

Reconciliation—What is that?

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I am struggling to understand what “Reconciliation” means. So January 12, 2016, I began a seven week program at the University of Regina to learn more about Canadian history in the context of Truth & Reconciliation. Recently, it hit me that many others, including First Nations people, know as little as I do about Canada’s early history. Previously, I thought that others were aware, but it seems not. So I begin to learn ... we are all in this together. My class encourages shared learning, so I will tell you about my learning experience through 2-3 articles in this Bulletin.

My class is part of Project of Heart, which is a learning tool, utilized nationally to teach people about neglected pieces of our Canadian history. This program is about building relationships, networking and learning together with others. With a facilitator, we will discover more about Canada’s colonial history, including Indian Residential Schools. We will remember specific children who died in a residential school located in Regina.

During the first class, we each (35-40 people, ages 20-75, mostly women) received a written statement relating to some historical event ... historical presence of Indigenous peoples, fur traders, intentions of early French settlers, documented government actions, achievements (e.g., sports) and rights of Indigenous people (e.g., right to vote 1960), etc. Then we all worked together to place ourselves in a chronological line. I was interested that those of us with statements relating to very early history managed to create a more accurate timeline than those with statements from 1990-2015. I am not sure if people at my end of the line worked together more effectively or if our knowledge of 1500-1800 events was actually better. At any rate, it was fun and interesting.

The Office of the Treaty Commissioner says:

Reconciliation is about... exploring the past and choosing to build a better future.

It’s understanding each other and building trust.

It’s recognizing that We Are All Treaty People.

<http://www.otc.ca/>

It was also an opportunity to share my recent knowledge of the horrible history of the Nekaneet Band whose traditional land is in the Cypress Hills. About 70 Saskatchewan bands signed treaties and were moved to reserves in exchange for food and other treaty rights. The Cypress Hills land is special and considered sacred by many. I grew up in nearby Maple Creek and have always called these Hills “God’s country.” Treaty 4 (1874) refers to the Nekaneet but they did not sign the Treaty and refused to leave the land or move to a government- selected reserve. Canada's government responded

by refusing to provide hunting/fishing rights, food, education, or financial support to the band **for 100 years**. Occasional payments were made (e.g., 1 bull in 1950s, allowed to attend school after 1958 but without transportation). More regular but limited support began about 1975, more in 1986, but full benefits were not provided until 1998. For perspective, I left that area to go to university in 1965. It still shocks me that I grew up within a few miles of Nekaneet people and did not know they were starving or why they did not attend

school. When I shared a bit of this history in class, several young First Nations women attending the class **told me**: “That is “reconciliation” ... to exchange information in a heartfelt way. And so we learn together.

P.S. if you want to read more about Nekaneet history, this 1998 government archive is informative and I hope mostly accurate (although I am learning much is omitted).

http://publications.gc.ca/site/archivearchived.html?url=http://publications.gc.ca/collection/s/collection_2009/indianclaims/RC31-79-1999E.pdf

