



A Human Future

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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 – Citizen Engagement

An Interview with Commissioner Marie Wilson (PART II)

This issue continues the interview with Commissioner Marie Wilson of the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada**. Dr. Wilson points to the multitude of opportunities that are set out in the TRC's "Calls to Action." The Commission will present its full final report to the federal government at the end of this year. Now, it falls to all of us who are Canadians to see that its recommendations are implemented—that we learn and teach the true story of the treatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada and that we do the work called for to bring justice, true reconciliation, and a good future for all in our country. – *B. Porter, ed.*

Beth Porter: How has your work as a commissioner over the past 6 years changed you?

Marie Wilson: I have a deepened gratitude for my family of origin and its rich extended family life. Hearing stories of such loss from those who had that taken from them makes me realize even more this incredible blessing in my own life. Also, the stories have made me more acutely conscious of the preciousness of my grand-children, who are the ages of the kids who were taken away to residential schools. I can imagine in a horrible way what it would be like if anybody tried to take them from our lives, what a devastation that would be.

You have mentioned gaps in the teaching of Canadian history.

A few weeks ago, I was at an event celebrating Aboriginal Awareness at a major Canadian university. I said to them, "Isn't it ironic that we are about to celebrate our life as a country for 150 years and here we

are having to create an event called 'Aboriginal Awareness'." We have been completely oblivious to each other's presence, or certainly the mainstream to the presence of the Indigenous peoples. Most adults my age and younger have no idea of this history. Our schools have to do a far better job, so that we grasp that our history did not start with the arrival of the Europeans. We have made ourselves very ignorant of everything that came before and indeed, from an Aboriginal perspective, anything that happened since then. The learning is not over; it's barely begun, and a huge part of reconciliation comes from being better informed about each other.

In the TRC's Calls to Action, we talk about the need for education not just

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within schools but also within professional colleges and professional associations of teachers, lawyers, doctors. That's because we need to reach multiple generations. We can reach the kids now, but what about their parents? How can we catch them up? That's why we have been meeting with ministers of education and the deans of the universities. If they start teaching this history to graduating teachers, for instance, then when they go to implement the curriculum in schools, they won't suddenly have all this unfamiliar history to teach. They will already know about it and be convinced of its importance. The same is true, say, in the faculties of law. Lawyers and others in the justice system are dealing with Indigenous clients but they have never been taught this background. We are trying to reach them as well through the professional associations. Likewise, medicine and other fields. Our focus is, in a relatively short term, to get our society caught up. Similarly, we talk about bringing new Canadians up to speed on this part of Canadian history, since it has certainly not been part of our international story about ourselves.

What can ordinary Canadians do to help implement the learnings of the TRC?

The first thing that I say to all adult Canadians is, read

the 94 Calls to Action. The Calls are grouped in categories—child welfare, health, the judiciary, the arts, sports, the media and, of course, education. People will find themes that attract them. If you are a teacher you will want to know what's being called for in the education recommendations. Then you can turn to your principal for support, or your Minister of Education or teachers' association. If you are a parent, you may want to talk to your parent-teacher association or your school trustee, to say, "We want this to be a priority." Whoever you are, you'll be asking whether those things that are called for are happening where you live, and if not, how to make sure that they do happen. The point is to get engaged. Don't try to figure it out alone. Call the right people together and say, "What would be appropriate?"

What I can tell you, Beth, is that all over the country people are asking, "How can we make this happen?" and coming up with lists of good ideas to address areas that need work, and then getting involved, asking what can I bring? Practical skills? Resources? Influence? I've heard about study groups, professional conversations, initiatives from departments of education; the Law Society of Upper Canada is doing a whole study review to make it a priority for themselves; there are cities that

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.**

Two of the Calls to Action ([Read all the Calls](#))

#83: Commemoration—ARTS: We call upon the Canada Council for the Arts to establish, as a funding priority, a strategy for Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to undertake collaborative projects and produce works that contribute to the reconciliation process.

#87: Reconciliation—SPORTS: We call upon all levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, sports halls of fame, and other relevant organizations, to provide public education that tells the national story of Aboriginal athletes in history.



have declared years of reconciliation; there is the work of Kairos and other faith and social justice groups. People are talking about how to operationalize the Calls in their municipalities. There is no one best plan.

A constant in all of this is to start building relationships with each other, so that we are not strangers. The only way to do that is to begin in an intentional way to put ourselves in the same room at the same time for the same purpose. You will see a pattern in our Calls to Action: there is always a call for one group or level of government or association to work *with* another.

Do you have suggestions for families or groups like L'Arche?

You do whatever can work. When I am in Yellowknife, my home, I reach out to my faith community and to the municipalities in the area. I talk to my grandchildren, giving them age-appropriate information. They know about this history. I make sure when I can that they can participate when there is something appropriate going on. Some of the actions people are taking are

very hands-on, such as one done with school children. It involves planting “gardens of dreams.” We had huge participation in this right across the country. It became part of my personal mission of reaching out to schools. The children made a craft—a heart on a pointy stick that could be planted in the ground to make heart gardens. On the hearts they put messages—words such as “courage” or “partnership” or “love,” or a picture of people holding hands, or an Indigenous symbol—something that captured their understanding of the story. These became gardens of hope, honouring memories and planting dreams all over the country. Because they are very publicly visible, people ask, “What is that all about?” And the kids talk about their garden at home. So the garden becomes an investment that calls forth ongoing conversation.

What are your expectations now, at the culmination of the TRC?

Non-indigenous participation grew from 10% among thousands at our first national event in 2011, to 60% among tens of thousands three and a half years later.

Canadian citizens getting involved

Jane and Tom Sagar (holding an Aboriginal Talking Stick, below) are retired Ontario public school teachers who give presentations to elementary and



high school students about Canada's treatment of Aboriginal peoples. Tom has also given leadership in Kairos. One disturbing fact they tell students is that the Canadian government withheld food from

Aboriginal people to force them off their land and onto reserves. This approach was also used to force compliance in residential schools. Jane explains that as they see it, this history is Canada's skeleton in the closet and we must deal with it if we are to grow well as a nation.

Pat Favaro worked with the Presbyterian Church of Canada, Kairos, and L'Arche to host an event, called “Wisdom on the Journey,” that built and strengthened bridges of understanding and friendship among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people preparatory to



the TRC national event in Alberta. As L'Arche regional leader for Western Canada, Pat was instrumental in bringing Reverend Ruth Patterson from Northern

Ireland. Ruth gave a spiritual perspective on healing and reconciliation at “Wisdom on the Journey.”

The “Wisdom on the Journey” event was presented as an “Expression of Reconciliation” at the TRC National Event in Edmonton. Pat is in orange sweater.



This is evidence of the momentum built by our work, and of the growing awareness of Canadians and the sense that this history belongs to all of us. The conversation has not

died down. This history is not going to slip back into the dark. What we have to do is figure out how to go forward in a way that is respectful, fair, and enriching for all of us. ■

WE Day's Aboriginal focus

Photo: Vito Amati



Aboriginal panel at Manitoba WE Day: L-R: Wab Kinew (Associate Vice-President for Indigenous Affairs at University of Winnipeg, author, broadcaster, hip-hop artist); Waneek Horn-Miller (speaker, Olympic gold medalist); Tom Jackson (actor, singer, activist)

At Manitoba WE Day, speakers included student Rinelle Harper and this panel of leaders. At Ottawa WE Day, among other Aboriginal speakers, was TRC Chair Justice Murray Sinclair. He called students powerfully, saying, "We all need to help our country heal from this experience. And you young people are the medicine." [Watch APTN video.](#)

Marc and Craig Kielburger have, for 6 years now, included Aboriginal presenters in the huge WE Day gatherings of student leaders across the country. This year's program had more Aboriginal presenters. Craig says, "The conversation has been started, now we need to focus on making it stronger and louder."

For Your Information

- [Final Report of the TRC](#) (published December 15, 2015)
- [Marie Wilson on going forward](#) ([3-minute video](#))
- "Indigenous wisdom and spirituality indispensable for climate justice," [a Kairos Canada article](#)
- [WE Day website](#). National student dialogue about Aboriginal history, culture and experiences: [We Stand Together](#)
- [The Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative](#), founded by Hon. Paul Martin. [Read related Maclean's article.](#)
- [The blanket exercise](#)—a Kairos teaching tool to understand how indigenous people lost access to their land
- "[Winds of Change](#)" responds to Call to Action #62 (a call for the residential school legacy, treaties, and past and present Indigenous contributions to this country to be a mandatory part of the curriculum in each province and territory)
- [On creating a Heart Garden](#)
- [Charlie Angus, Children of the Broken Treaty](#), University of Regina Press, 2015. [Listen to Charlie Angus on CBC's The Current, November 27/15](#)
- [The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society "Have a Heart"](#) reconciliation campaign (February 10, 2016)
- [RCMP Report](#) on Canada's Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women
- [National Inquiry](#) into missing and murdered Aboriginal women announced, December 2015

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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.