

Truth and Reconciliation Canada Commissioner, Marie Wilson

Remarks at Witnessing the Future Ceremony

Thursday, October 15, 2009

Rideau Hall, Ottawa

My name is Marie Wilson.

It is my honour to serve with Justice Sinclair and Chief Littlechild as one of the Commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

I stand before you as the spouse of a residential school survivor, and the mother of children who have grown up with the consequences of the schools.

So, on behalf of my fellow Commissioners, it is my special honour to thank these young children for their powerful messages.

We are especially encouraged by the very thoughtful way you offered them to us...in respectful partnership with each other.

It was so wonderful to see the partnerships that you formed.

Today, you remind us, by your good example, that something amazing can happen when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives are brought together in a meaningful way, for a common purpose.

We thank you for this gift of hope, as you begin to imagine how things could be for the future.

The history of Indian Residential Schools in this country, and what needs to be done to address the legacy of them, is not just something for, and about, Aboriginal people.

As a country, this chapter of our history belongs to all of us.

As its citizens, we all own our past, just as we will all own its future.

It is the same with our theme today: we are *all* called to “Witness the Future”. Not just the survivors, not just the children, but all of us.

Bearing Witness to something important is spiritual work.

We know this from our everyday living.

We know what an honour it is to be asked to Witness a wedding... a baptism... a traditional naming ceremony... or a memorial service.

Through witnessing, the event is validated, made legitimate by honoured and respected guests who bear witness to it.

We consider these times and events as sacred in our lives.

They call for more than our momentary, physical presence.

For this reason, we asked traditional and religious spiritual leaders to help us prepare for this event today...to prepare this room...and to prepare the gifts offered to each one of you as you arrived here.

As you leave, you may choose to place these gifts into the sacred ash baskets, as your *own* symbolic gesture of Reconciliation...placing with them along with any hurts you are ready to set aside and carrying away with you your own hopes for the Commission, and for the future of our country.

Witnesses will need courage for such a future.

One of our spiritual advisors recently reminded me that the ancient Greek word for Witness is martyr.

The martyr is someone who is willing to risk...though others may try to silence, weaken or distract.

Witnessing such a future will also take kind hearts, willing to feel the experience of the other.

Witnesses will also need wide vision, to see that Reconciliation is not about individuals.

Restoring right relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians is about the well-being of family, community and country.

What would a thousand acts of Reconciliation look like?

What could a thousand acts of Forgiveness look like?

These are questions we can all take away with us today...as we consider what actions it would take for us to answer them.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has a strong logo to remind us of our purpose.

At the base is the Qulliq, the traditional oil lamp of the Inuit, the infinity circle for the Metis, and the feather for the First Nations. Cultural symbols for all the Aboriginal children who were former students of the schools.

The logo's flame is symbolic of the Commission itself, as we continue our journey as Witnesses, shedding new light on part of our history that has been too long in the dark.

Just as a flame can illuminate, purify and transform, it is our deep hope that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will be a positive, transformative element

- In recording history.
- In healing individuals and families.
- In reconciling nations.

I am holding that very hopeful image in my heart and in my hands.

This traditional caribou and moose-hide bag features our TRC logo in beadwork and embroidery. The bag was specially made by the daughter of a Survivor.

The bag contains our very first TRC pin, with the TRC logo on it.

Will my fellow Commissioners now please join me as we present these special gifts to our Honourary Witness, the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean.