

June 21, 2015

June 21st is National Aboriginal Day, a day recognizing and celebrating the cultures and contributions of First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples of Canada.

While celebrating National Aboriginal Day this year, I also want to challenge you to help achieve the goals established by the recently concluded “Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada”. This challenge isn’t about remorse over the past, it is truly about **recognition** of the past, **reconciliation** with the original people of this country and the **actions** needed to move forward. This is necessary for our country to truly move forward with Aboriginal People as vibrant, contributing, participating members of our society.

I have sometimes heard people say, “let the past go”, “move forward” and “I am not directly responsible for the issues of the past”. I respect those views, but I also know that to move forward, you need to acknowledge the past. I didn’t go to residential school, but my life has been significantly impacted by this chapter in Canada’s history. My father attended residential school, as did all his brothers and sisters and the impact on his life and mine has been constant. My proud and loving grandparents watched their young children taken away and they witnessed the significant impact on their descendants in the process. Some went forward and thrived but many suffered from this history.

Only for the grace of God is my life significantly different from that of the Aboriginal people who sometimes sleep in our bank’s ATM lobby. Many of these people can trace the root of their issues to the past relationship of Aboriginal People and Canada. This past relationship also impacts every Canadian who steps over on Aboriginal person on the sidewalk or deals with an Aboriginal person in the workplace or on the sports field. The sometimes troubling attitudes and relationships of many Canadians toward Aboriginal People is a result of this past and prevents us all from moving on.

I am optimistic about the future of Aboriginal People and the benefit all Canadians will experience from reconciliation and actions for change. To increase your awareness of this aspect of Canada’s relationship with Aboriginal People, I recommend the following readings:

- **Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada**– “Reconciliation is about forging and maintaining respectful relationships. There are no shortcuts.” -Justice Murray Sinclair. www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Exec_Summary_2015_05_31_web_o.pdf
- **The Education of Augie Merasty: A Residential School Memoir**; by Joseph Auguste (Augie) Merasty (Author), David Carpenter (Contributor) - “A collection of handwritten letters transformed into a newly published book, might be one of the most important titles to be published this spring, written by one of the year’s most unlikely authors: an 86-year-old Cree man who lives on the streets of Prince Albert, fighting not only the bottle, but also prostate cancer and dementia. It’s a story of the near-decade he spent at St. Therese Residential School and the “utter cruelty” he both witnessed and suffered. But more than that, it’s a story of resilience and perseverance – the tale of a man not only haunted by his past, but haunted by the fundamental need to tell his own story.” MARK MEDLEY, The Globe and Mail

All the best to you and your families on June 21st, National Aboriginal Day.

Keith