

Courage My Friends Podcast Series VII – Episode 5
The Honourable Murray Sinclair 2018 Keynote Address on Indigenous Ways of Knowing

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ANNOUNCER: You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.
Needs No Introduction is a rabble podcast network show that serves up a series of speeches, interviews and lectures from the finest minds of our time

RESH: On November 4th, 2024 the honourable Murray Sinclair passed away and even as we mourn his loss, we celebrate his courage, wisdom and leadership.

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COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: Welcome back to this podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute at George Brown College.

In the words of the great Tommy Douglas...

TOMMY (Actor): Courage my friends, 'tis not too late to build a better world

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: This is the Courage My Friends Podcast.

RESH: Welcome to Episode 5 of the Courage My Friends podcast.
I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

In 2018, the Tommy Douglas Institute at George Brown College in Toronto and home of the Courage My Friends podcast, welcomed the Honourable Murray Sinclair to deliver the keynote address on Community, Education, Change: Indigenous Ways of Knowing.

We were both privileged and thrilled to get the then sitting Senator and former head of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada to open the day-long conference.

From the moment we met Murray Sinclair we were struck by his warmth and generosity. Through his poignant keynote address on the impacts of Canada's colonial history and the residential school system on the lives of Indigenous Peoples and the meaning of reconciliation, we experienced first-hand the brilliance, integrity, kindness and humour of this truly remarkable individual.

The honourable Murray Sinclair whose Indigenous name means "the one who speaks of pictures in the sky" passed away on the morning of November 4th and according to his family "peacefully and surrounded by love".

We join the rest of the country in mourning his passing.

Here now is the Honourable Murray Sinclair with his 2018 keynote address on Community, Education, Change: Indigenous Ways of Knowing. We begin with a Land Acknowledgement by Indigenous Counselor Lori Budge and an Introduction to the Keynote by Community Worker student Richie Cheesaquay.

LORI BUDGE: Kiknoohahmakowin. I was asked today to give a land acknowledgment, and I always call it a territorial acknowledgment. If I'm acknowledging the territory, I would say, that we're gathered today on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation, because they are the people with whom the agreement, the Toronto Purchase was signed on May 29th, 2010. Tomorrow will be the 8th anniversary of that.

So when we think about Indigenous things that affect our lives, our daily lives, it's only the 8th anniversary of the signature of the agreement that impacts this whole territory.

I would also say, if I'm acknowledging the land, the way I would do that is to give thanks for everything that brought us here today. Those things that sustain us, the water, the air, the plant life, the creepy crawlies, and everything that lives in each of those places that support us in being who we are and how we are here today that make us sustainable. That we take for granted in being here. All those things support us.

RICHIE CHEESAQUAY: Good morning, everyone. My name is Richie Cheesaquay, and I'm from White Sand First Nation, just located a few hours north of Thunder Bay, Ontario, where I grew up. I'm a graduating student this year from the Community Worker Program here at George Brown College, [applause] and I work at Aboriginal Legal Services.

The Tommy Douglas Institute hosts progressive spaces to discuss pressing issues and ideas on critical and socially just education in the 21st century.

It's great to be here today at this 6th annual event, with the focus on Indigenous Ways of Knowing and change in the community and in education.

I'm very proud to be here today to introduce Senator Murray Sinclair as our keynote speaker. Senator Sinclair has played a vital role in advocating for a just Canada, for our families that have been through the residential school system. In one way or another, we are all connected.

My maternal grandparents are residential school survivors, and recently I've been reflecting on how this is affecting my family and myself.

Some days it's hard to think about, just because of all the systemic issues we are continually faced with. But what I'm trying to say is that I'm grateful for all the work that Senator Murray Sinclair has done in terms of reconciliation.

With over 25 years experience within the justice system, Senator Sinclair was the first Indigenous judge appointed in Manitoba, and the head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The work he has done with the 94 Calls of Action are incredible. The movement towards reconciliation will be challenging, but it must be addressed. This is where our journey of reconciliation continues. To those who ask why Indigenous people don't just get over the residential school experience, Senator Murray Sinclair has this response:

“It's important for us to remember, we learn from it. And until people show they have learned from this, we will never forget. We should never forget, even once they've learned from it, because it's a part of who we are. It's not just a part of who we are as survivors, or children of survivors, or relatives of survivors; it's a part of who we are as a Nation. And this Nation must never forget what it once did to its most vulnerable people.”

THE HONOURABLE MURRAY SINCLAIR: Thank you very much for that very warm welcome, and for that very kind introduction as well. I appreciate the spirit in which it was given. I want to thank the organizers for inviting me to be here with you, although, I will tell you this, that now that you've given me a standing ovation, I don't know what to do.

This is kind of reverse order from what I'm used to.

I have a granddaughter who's 12 years old who's just learning, to do public speaking. And she's in a French immersion course, and, so she has to deliver her speeches in French, and, so I help her do that. And I was, helping her with her latest speech, which is part of the school division competition, and she usually wins her grade level in her school competition at 12 years of age.

And this year she worked very hard on her speech because her speech was about, *I Am a Survivor*, she said. And she did all of it in French for five minutes. And, after, I was very proud of what she did, and after it was over she said, what do you think, Mushum? That's our word for grandfather. What do you think, Mushum?

And I said, it's very well done. It's beautiful. You can start writing my speeches for me now.

And she said, “Mushum, I have a question.”

And I said, "Sure, my girl, what is it?"

She said, "How do you make them all stand up at the end?"

Now that you've all stood up at the beginning, I'm totally confused about what to say to her about that.

That introduction was very meaningful. Thank you very much. I appreciated the kind words.

Introductions are always a little iffy though because of the number of times I do public speaking and the events that I go to and the various crowds that I speak at.

I was at a gathering one time of survivors in Saskatchewan, shortly after we began the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. And there were about 1,200 or 1,300 survivors in a large convention room at a hotel. And I was being introduced by a survivor who was trying to get everybody to settle down so that he could introduce me.

And he gave the shortest introduction I've ever received because he couldn't get them to settle down no matter how many times he tried.

He finally said my introduction in seven words.

He said: "Shut up. Sit down. Here he is." [laughter]

That one worked for me then. This worked for me too. But, thank you very much.

My traditional name is Mazina Giizhik. Mazina Giizhik, Ojibwe name, is what we call our spirit name. It's the name that the spirit who was placed within me when I was created, carried and brought to me. And that spirit name means *The One Who Speaks of Pictures in the Sky*. It was the name that the Elder, who named me, told me, and told my family to remind me from time to time, also reflected my responsibility to the people, and that is to talk about the things as I see them, and to help the people understand what it is that I see.

I am from the Fish Clan, and earlier we, we heard from, representative also of the Water Clan. We all come from the larger Water Clan People. The Water Clan People are the handsomest, most intelligent, most straight talking, philosophical, beautiful people in all of the Ojibwe Nation.

Algonquin people need us in order to survive. And no matter what, Fish Clan People are the ones who have the responsibility of a certain aspect of the teachings of the lodge.

But unfortunately for me, my wife Animkikwe is a Bear Clan.

So if you think about what it's like for a Bear Clan and a Fish Clan to be married to each other, you can imagine what our relationship is like. To her, she says, "Fish Clan people only exist to feed the Bear. [laughter]"

I tell you all of this because it's part of what I want to talk about today. And what I want to talk about today is the importance of knowledge, and the importance of knowing who you are, because it's the essence of our existence, to know who you are.

It's one of Plato's big five questions, if you studied philosophy. And were able to get out of your philosophy course with your head still straight, you know what I'm talking about.

Knowing who you are is the key to being able to enjoy the life that you are given to live. And enjoy is not meant in a happy, gay means. It's meant as a way of expressing that you have a responsibility to fulfill.

If you know who you are, then you know what your responsibilities are, and you know what it is that you have to do, and you will derive the pleasure of success from doing what it is that you have been called upon to do.

When I was a young man, I went to law school because I had lots of questions. I went to law school beginning in the mid 1970s in order to find out why.

I wanted to know why my family was the way that it was. I wanted to know why my community was the way that it was. I wanted to know why there was so much violence between the adults of my community. I wanted to know why there was so much violence directed at us by the non-Indigenous people in the nearby town where I went to high school.

I wanted to know why, when I graduated from high school, and I was the top student of my class, I was elected class Valedictorian, I was athlete of the year, I had A+ average marks, and I went to university; I wanted to know why nobody would have traded places with me, and been who I was. I wanted to know why people had such disrespect for us as a people. And people had such disrespect for me without even knowing who I was, without even having met me.

They treated me with disrespect in restaurants, in public, on buses, in taxis, in stores, and in universities when I started my class.

I wanted to know why my grandmother and grandfather had raised so many children and taught us never to talk about our Indigenous culture. I wanted to know why my grandmother and grandfather, who could speak four Indigenous languages, plus

French, and plus English, never allowed us to speak any of our Indigenous languages after I started high school, after I started school.

I wanted to know why my aunts and uncles who went to residential schools never talked about their school experience.

I wanted to know why my grandparents went to residential schools, and my aunts and uncles never went to high school reunions like all of the parents of my friends in high school did.

I wanted to know why they never reminisced with their school colleagues about their school days. And I wanted to know why they had moved away from the community that we had been born into.

I didn't know why, so I thought going to law school would help me understand, but it didn't. Law school taught me, in fact, of the glory of the English Common Law, and the fact that we had so much to be thankful for, that we had such a brilliant and efficient legal system that would be able to give us answers to every single issue that society had to face.

And I wanted to know why, when I left law school and graduated, and went on to practice law, I was so unhappy with the way that I was doing my work. I wanted to know why I felt like I was participating in a system that had long oppressed our people and doing it so well that I continued to impress upon them the fact that they had to learn about the white man's law because I didn't know otherwise.

And I wanted to know why I didn't know otherwise.

I decided after law school, in fact, to quit practicing law and to go back to my grandfather's career which was a carpenter and work with wood because I found that more satisfying, less confrontational, less adversarial, more instinctive, more comforting. But I knew that there was something more for me than that.

And I wanted to know why I carried that name, *Mazina Giizhik, the one who speaks of pictures in the sky.*

Law school didn't teach me that. It was when I quit law, or was about to, and my wife said, go and talk to an Elder. And we knew who I should go and see, and I went and spoke to him. His name was Angus Merrick. He's long since passed away.

But I went to see Angus because Angus had worked in the court system as a court worker. And he had worked a long time within the justice system. And he knew how the justice system worked and what it did to people. But he was also a very traditional man.

He knew our culture. He knew our ways. He knew far more than I had any knowledge of.

And when I went to talk to him, I asked him, Why do I feel like this?

And I told him what I was thinking. I told him how I was feeling. I told him what was going on. And I told him about my decision to leave law and to go and become a carpenter, to go and work with cars, which I found to be very fulfilling at a certain level.

And he listened to me all day. I spoke. He listened to me for a long time. Drinking tea. Smoking his cigarettes. Listening in the teepee in the back of his yard while I talked. And I cried.

And I told him that I felt that though I was still very good at what I was doing as a lawyer, I felt like a failure. And what could I do about it? Except quit.

And he said to me, you have probably completed your education in that world as much as you can. Now that you have this degree, and can be a lawyer, he said, if you want you can quit. You can go and become a carpenter. But that knowledge of law will always be in your head. You will never be able to put that aside. People will always come to you to ask you for help to understand those things that you know.

People will always come to you and ask you to help them with the problems that they have. So don't think that you're going to avoid the responsibilities that go with the education that you have been given.

But your education is not complete. He said, because you do not know who you are. And because you do not know who you are, you do not know how this fits into who you are, this knowledge that you have.

He said, you don't know who you are as a husband. You don't know who you are as a son or a grandson or an uncle or an aunt's nephew.

You don't know how to take care of your family in the way that was meant for us to take care of them. You don't know your responsibility as a brother to your sister. You don't know your responsibility to the community as a leader because you have not been raised that way. You have not been educated in those things. And so your education is not complete, he said.

If you want to complete that education, you have to go and talk to your mother.

And I said, but my mother has passed away. She died when I was a year old.

He said, I'm not talking about that mother. I am talking about your mother the Earth. You have to go and sit with your mother and ask her to help you to learn.

You have to put aside your food and your water, and you have to ask her those big questions. And she will start to help you.

And then, he said, you have to find people who know the answers to those questions that she will direct you to seek answers for.

And so that's how my journey on this road that I walk now today with you began.

And that is by going and fasting and seeking answers to questions. By going and talking to Elders who could tell me about the history of our people. Who could tell me, in fact, that we did have a history.

Imagine my surprise when I learned at the age of 28 that we had a creation story and that it was not the creation story that we had been taught in the Bible. That we had a creation story that was as beautiful, as significant, and more meaningful, perhaps, because it came from our people, as that which was taught to the rest of society. And that story was ours.

And imagine how I felt when I was told that our creation story was true. And that the creation story that others taught their children was also true. And that we had to understand that as part of our teaching and understanding about respect, that we had to respect everybody's creation story. We had to respect everybody's right to live in accordance with what they had come to understand their existence to be and to mean. And that was my first important teaching about respect and understanding and acceptance.

I had been taught, of course, things in those areas in high school and in the Catholic schools that I'd gone to and in university. But it didn't hold the meaning that that teaching from those elders gave to me.

So my discovery of myself began at that point. And it was enhanced when my children started being born. Because as I held each and every one of them, I realized that I needed to try to make their lives as meaningful as I could as well.

That I had a responsibility to help them understand who they were. That I had a responsibility to help them to become as complete as they could be. To ensure that they knew their spirit name, and what the teaching of their name was. That they knew what our clan was, and what it meant. That they knew who they were and where they belonged and what their responsibilities were.

And to the extent that I could, that they also learned their language. All of which was very important to our sense of self.

That journey has been underway now for almost 40 years. And it continues even today.

Every day, I learn something new about myself because I learn something new about you. And what you carry, what you know. What you have to share with me is part of who I am now.

Knowledge is the key to our ability to survive. But survival is not merely about getting by. Survival is also about being strong. We have an expression in Ojibwe that talks about that, and that word is Ongomiizwin. Ongomiizwin means be strong, be stalwart, be steadfast, be determined, do what you can do when you can do it. Do not shy away from your responsibilities. Ongomiizwin. You have a responsibility to do what you can when you can.

And so when we see each other in our family, and when we part, we say that to each other in Ongomiizwin. Be strong, be determined.

In English, I always tell my kids when they leave, even though they're now in their forties and thirties, that they'd stay out of trouble. And if you can't stay out of trouble, don't get caught.

Unfortunately, my middle daughter, who's the one with the sharpest tongue says, dad, if I don't get caught, I don't get into trouble. So I got to think of a better expression.

Ongomiizwin is about being faithful to your life, being true to who you are. And it is part of our knowledge base as Indigenous people, as Anishinaabe people. It is part of who we are.

Every tribal entity has a similar teaching. You have all been raised with a similar teaching in the way that you have been raised. You have that, you have been given that. You may have come to it early or late in life, it doesn't matter, but you have come to that understanding that your responsibility is to do what you can with what you have been given, and to fulfill your responsibility to your family, to your community, and to yourself. All of which is the key to life.

So knowledge is the key to life. It is the key to surviving. It is the key to life.

Traditional knowledge for us as Anishinaabe people does not come, though, from the public schools. And in fact, those who have gone to public schools I have not been able to benefit from being given any information about who they are.

I went to public school, and I was a very good student in public schools. As I said, I was the recipient of top marks in everything I studied. I was very active in sports, and I was chosen by my classmates to speak for them when we graduated.

But, when I left high school, I was not merely incomplete, but my sense of self had been destroyed. Because in the public school system, we were taught that Indigenous people were inferior, that indigenous people were lucky that European colonizers came to this land and saved us from extinction. Saved us from starvation. Saved us from freezing to death by teaching us about science. By teaching us how to survive in a land that was so cold and so harsh and so difficult to live in.

Never mind the fact that we had been here for tens of thousands of years before they came and didn't need them to survive and that we were quite successful in the lives that we led. They didn't teach us that fact. They didn't talk about that inconvenient truth. They merely talked about the fact that we as Indigenous people were very lucky. That European civilizations had saved us.

And it's because most Canadians do not know the history of this country. They know about the history since Confederation, that's well taught. But they know nothing about the history before Confederation, beyond the history of the European arrival.

And as part of that history that talks about us as Indigenous people being hurdles to the settlement of this country. Being problems that had to be overcome. Of being people who stood in the way of progress, as savages, barbarians, pagans, heathens. Those who were meant to hurt them or get in the way of them.

So it was not that we had anything positive to contribute to the history of this country before or after Confederation. It was, in fact, that we held this country back from greatness until Confederation occurred. And then once Confederation occurred, we have been told, then this nation started to fulfill its potential.

In the Canadian school system, they talk about this country achieving its independence from British colonial authorities as though that were an act not merely of emancipation, but it was an act of fulfillment. That we were fulfilling some kind of destiny that we were entitled to fulfill, but not the Indigenous people. We, in fact, stood in the way.

Sir John A. MacDonald saw it that way. Very early on it was his view that indigenous people were a problem and needed to be dealt with quickly.

Before Confederation Indigenous people, of course, were self-sufficient, were organized into their collective entities in a self-governed way, and were able to take care of their own internal affairs quite well. And that fact and in fact, was recognized in the rural proclamation of 1763, which ended the French-English War in North America.

England was so debilitated by that war that it needed, to issue a proclamation or to appease the Indigenous People of the North America to keep them from taking up arms against the English presence in North America because England could not continue to sustain a war against Indigenous populations.

So they issued the Royal Proclamation of 1763. And that Royal Proclamation was an act of assurance by the King of England to all Indigenous People in North America, in which he says, we will not interfere with your lands, with your territories, with your way of doing things. We will stay out of your business and we ask you to stay out of ours.

We ask you to let us live where we now live, and we will let you live where you now live. And when you are ready to treat with us, when we are in need of your land, or when you wish to surrender your land to us, it is agreed that we will be the ones to purchase it so that we can continue to govern it.

And that proclamation was issued not simply unilaterally, but it was also circulated amongst the Indigenous People who were all invited in 1764 to a gathering at Fort Niagara. Thirty-eight hundred leaders from all over North America gathered at Fort Niagara in 1764 to hear that assurance from the Crown's representative that the King of England would not interfere with their lives.

And that assurance became part of our Constitution by virtue of the British North America Act, as well as by virtue of the fact that it extended into the future of Canada. It led directly to the American War of Independence, which led to American Independence in 1776 because they wanted the land. They didn't want to be controlled.

But in terms of Canada, that law, the Royal Proclamation, continued until Confederation, and even now, continues still.

As part of the British North America Act of 1870, which allowed Manitoba to become a province, and extended Canadian jurisdiction into the West, Canada, before it could extend its jurisdiction into the West, had to enter into treaties for the land with Indigenous People in accordance with the undertaking by the Crown in 1763.

And that undertaking, therefore, was intended to continue after Confederation. And so Canada did.

And in those treaties, there was a promise that was extracted by Indigenous leaders from the Crown, that the government would build schools on each and every reserve that was created by the Treaty. So that each and every community of Indigenous people would be provided with a government paid school, run by the Indigenous people for their children. Because they wanted their children to be educated so they could compete in the new society that was being created by that new relationship.

So when you look at Treaties 1 through 10, every Treaty has a schools clause that was entered into after Confederation.

But McDonald saw it differently. He was more inclined to follow the thinking of Egerton Ryerson in 1858, who issued a report in which he said, we have to establish a public school system for all of the children of the colonies, but Indigenous people cannot be educated in those public schools because they are intellectually inferior.

They cannot learn the same way that white children learn. Therefore, they should be educated in industrial schools. They should be educated to be the workers for our society. The ones who are subject to the business elite who we will educate in our public schools. That's how Egerton Ryerson saw it. And that's how John A. McDonald saw it.

So he put together a plan, even though he was authorizing the Treaties that were entered into after Confederation, which contained the schools clauses, he authorized the establishment of what he called "industrial schools". To take children away from their families and place them in those schools.

Children as young as the age of five were taken away from their families forcibly, often against the will of the parents, and placed in those schools.

And just imagine if you can, that five year old who is in your life right now. And you have a five year old somewhere in your life, whether it's your daughter, or your granddaughter. Or your niece, or the niece of a friend, or the daughter of a friend. You have a five year old little girl in your life. And imagine what it would be like if the government came and took that child away from you, not because you had done anything wrong, but simply because they wanted to indoctrinate her into a different way of doing things.

And that's what the schools were. They were not schools. There was very little education that took place in those schools until the 1940s. People who worked in the schools were not required to have educational certification or background. They were employees, and their obligation was to teach basic writing, counting, spelling skills, but nothing else. There was no other educational program in place because they didn't have teachers until after the Second World War.

And those schools, in fact, were centers for indoctrinating children into a different culture. Because from the beginning, the people who worked in the schools were directed that the children were to be civilized through Christianization.

Churches were brought into the Residential School System as managers of the schools. It was part of their missionary work, so they saw it as a way of extending their role in

society as well. But more importantly, the government saw it as a way of them getting cheap labor to run the schools, because they literally worked for nothing.

And those people who ran the schools indoctrinated those children severely. Harsh discipline was used. Techniques were put in place that kept children from being able to speak their language, practice their culture, continue relationships with each other, with their brothers and sisters. They were not allowed to talk to each other in the schools. They couldn't talk in their language. They couldn't see their parents while they were in the schools. They weren't allowed to go home in many cases, even during school breaks.

Children were not allowed to go home to families if the parents were still practicing pagans, if they continued to attend ceremonies.

So in 1885, the government of Canada passed an amendment to the Indian Act that said that Indigenous ceremonies like the sun dance and potlatch laws and any Indian ceremony was banned and was illegal. And all of those practices would result in people being prosecuted.

It became illegal to wear Indian garb in public if you were an Indigenous person.

It became illegal to even do simple things like smudge a room to clarify your existence, to state your existence as an Indigenous person. It became illegal to leave your community. If you left your community without a pass from the Indian Agent, you'd be arrested and detained. And certainly you couldn't go and take the children out of the school. And if you declined to send your children to the school, you would also be arrested because of amendments to legislation.

So after Confederation, the Government of Canada waged war, just like the Americans did. The Americans did it through military might. The Indian Wars during Lincoln's era and afterwards were a big part of American history.

But Canada's war against Indigenous people was through law. We waged war through law. And imagine being subjected to that. If you wanted to challenge it, you'd go to court. Often that's the answer. You can hire a lawyer, go to court.

Well if a lawyer agreed to give you advice, he would be disbarred unless you got permission from the Minister of Indian Affairs to give you that advice.

If the individual went to court, the court could not accept an application unless the Minister of Indian Affairs consent to being sued was filed as well. The Minister never gave consent to being sued.

And if you wanted to protest. If you wanted to travel to Ottawa and protest against this, it became illegal to leave the reserve, became illegal to gather in large numbers.

In fact, if three or more Indigenous people gathered together for the purpose of complaining about the Government of Canada's treatment of them, they were guilty of an Indigenous or Indian conspiracy and could be prosecuted and jailed. Indian conspiracy laws were passed in the late 1880s.

And if your leaders in your community were trying to lobby or trying to effect change because they were your traditional Chiefs and traditional heads people, traditional women leaders, the government had an answer for that because in 1891 they passed a law that said those traditional leaders could no longer speak for the community. And only those men over the age of 21 were allowed to hold office, elected under rules established by the Department of Indian Affairs.

And they had to give notice to the Indian Agent when they were holding a meeting and the Indian Agent had to be present when they held the meeting and he chaired the meeting and he kept a record of all of the decisions by the Band Council. So Indian archives were in the hands of the government from the very beginning.

And so the right to protest, the right to go to court, were all taken away from you. Maintaining your culture was taken away from you, not only in the schools, but in the communities. And the schools and the communities suffered under this regime from after Confederation until relatively recently.

In 1969, the Government of Canada issued what is called the White Paper, which really was intended to complete the assimilation process by doing away with the Indian Act, by wiping out treaties, by wiping out the concept of aboriginal rights and aboriginal title. That was what the discussion paper proposed.

And there was a huge standing against that by Indigenous leaders in the country. So much so that they shut it down, that process. But the thinking that went behind it still exists today.

Even though we now have in our Constitution of Canada a recognition of the existing Indigenous rights that indigenous people have, there is still a large population in this country who believe that Indigenous People should not be treated any differently than the rest of society because of the way our public schools have educated us to believe.

And it's the way that we have educated ourselves and the way that we have educated our children that we need to begin to change if we're going to have any significant impact in the way reconciliation progresses in this country.

Because reconciliation is a process which is building. It's not a spectator sport. It involves everybody. And everybody is implicated in it, whether you like it or not. You are either for it or you're against it. No neutrality exists here. And when you think about it, you have to understand it. And understanding it is part of the educational process. And understanding the implications it has for you is part of the challenge that we also need to face.

And all of that has to do with knowledge. All of that has to do with dialogue as well, and developing consensus and agreement about where we're going to go as a country. We can no longer have the same kind of relationship that we've had since Confederation. We probably cannot have the same relationship we had before Confederation either.

We have to talk about what kind of relationship we're going to have going forward. . And that means we have to think differently. We have to think better, and that's where you come in. You are the scholars, you are the thinkers. You are the ones in whose hands we vest these challenges.

My call to you is to think about this.

What would you do if this happened to you? What would you want if this happened to you? What would you ask for? What would you insist upon? What would you settle for if this had happened to you?

And keep in mind that the answer to those questions are going to be the key to the future of this country. Because given the way that world events are spinning around us now, it is quite conceivable that Canada could be colonized again.

Just think, if President Trump were to become our president, or somebody like him, and brought all of those external forces to bear upon this democracy as we know it. And insisted on this democracy changing to comply with those views of the world, what would you insist upon? How would you want to be dealt with?

Because if you know what that will be, then you will have part of the answer to what we have to do now.

If you do not know how to deal with this, you will not know how to deal with that. Something you need to think it through very carefully.

We have a long way to go in reconciliation. It's not going to happen overnight. It's only been two years since the conversation really started. And, we will see a lot of diversions and hurdles along the way. But we have to have a vision about what that process is going to be like and about what the endgame is.

The vision for the moment should be that we must have a relationship of mutual respect. But it must also include an opportunity for Indigenous people to gain back their self respect, which was taken away from them by this history, so that they can stand as equals in that relationship of mutual respect.

And what are the institutional changes we have to make? What are the social changes we have to make? What are the legal changes we have to make? And what are the academic and educational changes that we have to make?

So you've got five minutes, figure it out. [laughter]

But keep in mind that this is going to be a process in which we will be trying things as we go forward. So let's not be afraid to try.

Let us not be afraid to try.

Things cannot be worse than the way that they have been or that they are.

We have a situation now where, across this country, the largest single group of people being incarcerated in our jails are Indigenous men, and Indigenous women, and Indigenous youth.

Almost 50 percent of the children who are in care in Canada who have been apprehended by child welfare authorities are Indigenous children. And yet we represent less than 5 percent of the population.

Suicide rates in Indigenous communities by people under the age of 30 are ten times the rate they are for the rest of the population.

We have Indigenous people who are giving up hope. Indigenous youth who see no future for themselves. And the high school dropout rates are still the highest in the country for Indigenous youth. Higher than they should be. Higher than we could make them. And we need to do better.

And we can do better.

Thank you.

RESH: That was the Honourable Murray Sinclair with his keynote address on Community, Education, Change: Indigenous Ways of Knowing at the Tommy Douglas Institute at George Brown College in 2018. A judge, lawyer, former senator and Head of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Murray Sinclair of the Anishinaabe Indigenous Peoples peacefully passed away on the morning of November 4th 2024.

Along with the rest of Canada, we honour his memory and mourn his passing. In lieu of flowers his family requests that those who are able to, donate to the Murray Sinclair Memorial Fund at the Winnipeg Foundation where funds will prioritize Indigenous women, children, families and survivors. The link to the Fund will be posted in the show notes to this episode.

And this is the Courage My Friends podcast. I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

Thanks for listening.

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: You've been listening to the Courage My Friends Podcast, a co-production between rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute at George Brown College.

Produced by Resh Budhu of the Tommy Douglas Institute, Breanne Doyle of rabble.ca and the TDI planning committee: Chandra Budhu and Ashley Booth. For more information about the Tommy Douglas Institute and this series, visit georgebrown.ca/TommyDouglasInstitute.

Please join us again for the next episode of the Courage My Friends podcast on rabble.ca