

Truth and Reconciliation Canada Commissioner, Chief Wilton Littlechild

Remarks at Witnessing the Future Ceremony

Thursday, October 15, 2009

Rideau Hall, Ottawa

My name is Wilton Littlechild.

Today, I stand before you humbly as one of the Commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

I also stand before you proudly as one of the more than eighty thousand Indian Residential School Survivors alive today.

Like you, I am sure, I am very moved, and inspired by the voices we have just heard.

Let me ask them each to stand, as I say their names:

Mary Courchene and Stefanie

Lorraine Hance and Heather

Peter Irniq and Jacob

Richard Kistabish and Rayven.

From our hearts, we thank you for your strength and courage in sharing your stories with your grandchildren, and with all of us today.

We also have special guests—survivors from across Canada—which I would like to acknowledge:

Garnet Angecone and Chance

Mary Catherine McEwan and Reannah

David Poitras and Markus

Lilian Pooyak and Nikko

Agnes Mills and Kyla

Brother Charles Wood and Lannie

At this time, may I ask that all survivors of residential school here with us today, please stand...and if you are watching from home, feel free to stand.

My fellow Commissioners and I want you to know that our greatest hope lies in you.

We see you, we hear you, and we believe you.

Over the next five years we will do all that we can to gather all your stories. I want you to know that we will make sure that they stories are heard, and never forgotten by Canada.

Our sincere Quannamik...Meegwetch... Merci Beaucoup and Thank You... goes out to you...the children of *yesterday*.

Now I want to speak about the *children* who are here today.

There are the grandchildren, who came with the Survivors.

There are also non-Aboriginal children here. The youngest of these are from local schools here in the Ottawa area. They have been investing their own time to learn about Residential Schools. The older students are in university, and come from various parts of the country. These children and young adults are not related to any one of us here today.

But in a way, by being here, they have become related to us all. Let me explain how.

All these children, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, have been meeting and working together for the past day and a half in a special workshop to learn about residential schools. Together, they have been sharing, and writing down their thoughts and hopes for

the TRC, and, importantly, for Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

But what happens after today? You young people have heard us speak today about what it means to Witness something. In our traditional ways, Witnesses are asked to store and care for the things they see and experience.

A very important part of that is to share it with their own people when they return home. That's part of what we mean, when we talk about traditional oral history. So when *you* go back home, if you share what you have learned with your family, and friends and classmates, you will also be helping the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

You will become an important Witness to what you now know, based on what you experienced this week.

As Commissioners, we especially want to thank you for your willingness to be here, and to learn. We also want to thank you for the wishes and symbols of hope and reconciliation you are about to give us. These gestures are very important to us.

I will now ask our Métis and Inuit elders to please step forward.

The elders are holding traditional Ash baskets. These baskets were special gifts to the TRC. They were blessed for us earlier this year by the Miqmaq and Maliseet people of the Maritime region. Today our elders will hold these sacred baskets to receive the gestures of Reconciliation from our young people.

It is time for us to listen and learn from the children.