

The Community Forum

Welcome to The Community Forum, a collection of stories, perspectives, and ideas for action from Forum Community Relations. This edition offers ideas and resources from our community about a settler's role in reconciliation.

When asked what was one thing you wanted to see explored in this newsletter, some of you said:

- "Empowering relationships among settlers and first people"
- "Allyship"
- "What does reconciliation look like in our everyday"
- "The role of non-indigenous people in reconciliation."
- "Reconciliation as a shared responsibility."

Through stories, reflections, and sharing of resources, this edition explores it all - we hope you enjoy it!

All my relations,

~ **Anne**



What is a Settler's Role in Reconciliation and Why Does it Matter?

By **Teneya Gwin**

A settler's role in reconciliation will look different to many individuals, it's not a one size fits all type of thing, it is all based on where you are at in your reconciliation journey. I have put together a few ideas to help start this journey. Now these ideas have been based on my experience working with and for Indigenous communities in Alberta for approximately 14 years

as well as identifying as Indigenous myself.

I highly encourage individuals to start in your hometown, understanding the history of where you grew up as a place in which you built your foundation. Research if there was a residential school in the area, understand the traditional territory you live in and



**Teneya Gwin, Founder of
ElevenEleven Consulting**

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learn about the neighbouring Indigenous communities (Treaty territory, First Nation reserves, Métis locals, Métis Settlements and Métis Regions). Looking into where and how you were raised as a Canadian and the opportunities available to you and understand that these opportunities may not have been the same for your Indigenous neighbours because of Canadian Law and policy, this is the 'Truth' component that I'll describe soon.

Once you have done this research you can start to build your own land acknowledgement. I truly believe that writing this from a personal perspective means so much more. Land acknowledgements are a beautiful way to start a meeting, conference or I've even seen a birthday party started with a land acknowledgement. We are acknowledging our ancestors that came before us that created the spaces and places in which we live and work.

Now that you have some understanding of the territory in which you live, I encourage you to learn the 'Truth' component of the Truth and Reconciliation. Look for books written by Indigenous authors, programs facilitated from Indigenous professionals, and multimedia created by Indigenous creators. Heck, the simplest way to do this is to diversify your social network, start following Indigenous people to gain a new perspective. The Indigenous perspective and narrative have been missing from the Canadian conversation for a long time, our history books often read from a narrative that is not Indigenous, we need to have this lens in order to have a better understanding of the truth. There have been many steps taken in Canadian history that have attempted assimilation of the Indigenous Peoples.

Reconciliation and Allyship have become buzz words, but before you put these words in your twitter handle and business card, I encourage you to identify with the definition and follow through with the action component of these definitions. Disrupting oppressive spaces and having a lens to identify that the organizations, governments and institutions have been primarily built on a colonized perspective.

Check out these references to explore what allyship means for you:



Ally Bill of Responsibilities



Treaty 7 Indigenous Ally Toolkit



Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy Network Indigenous Ally Toolkit

In terms of reconciliation in your workplace, there are many things an organization can consider; does your workplace consider and include the Indigenous perspective within the strategic plan, hiring practices, specific roles for Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous positions are proportionate to the Indigenous population in the area (board, volunteers and staff)? As a contractor I have the unique opportunity to have sneak peeks into multiple organizations, I often look to see if my values align with the workplace before considering working with them. This is important because as an Indigenous entrepreneur I bring a different perspective, and will this perspective be met with resistance because there is limited knowledge on the 'Truth' or will it be embraced because the organization has begun a journey of reconciliation.



Download your free guide to crafting a traditional land acknowledgement from Forum Community Relations

Bessie's Trees

HOW LEARNING ABOUT MY ROOTS STRENGTHENED MY COMMITMENT TO TAKE ACTION TOWARD RECONCILIATION

By Anne Harding

I grew up like many Canadians of settler backgrounds, identifying simply as “Canadian.” The notion that I was anything other than germane to the country where my family had lived for generations was a foreign concept. As I started to work with and learn more about the history and experiences of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, though, it became clear to me that I would benefit from a deeper understanding not just of my family’s heritage, but also of their stories with this land.

“Our family has been here for generations. We’re Canadian.” “We’re Maritimers, and have lived in Nova Scotia for centuries.” “We’re farmers from Saskatchewan where we’ve homesteaded for over a century.” I’m sure these phrases, or slight variations on them, are familiar to some. These were the family stories and identities that I grew up with, and that worked for me for the first 20-some-odd years of my life. They worked for me because I’m white, and our systems in Canada are intentionally set up to benefit people like me. Coming from an upper middle class family in Calgary, I never needed to defend or question my background or heritage. I just existed as ‘Canadian’, pretty much blind to the fact that my experience was so very different from the experiences of Indigenous people who were (and still are) subtly and overtly discriminated against because of their heritage.

This really hit me about seven years ago when I started digging deeper into my family’s story. I was spending so much time working with and learning from Indigenous friends and colleagues who had such rich understandings of and appreciation for their

families’ longstanding (like, several thousand years’) connection to this land. If I was really identifying as ‘Canadian’, why didn’t I have a stronger personal connection to this country and its people? So I went on a personal fact-finding mission.

I was thrilled when I was chatting with my mom one day and she said “well, you know you have an ancestor who was a Red River Settler, don’t you?” I said, “what does that mean?” and she said “I don’t know. But here’s a USB stick with our family’s history on it - look in there.” What I learned from that USB is that my great-great-grandfather John Nielsen was part of the Wolseley Expedition in 1870.

The Wolseley Expedition (or Red River Expedition) was a government military expedition that was launched at the same time that the government was passing The Manitoba Act, which guaranteed 1.4 million acres of land in what we now know as Manitoba as a dedicated land for Métis people. The expedition was retaliation for Louis Riel’s execution of Thomas Scott, and not so subtly intended to punish the Métis for standing up for their recognized rights. By the time the expedition made the 3 month journey across Northern Ontario and into Manitoba, Riel had



Wolseley Expedition



Manitoba Act

fled to the United States, where he stayed in exile before coming back up to fight in the Red River Resistance and ultimately being the only Canadian executed for high treason to this country (for fighting for Métis rights) in 1885.

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Now for his service, my ancestor, John Nielsen, was granted 160 acres of land in the province of Manitoba, which surely would have belonged to a Métis family. John brought



his family out from Ontario and learned to farm in Manitoba for about a decade before moving with a mission to Saskatchewan, where my family has “homesteaded for over a century.”

It has been incredibly impactful for me and my work

to learn this story. To fill out my identity as a Canadian. To connect my personal story with the story of Indigenous people in our country. I am now able to better understand that my privilege growing up as an upper middle class white girl in Calgary can be directly traced back to racist government policies of assimilation.

The fact that my parents and their parents were encouraged and supported to pursue post-secondary education, to own property, to have stable careers and loving family lives, all relate to the fact that John Nielsen was a white militiaman in a government expedition to quash the ability of Métis people to maintain their identity and way of life. The same Métis people who were integral to the formation of this country through their pivotal roles in the fur trade, as navigators and negotiators between Indigenous and European traders.

Learning this history didn't change my interest in reconciliation, but it most definitely deepened my commitment to seeing my privilege as a responsibility. To make sure that I do everything that I can to use my privilege to help build a country for future generations that celebrates and recognizes the unique rights and identities

of Indigenous Peoples, rather than a country that fights tooth and nail to force a whitewashed set of values and way of life on all who call this country home.

My mom passed away just over a year ago, quite unexpectedly, from pancreatic cancer. One of the ‘affairs’ that we needed to get in order was to deal with the parcel of land she owned, 8 miles east of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. It was part of the Nielsen homestead lands that had been passed down to my mom from her mom, Bessie Persson (John Nielsen's granddaughter). It's about 20 acres of forest/marsh that were affectionately known as “Bessie's trees” by her siblings and relatives. As far as I know, the land has been untouched, as it was considered too much of a swamp to be used for “productive” purposes, like farming.

While my mom was in the hospital, I had an idea that I shared with her. Bessie's trees were discounted by our farming ancestors, seen as holding no real value, so they were left untouched. To me, that means that the trees, plants, berries, and medicines on that land are indigenous to that territory, which may be a bit of a rare thing, given how prevalent settlement and farming is in that part of Saskatchewan. How wonderful would it be to partner with an Indigenous organization in the future to use that land for traditional Indigenous practices, like harvesting or ceremony, particularly for Indigenous youth living in Prince Albert, which is a mere 5 minutes away? I was fortunate enough to be able to share this idea with mom before she passed, and she loved it.

So I am now the proud steward of Bessie's trees. And I look forward to one day partnering with an Indigenous organization to have my family's homestead lands used to contribute, in a small way, to the revitalization of cultures that my ancestors were once sent to destroy. To start this journey, I've contributed 5% of my revenues to the Indigenous youth organization

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Canadian Roots Exchange over the past year. While I thought it was important to begin with a financial commitment, I look forward to continuing to deepen this relationship over the coming years, discovering new ways that I can use my privilege to advance reconciliation, and one day partnering to see these lands used for healing and a re-storying of what it means to identify as Canadian.



The Stories We Tell

By Brittany Brander

Whether it's the simple retelling of the events of our weekend or the grand ideals we build as a nation, stories are how we make sense of the world, how we understand our past, and how we shape our future. In them, and through them, we find meaning, purpose, and value.

And the stories we tell—and the ones we do not—matter.

But who decides who has the right or power to choose which ones end up in our history books and which ones do not?

Since time immemorial, it has overwhelmingly been the “winners” who have held the power of the pen—the power to determine how history will unfold in the books and minds of our children and grandchildren and influence their view of the world.

The narratives we have constructed of Canadian history, economy, and society are

centuries old. And we have folded these narratives into legislation and policy which have led to the systemic displacement, dispossession, and discrimination of Indigenous Peoples. This legislation still defines many aspects of the Indigenous experience today.

For years, these narratives shaped my own settler view of Canada, a view that I began to challenge when I started working for a museum that was critically challenging its own telling of Calgary's history. During my time at this organization, I was given opportunities to look at history from another perspective, to understand on a deeper level the consequences of telling an incomplete story.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and their 94 Calls to Action launched an important journey for Canada and for Canadians—to question and challenge the stories we are told about Indigenous Peoples and the DNA of Canada's social, economic, and political fabric. And we are slowly and painfully deconstructing the harmful narratives that

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have kept the First Peoples of these lands from creating and participating in prosperity.

But we have a long way to go.

And by confronting and challenging the narratives we create and build, we can rewrite a centuries-old story and advance reconciliation.

The task is not easy. But we can do it. And we must. For our future.



This reflection comes from Brittany Brander, Manager of Brand & Communications at the Business Council of Alberta and one of Forum Community Relations' cultural agility coaching clients. To learn more about one-on-one or small group cultural agility coaching, please visit this page.



What's one thing that Canadians of settler ancestry can do to help advance reconciliation?

Check out this 2 minute video to find out.



What are you reading?

One of the easiest ways that Canadians can advance reconciliation is to make a choice to diversify your media intake! What books, articles, & podcasts are you reading and listening to? Check out what's on Anne's nightstand and in her earbuds right now:

On my nightstand

Since the last edition of The Community Forum, I finished reading *A Geography of Blood* by Candace Savage and highly recommend it for anyone with settler or Indigenous ancestry in the prairies, particularly the area around the Cypress Hills in southern Alberta & Saskatchewan.

Pathways of Reconciliation is a compilation

In my earbuds

As part of the Indigenous Awareness for IAP2 Canada Learning Program, I'm working with two learning participants who want to increase their

of academic essays that offer different ideas and perspectives on advancing reconciliation in Canada. So far, it's offered some ideas that have challenged my own assumptions and views about what reconciliation looks like in our country, and is recommended for those who appreciate (or at least don't mind) the academic language.

understanding of and comfort with Indigenous interests in Canada. Each small group cohort in this learning program picks different learning

materials to work through together. My group selected a few episodes from the Indigenous 150+ Podcast Series.

The Indigenous150+ Youth Ambassador program brought together 21 young adults from across the country, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to learn how to moderate cross cultural conversations and basic podcasting skills.

One of the episodes that my group listed to is called We Are Not

Extinct: Hunting, Patience and Perseverance. In this episode, Rick and Linda Desautel, Sinixt decedents share their 11 year story of how they fought their way to the Supreme Court of Canada to have the rights of the Sinixt Nation recognized and the wrongful declaration of their extinction reversed.

This was an especially meaningful learning opportunity for me, who holds recreational property at Galena Bay, BC, which is on Arrow Lake, the heart of Sinixt traditional territory.



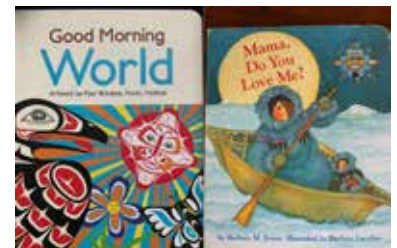
Bobby's Pick

Go Show the World by Wab Kinew

"I like this book because it shows lots of different Indigenous people doing lots of different and important things."

- Bobby Harding, 7 years old

Some of you have also asked for book recommendations for younger readers - here are two of our favourites:



Anne is privileged to live, work, and play in traditional Treaty 7 territory and home of Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3.

Anne is the Owner of Forum Community Relations, a Calgary based consulting company dedicated to catalyzing better communities through Indigenous relations, community engagement, and culturally appropriate facilitation.

Connect with her work at www.forumrelations.com

