered. The Dominion was supposed to have been established without displacing the people and with respect for their ways. The original pledges included profound conditional clauses that were then run roughshod over. As we travelled the country, it's one of the things that we heard spoken about most frequently by Aboriginal people: treaty provisions are ignored, or modern-day land claims agreements are ignored or may take a decade to implement, and then, once implemented are

not implemented according to the terms of the agreement. The next round of the struggle is about getting the resources that belong to them, seeing that the commitments that were made are implemented, or monitoring how they will be implemented.

However it is very important that we not see the TRC recommendations as some sort of collective punishment. Implementing them is not going to be a drain on our resources but rather an enrichment, as we build the more value-based society that we have been claiming to be all along without really telling ourselves the truth about ourselves.

**How did the non-Indigenous people who attended TRC events experience these events?**

Over and over again I have heard some variation of this: "I thought I was a really well-informed Canadian. I'm well-educated; I thought I knew a lot about all these issues and I had no idea of the depth of what had happened until I heard first-hand from the residential school survivors." The word that people use over and

## National Research Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

A National Research Centre for Truth and Reconciliation was mandated when the Commission was set up and has recently been established at the University of Manitoba. On the need for such a centre, Commission Chair Mr. Justice Murray Sinclair has remarked, "Ironically, putting the past behind us means preserving it with purpose and dedication—so we can remember the lessons it teaches as we move forward." The Centre will house thousands of video- and audio-recorded statements that the Commission has gathered from survivors and others affected by the schools and their legacy; millions of digitized archival documents and photographs it is collecting from the Government of Canada and Canadian church entities; works of art, artifacts and "expressions of reconciliation" presented at TRC events; all of the research and records collected and prepared by the Commission over the life of its mandate,



Mr. Ry Moran, the Centre's director

and any additional material that the Centre will collect in future years. Mr. Ry Moran, who was director of statement gathering during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has been appointed the Centre's first director. He is also a Métis singer/songwriter.



over again is ‘transformative’. It was transformative for them to become aware, to learn what they didn’t know before, and to realize the depth of what happened, and then to allow themselves to feel that in such a way that they could be changed by it.

**You were the only non-Aboriginal commissioner on the TRC. How was that for you?**

I sometimes was concerned that I might not be accepted in some of the Aboriginal communities where there was a lot of hurt and anger and it has been just such a

wonderful thing to be able to say that I have been consistently and repeatedly received in such a welcoming way. It’s a sign of hope to see how, in spite of their stories of grief, loss and injury, the survivors also have very positive things to say, or they want to acknowledge people who had been at the schools with them who had been helpful to them, had been good to them, whether other students or sometimes a special teacher or coach. To be able to see the good as well as the things that were problematic, that has touched me—the extraordinary resilience of people, considering especially that these were little children. ■

## Digging Roots



*Digging Roots* performed at the TRC Closing Ceremonies in Ottawa, May 29–June 3, 2015. Aboriginal music and arts groups are attracting more notice since the TRC. Watch a 3-minute music video of *Digging Roots*’ latest album, with the husband and wife singer/songwriter team of Raven Kanatakta and ShoShona Kish and a full band.

## For Your Information

- [TRC website](#)
- [Honouring the Truth; Reconciling the Future: Summary of Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation of Canada:](#)
- [The 94 Calls to Action](#)
- Residential School survivors speak of their lives and journey toward healing ([video](#))
- Testimonies by Residential School Survivors ([video](#))
- Wab Kinew, “The Residential School Apology,” a short article in *The Walrus*, October 2013.
- “Reconciliation is in the Wind” ([a Kairos video](#))
- The [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)
- A record [10 Indigenous MPs were elected in October, 2015](#)
- “What is Reconciliation?” [video](#) by Commission Chair, the Hon. Mr. Justice Murray Sinclair (2 min.)

[www.larche.ca/en/inspiration](http://www.larche.ca/en/inspiration)



The L’Arche movement was founded by Jean Vanier, in France in 1964. Today there are 147 communities of L’Arche on six continents, 29 in Canada. In L’Arche, people with intellectual disabilities and those who come to assist them share life together.

*A Human Future* is offered as a contribution to the Canadian conversation about values and the fostering of a society where everyone belongs and can make a contribution.