

COMMISSION ROYALE SUR
LES PEUPLES AUTOCHTONES

ROYAL COMMISSION ON
ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

LOCATION/ENDROIT: Northern Lights Secondary School,
Moosonee, Ontario

DATE: Wednesday, June 10, 1992

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"for the record..."

STENOTRAN

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1 Northern Lights Secondary School,
2 Moosonee, Ontario

3 --- Upon commencing June 10, 1992, at 11:10 a.m.

4 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** (talk to
5 students begun before system set) -- (reporting started
6 at 11:15 a.m.)

7 There have been many Royal Commissions
8 in Canada, but this is the first one that has the kind
9 of mandate that we have. It is very, very broad. It
10 covers all issues that might affect our people in Canada.
11 It covers all aboriginal people. It covers all sections
12 of Canada.

13 It covers things like issues dealing
14 with self-government and there has been a lot of talk at
15 the present time about aboriginal people and
16 self-government.

17 We have the ability to look into all
18 aspects of that.

19 We can deal with treaty issues. Again,
20 that is another issue that has always been very, very
21 important for aboriginal peoples. It has, in the minds
22 of First Nation people, defined the relationship that they

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1 have had in Canada and the newcomers here.

2 We can deal with treaties that were
3 signed by First Nations prior to the creation of Canada
4 -- the old treaties that are pre-confederation -- or the
5 new ones, or the future ones.

6 We can deal with land questions, the
7 aboriginal title issues that are extremely important to
8 many parts of Canada, particularly the parts that have
9 never had a treaty issue. We can deal with issues that
10 are important to women and we have been hearing from women
11 in different parts of the country and some of the concerns
12 that they have and the kind of aspirations for the future.

13 So, we have heard both the good side and
14 we have also heard the very sad, painful stories of women,
15 violence at home, and so forth.

16 We can deal with elder's issues. And,
17 again, we are hearing both stories of pain, but also stories
18 of a wonderful revival and the role that elders are playing
19 in prisons and elsewhere, to give native people something
20 that they have lost.

21 The rehabilitation that inmates have
22 been getting, the drug and alcohol and so on, and anger

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1 management and therapy, it has never worked as well until
2 the elders got into the prisons and brought pipe in and
3 they brought the sweet grass and set up the sweat lodges.
4 They brought the inmates in and then they started doing
5 healing circles. And this has happened both with women
6 and with men.

7 So, we are finding that the elders --
8 particularly in the urban areas -- are really in demand
9 and that people are looking to them for some real serious
10 guidance of where they are at.

11 We also can deal with youth issues, and
12 this is part of the reason that we are here now. We want
13 to hear from you some of the things that are important
14 to you, and some of your visions for the future.

15 We have visited a number of native
16 schools, some better than others, some more exciting than
17 others. We went to a high school in downtown Winnipeg
18 -- which I talk a lot about because it really had a good
19 impact -- and we were very, very impressed -- called the
20 "Children of the Earth High School."

21 The native people of Winnipeg fought for
22 a long time to try and influence the larger school system

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1 that native people would feel at home in those schools
2 -- there is some relevance here -- the history of what
3 most native were working in were culturally insensitive
4 to aboriginal people -- and finally they decided that they
5 had to pay for their own school. They just were not having
6 the larger system pay much attention to them.

7 After a lot of struggle they created this
8 school and it is still part of a larger school division,
9 but the native people have some freedom and influence in
10 the school.

11 What is really interesting about it is
12 that, as soon as you go in you see there is a difference
13 in the school. The native people there -- it is an
14 all-native high school -- it is run by native staff. And
15 as soon as you go in you start to see, you know, the
16 vibrance. The spirit in that building is quite different
17 than many other places.

18 The native children there are taught
19 their language, their culture. They have spiritual
20 advisors. Before every event they burn sweet grass, or
21 sage, smudging all the way around. There is a drum group
22 within the school. They have a theme song which includes

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1 both male and female. And they sang it for us. It is
2 really inspirational.

3 And the young people there are going
4 through a really good -- they have only had the school
5 for about a year and a half -- and already you could see
6 real change. We heard some real painful stories from young
7 people that obviously were aboriginal -- this is an
8 aboriginal high school -- but they told us their story
9 about how they did not know whether they were native or
10 non-native when they were growing up. And, for a long
11 time, they actually tried to be non-native, and they really
12 fought hard to be recognized as just an ordinary person.

13 And, of course, they just ran into a lot
14 of problems. And so, in the end, they came to the
15 conclusion that really they could not get away from the
16 fact that they were an aboriginal person. No one was
17 really letting them do that and they could not live with
18 it, so they started recognizing that they really should
19 recognize the fact that they were aboriginal.

20 They demonstrated to us the growth of
21 their language that has been happening since they were
22 there. And it was very painful for some of these students

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1 that had denied their heritage for a long time. And it
2 made them feel ashamed to feel that if they are going to
3 be anybody they really have to be a non-native person.

4 And it is really, really interesting to
5 see how the relationship between the teachers and the
6 students is quite different in the school than you would
7 have in other schools. They demonstrated their closeness
8 to us with their dances and songs, and so forth.

9 They did some interesting things. They
10 wanted to tell us a number of things, so they did it in
11 a number of ways. They used drama. And one thing they
12 did was, they ran through a whole series of skits, real
13 fast, where the young people themselves were just changing
14 the stage. And they went through all the major themes
15 of our mandate.

16 They went through the violence, the
17 racism, the family neglect that follows with alcohol and
18 drug abuse. Then they also told the other flip side about
19 their cultural rebirth and the healing circle, and so
20 forth. It was really moving thing.

21 Then they started individually giving
22 us presentations.

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1 So, we have had a lot of interesting
2 experiences. We have been travelling out in an urban
3 setting. We have been travelling in rural settings. We
4 are holding hearings -- we will be holding hearings for
5 about 18 months. We can be in all kinds of different
6 communities and hear different stories and different
7 issues on the Indian Act and Indian Affairs, on history,
8 on culture, on language and social issues, on health and
9 education.

10 It virtually covers the whole landscape.
11 There is virtually nothing that we cannot deal with.

12 We are very, very happy to be here
13 because you are the future for people like us. I am sure
14 you are told this many times, but it is the truth. There
15 is no getting around the fact that young people become
16 adults. They get responsible positions. They get into
17 positions of power and influence. They become the
18 teachers. They become the chiefs, the band managers.
19 And you will eventually be part of the power structure.
20 And you will be in a situation where you will be making
21 decisions that your parents are now making.

22 So, it is very important for us to listen

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1 to young people in our work, because the reason for the
2 Royal Commission is to work out a long-term plan. And
3 we really want to make sure that the pain and the ignorance,
4 and the oppression of the past colonization of aboriginal
5 people does not occur again.

6 We also have a healing. But, more than
7 the healing, we want to -- once you get beyond the healing,
8 then we have to look at the kind of society that we want
9 to create together.

10 First Nations people have always thought
11 they were prepared to share Turtle Island with the
12 newcomers from elsewhere, so that there would be peaceful
13 co-existence. All they ask is the right to be recognized
14 as nations. All they ask is that their institutions of
15 government and all the other institutions, whether they
16 were social institutions or political institutions, or
17 legal, would be recognized. And that has never occurred.

18 Our spirituality has been attacked. Our
19 political systems were affected by the Indian Act. Our
20 way of life was made to feel inferior, our language and
21 our culture. At one time, if you were in a school like
22 this anywhere in North America, you were denied the ability

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1 to speak the aboriginal language and it was just about
2 crushed out of us.

3 It is amazing that aboriginal people can
4 still remember anything from their culture, because
5 virtually everything that had anything to do with
6 aboriginal people was made to feel inferior.

7 So, because it is so important for people
8 like you to be involved in this, we wanted to spend some
9 time here.

10 And again, I apologize for there not
11 being enough time.

12 Viola wants to say a few things and then
13 we are going -- if you have questions in that respect,
14 we want to hear some of your views about the kind of society
15 you want in the future.

16 Thank you.

17 Viola?

18 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:** Good
19 morning.

20 My name is Viola Robinson and I am a
21 Micmac Indian from Nova Scotia, and I want to thank you
22 for the welcome we have gotten here this morning and for

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1 the signs out there. We saw them as soon as we walked
2 in the door.

3 And I guess what I have to say -- I am
4 not going to take too much time -- Georges has pretty much
5 covered the purpose of the Royal Commission and what we
6 are trying to do -- but I do believe that the youth have
7 a very important role to play for the future of Canada.

8 And I think it is important that you look
9 and start thinking about what kind of a country you want
10 to see as you go out into the world, out into the country,
11 and what role you can play to make it a better place to
12 live.

13 The other thing I think is important as
14 well is -- when I look around I am very encouraged --
15 because, where I come from, we have been exposed to European
16 culture and society a lot longer than the western part
17 of Canada and the north. We have been exposed every since
18 in the early sixteen hundreds.

19 And when I go to schools -- I used to
20 have to go and speak to high school student bodies like
21 this in Nova Scotia -- and a lot of times there were no
22 aboriginal faces out there in the student body. And if

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1 there were, there were probably one or two. We do not
2 have the kinds of high schools that you have here, with
3 a lot of aboriginal students. And certainly there is not
4 the kind of support.

5 So, when we had to go to high school,
6 the first thing we would do is, we have a cultural shock
7 and they we are -- my children, when they went to high
8 school, they found debates and discussion about their
9 rights. And my kids, when they went to school, they were
10 the only ones, they were the only aboriginal students in
11 a big high school.

12 So, they had to fight their way through,
13 which I have had to, too.

14 But here it is different, much
15 different. And this is encouraging. And one thing you
16 have to do, I think in life, is, you have to develop now
17 yourselves, of who you are and to be very strong and firm
18 about who you are because, if you can do that, you can
19 go anywhere. You can go anywhere in Canada, and you can
20 always be successful. I think that is really, really
21 important. You have to get your roots and be very strong
22 and believe in what you are doing and who you are.

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1 And, as long as you do that, have your
2 culture, your language, it is very, very important. The
3 language, where I come from, is just about lost. One part
4 of Nova Scotia there is nobody speaking it. The other
5 part, in Cape Breton, people are still maintaining their
6 language. I speak my language and I understand it, but
7 my children do not.

8 So, that is another area. And certainly
9 I think -- well, I am not going to take a lot of time because
10 we are referred to as a listening commission -- so, I guess
11 what we want to do is hear you and hear your concerns and
12 to be able to respond to any of the concerns that you might
13 have.

14 So, I will leave it at that and give the
15 rest of the time for your questions or your issues, or
16 whatever, that you want to get into.

17 Thank you.

18 **TERRY LEGGE:** We have a microphone there
19 at the back, if there is anybody who would like to make
20 some comments, or ask some questions, please just step
21 up to the microphone.

22 **UNIDENTIFIED TEACHER:** (no microphone)

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1

2 I have a piece of paper that was passed
3 to me by a student because she decided I should ask the
4 question.

5 It is directed to Mr. Erasmus and it says
6 "In teaching the First Nation students are the important
7 generation, why aren't we first on the Assembly of First
8 Nations list of priorities?"

9

10 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** I guess
11 the reason is that the chiefs of Canada have decided that
12 the issues that are most important are the political
13 issues.

14 There are many, many resolutions that
15 the Assembly passes every year and some of them do deal
16 with young peoples issues. But I think for quite a while
17 -- I mean, I am not in a situation where I can speak for
18 the Assembly -- I have to make it very clear -- but, having
19 been involved in that and being the National Chief for
20 six years and for the better part of 20 years I have been
21 in an elected position -- I guess I could speak in a general
22 way for the leadership of the county.

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1 The majority of the leaders in this
2 country believe that the issues that have to get solved
3 first are the treaties, the land, self-government, and
4 to build around that. Then we can tackle the other issues
5 one at a time, the social issues and so forth.

6 Obviously, that means that the issues
7 of concern to young people are generally put to the back.
8 And it is extremely unfortunate that that actually is
9 what occurs on a day-to-day basis, not because people are
10 trying to neglect the interests of young people -- in fact,
11 I suspect that 99.9 per cent of the leadership out there
12 are very, very sincerely thinking that they are working
13 on the issues with some priority that are going to lay
14 the basis for future generations. In fact, that is what
15 they are doing.

16 A lot of the chiefs are older people and
17 they are fighting for a land base. They personally are
18 probably -- self-government -- they have been aware for
19 a long time that it is going to take a long time to
20 implement.

21 It probably will be people like
22 yourselves that will be implementing what self-government

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1 means. You will have the tools to actually then turn
2 around and look at the social problems and you will do
3 something about it.

4 What I would like to suggest to you is
5 that -- myself and the chief here -- Norm and I were talking
6 about last night about how -- it is amazing, we were young
7 people one time. And a really interesting thing happens
8 when you become an adult. You tend to forget what it was
9 like -- very quickly.

10 So, it is a real challenge for you to
11 try and remember what it is like for young people and to
12 change the institutions so that -- one thing I would think
13 that would make more sense would be to give young people
14 more power. Institutions like this rob the power of young
15 people. And that is a more European type of institution.

16

17 If you were to create a school that was
18 based on the original traditions of aboriginal people it
19 would be a much more horizontal relationship. And that
20 is one reason why Viola and I did not want to be on the
21 stage. We did not want to create a false elevation between
22 us. We wanted to have a much more horizontal relationship.

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1 So, a school I would think that is based
2 on traditional values would give more power to the student
3 population. So, try and remember that when your on this
4 side and you are the principal, and you are the teacher
5 and you are the parents, to give your children more power.

6 And also remember when you are raising
7 your children to give them more power. Not to give them
8 complete freedom, but balance it so that they have a better
9 relationship.

10 I do not know if that answers your
11 question.

12 Any other questions?

13 **UNIDENTIFIED TEACHER:** (no microphone)

14 She still wants to argue with you, but
15 she will not do it herself.

16 Then why put so much pressure on us by
17 saying that we must overcome our stereotype and aim for
18 high goals? -- if they don't really have any power -- and
19 this is the lady you are arguing with right here.

20 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** I do not
21 see it as an argument.

22 **UNIDENTIFIED TEACHER:** (no microphone)

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1 Discussing.

2 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** Well,
3 there really needs to be a breaking down of stereotypes,
4 there is no question about it. The stereotypes that
5 unfortunately we are dealing with, you know, sometimes
6 are created by Hollywood, that the image that aboriginal
7 people are all drunks, lazy, don't want to work. They
8 are shiftless, untrustworthy, irresponsible, virtually
9 every negative you can think of have been put to aboriginal
10 people.

11 And yet, when you look at people
12 traditionally, you would see that we work very, very long
13 hours, had to be very responsible, and could never -- if
14 they were lazy, then they would not be able to survive
15 -- so that it just doesn't fit in.

16 Yes, every culture and every people do
17 have individuals and do have people in amongst them, you
18 know, that are either fools or some are lazy. But there
19 are, obviously in every people, those that are strong,
20 are bright, they are assertive and they are energetic and
21 responsible.

22 So, that stereotype that has been put

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1 on aboriginal people, the negative stereotype, has also
2 been put on other peoples. And all of those stereotypes
3 don't really serve any real, useful purpose, and they need
4 to be destroyed.

5 Other stereotypes that are starting
6 emerge now is that we are all the same, that there is just
7 one homogenous culture and that our values are all the
8 same, our world view is all the same. That is not the
9 case.

10 I am a Dene. I come from northern
11 Canada. And our way of life is very, very different from
12 the Micmacs, that Viola is. And there are similarities
13 with the northern Cree here, but there are significant
14 differences. And we are very, very different from the
15 plains people that do not live in forests.

16 So, that is another stereotype that also
17 needs to be broken down.

18 **UNIDENTIFIED TEACHER:** (no microphone)

19 One of the students asked me to ask you,
20 what are the Commissioners doing for Metis people?

21 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** Well, we
22 are not actually doing anything for anybody, yet.

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1 What we have been mandated to do is to
2 go out and to listen, to research, to ponder and to start
3 -- the first thing we are supposed to be doing is, we are
4 supposed to be listening to people as to what they would
5 like us to do on Indian positions. That is why we are
6 holding hearings.

7 We are meeting with aboriginal
8 organizations; we are working with the Metis. And we hope
9 to get some very clear direction as to what we should do
10 in that area, both from the hearings and research and
11 readings that we will be doing. And so we will be making
12 recommendations that will apply to the Metis people.

13 What we will be doing is, every time we
14 are going to make a recommendation we will be testing out
15 the ideas in advance. We will probably come out with
16 things like special documents that have draft ideas and
17 they will be bounced around. And we will get input more
18 to further develop the idea before we finalize those
19 issues.

20 I am going to ask Viola to relieve me,
21 so she can answer some questions.

22 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:** Okay, I

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1 am ready for any questions. I don't know if I can answer
2 them or not, but I certainly will try.

3 **WILBERT WESLEY:** (native language)

4 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:** (native
5 language)

6 **WILBERT WESLEY:** Viola, I welcome you
7 here. My name is Wilbert and the topic I wish to discuss
8 on is the Cree native language and how it should be
9 preserved, such as it is now a compulsory course here French
10 and English, and I feel Cree should be the same thing,
11 a compulsory.

12 It is taught, but it is not a compulsory
13 credit that should be taken. I feel also it should be
14 publicized. We have a television show on Cree, called
15 "Wawatay." But it's only given on weekends, which should
16 also be on weekdays as well.

17 And we should advertise it as well, such
18 as posters, writing in Cree and also writing in government
19 documents for the native people far up the coast to
20 understand.

21 Thank you.

22 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:** Well, I

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1 think you have really touched on a topic that is very,
2 very crucial to aboriginal young people in this country.

3 It keeps emerging as a critical point,
4 the aboriginal language. And it's something that we hope
5 we won't have to wait two or three years to try to do
6 something about. And I think what you have said there
7 is in the form of a recommendation and it seems as though
8 there must be a way that those recommendations can be
9 followed up within your own community here.

10 Certainly, you have a structure here
11 that deals with the school system. You have your Band
12 system and those kinds of things -- I would think that
13 those kinds of recommendations, if they were to move
14 forward, were to be advanced to the right authority within
15 your own nation and within the education system, I cannot
16 see why some progress could not be made.

17 But, you know, they are very sound
18 recommendations and I do not know how anybody could argue
19 against those kinds of suggestions.

20 Thank you.

21 Are there any others?

22 **UNIDENTIFIED TEACHER:** It is not

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1 necessary to come to the mike. Just stand where you are
2 or sit where you are and speak up.

3 **UNIDENTIFIED STUDENT:** Why don't you
4 have any student representatives on the Commission?

5 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:**
6 Student representatives on the Assembly
7 of First Nations?

8 **UNIDENTIFIED STUDENT:** On the
9 Commission.

10 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:** On the
11 Commission?

12 **UNIDENTIFIED STUDENT:** Yes.

13 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:** We have
14 -- as we move out here and we invite youth from the community
15 where we are holding hearings -- we invite youth to come
16 and sit with us as a Commissioner of the Day. As a matter
17 of fact, we did have a youth sitting with us yesterday,
18 over at the Moose Factory hearings.

19 And we encourage that. And the
20 Commission, as well, is going to be holding what we call
21 "round table" -- sort of like conferences -- with certain
22 segments of aboriginal people.

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1 For instance, there will be one on urban
2 aboriginal issues. There will be one on treaties. And
3 there will be one on elders. And there will be one on
4 youth. And there will be one on women.

5 So, we are planning to put a lot of
6 emphasis and consideration for youth.

7 We have a student program at the
8 Commission itself, summer student program, where we hire
9 summer students to work on the Commission during the
10 summer.

11 That is all we have done.

12 **CHRISTINA DELANEY:** My name is
13 Christina Delaney.

14 I have a grandfather who is 80-years old
15 and I have been growing up with him for my 18 years. I
16 cannot speak my language. I try, but I love him more than
17 anything, and there's communication there where, you know,
18 someone dies, you can feel the love between us and I can
19 rub his hand and we know we understand each other.

20 But, there is something missing in our
21 lives when we cannot listen to the stories that they have
22 to tell, or explain how you are feeling about something.

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1 And it's very frustrating for me, knowing that this very
2 important part of my culture is being lost.

3 And I was talking to someone yesterday
4 who said, "You know, native people just want to be free."

5 And I had to disagree because I think very much we are
6 free. We have a great freedom and what I'm scared of is
7 losing it, losing the tools that -- to work with -- losing
8 my grandfather who can teach me the language. And all
9 these years he's been a trapper, all his 80 years, and
10 his knowledge, I won't be able to learn except through
11 the touch and the love, that's all.

12 And I think each one here, everyone here
13 has a gift. We all have a knowledge. We were given the
14 knowledge to know when something is wrong. Like, we know
15 we're doing something wrong to the planet. The knowledge
16 is put in our head, that's what my mom said.

17 We are given the knowledge and we should
18 do something about it, and we should talk about it. I
19 think everyone here should, if they have a concern, speak
20 about it because it's very important that we talk about
21 it together and sharing -- a long time ago people shared
22 everything, you know, for survival. You shared your food.

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1 You shared your land for hunting. It was survival. And
2 today we don't have those things as much as we did then.
3 But sharing -- we have to share again, for survival, for
4 our culture to stay alive.

5 That's all I have to say.

6 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:** Thank
7 you.

8 I don't have any answers for you. I
9 don't think you have really asked a question here, but
10 I think you have raised a very important concern here.
11 And it is one that is surfacing around. And, you know,
12 aboriginal culture -- and even as we go around now, myself
13 -- and I am sure with the rest of the Commissioners --
14 it doesn't matter how much experience you get, it doesn't
15 matter how much travelling you do, and it doesn't matter
16 how much education you get, but as you go around to
17 different communities you are always learning. You are
18 always learning and it's a learning experience for us,
19 as we go from community to community.

20 And I think that something like culture,
21 which has been lost -- a lot of it has been lost for
22 aboriginal peoples throughout this country -- and now

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1 everybody is struggling to revive and to retain their
2 culture and their language, the very thing that you speak
3 about. And there is more progress being made in some areas
4 than others.

5 For instance, the healing process -- and
6 that is something like what you are talking about -- and
7 the culture of aboriginal people is to be in a circle,
8 and to talk, and to share. And that's something that has
9 been lacking, I think.

10 You see, the way we view -- all of our
11 views as aboriginal people -- we might call them egocentric
12 -- we see the world in a different way than non-aboriginal
13 people. The non-aboriginal people, their world view
14 again. And that world view has been imposed on us for
15 a long time and it is not right.

16 We have to change that. Young people
17 like yourselves, you know, you have -- like this lady here
18 was asking -- why are we not a priority? Well, you make
19 yourself a priority. It is what you feel in your heart
20 and what you think. You express it and you make it --
21 if you want to do something and if you really put your
22 head to it, there is nothing that is going to stop you.

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1 And you have to do it yourself. Nobody is going to do
2 it for you.

3 These things that you talk about, you
4 have to keep expressing them. And you are going to have
5 to convince others to do it. You are going to have to
6 convince your teachers. You are going to have to convince
7 your parents and other people, to understand what is
8 missing and how you want to address that.

9 And, once you do that, people will have
10 to listen and they have to start changing. We cannot allow
11 other cultures or other beliefs to impose on us. People
12 outside of the aboriginal community have to start
13 understanding aboriginal people more. And there is
14 nothing wrong with that. They have to learn. And we have
15 learned their culture and we have done that for 500 years.
16 Now they have to turn around and start learning ours.

17 And once that attitude is instilled in
18 the educators and society in general, you will start seeing
19 a change. And you can start that here, and you can start
20 it yourself.

21 **CHRISTINA DELANEY:** Ms Robinson, you
22 said about doing things for yourself and I strongly believe

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1 that us native people, like, we need to be stronger and
2 in the way we need to be stronger we need to keep going
3 to school. And that is something that we learn from
4 non-native people, is education.

5 Two hundred years ago, around here, we
6 never knew what a book was, I guess. We never knew what
7 the formula -- equation for velocity, or whatever -- those
8 are things we did not need to know. And now, more and
9 more we have to learn to, I guess, learn these non-natives
10 ways. And we're caught. We're caught between, "Should
11 I go hunting this fall, or should I go to school?"

12 But, if I chose to go to school and after
13 so many years it's being paid, like, is the depletion of
14 these funds for post secondary students, is that going
15 to become a problem with the next 10 years?

16 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:**

17 Probably.

18 We are going to look at that. This is
19 very, very important. It is the one area that has been
20 a very big success with the Department of Indian Affairs
21 and it is ironic that it is the area that they are cutting
22 back.

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1 None of their programs have been more
2 successful than the post secondary education program.
3 And they have been reducing the funding and it just does
4 not make any sense because, for the most recent statistics
5 on it, something like 1.3 per cent of aboriginal students
6 that get into elementary school succeed in high school.
7 And then to stop -- and not all of those people go on
8 to post secondary experience -- and to be dampening that
9 little over one per cent -- even if everyone went -- just
10 does not make any logical sense because the experience
11 is that the majority -- the overwhelming majority -- 85
12 per cent -- 90 per cent of the people that get any post
13 secondary experience at all become employed. And
14 so, to stop those people from going to university and keep
15 them on social assistance, you know, the government is
16 still laying out money. And, in a lot of cases, it is
17 more expensive.

18 We went to a Saskatchewan reserve about
19 10 days ago. There is a student there that had -- I think
20 about four to six -- and the government used to fund
21 year-round school, 12 months out of the year, so you could
22 finish your degree a lot faster. They have just recently

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1 made a change that they only can fund eight months at a
2 time, you needed a break.

3 So, he left his work so he could go to
4 university and now he has got at least four, maybe eight
5 months -- or he has got to wait in between before he goes
6 back to university. And he was told, according to Indian
7 Affairs, "Go home, the social service people have been
8 told that university students are going back."

9 So, it just doesn't make any sense and
10 obviously, for him, he would be getting more social
11 assistance than he would be getting in university support.

12 So, it is not logical. It does not make
13 any economic sense. It does not make any long-term
14 planning sense.

15 So, we will definitely be looking at
16 that.

17 You were saying that 200 years ago they
18 didn't have certain kinds of equations and I suspect there
19 would be very few places in the world where you would have
20 found that kind of knowledge 200 years ago.

21 The knowledge of aboriginal people here,
22 you know, was equal to, in many, many, many things. The

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1 kinds of gifts that North American aboriginal people have
2 given to the world has not been fully recognized.

3 When Columbus and others discovered
4 North America a revolution happened in Europe. They
5 discovered minerals like gold and silver here and it
6 completely changed North America. They discovered
7 vegetables here, like potatoes and corn and all kinds of
8 things that they did not have in Europe -- we also gave
9 them tobacco and tried to do away with them -- but the
10 gifts that came from North America, from aboriginal people,
11 herbal medicines that are used -- have been broken down
12 into the individual parts and now are used as common-day
13 medicine all came from aboriginal people but, you know,
14 you never get that side of the story of aboriginal people.

15 Yes, we do have choices. What we
16 suggest to young people is -- that are aboriginal people
17 -- is, they need to know their language, they need to know
18 their culture and they need to know how to survive on the
19 land. If you have those kinds of gifts, if you are centred
20 in that kind of way, then you can pile on more and more
21 languages, you can pile on more and more knowledge.

22 But, when you do not have that core idea

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1 of who you are, then there is always an insecurity in you
2 that can be challenged and affected by other people. Just
3 being able to -- whenever you wish -- if you want to do
4 it on your leisure time to be able to travel on the land,
5 and know how to do it, know how to survive, know how to
6 go out and start a fire in any kind of condition, be able
7 to go out there with just a few things in your pocket --
8 perhaps matches -- a few minor things, and be able to
9 survive, is a wonderful feeling. And to know that it is
10 your traditional life to survive with that is very, very
11 useful.

12 And that is a minimum basis that
13 aboriginal people should be given, in addition to
14 everything else that they are going to learn.

15 **CHRISTINA DELANEY:** I guess I'm really
16 stressing education. What the government is doing now
17 doesn't make sense, as you said. Like, it would be more
18 economically sound to pay a native student to get six years
19 of post secondary education, than to pay them for 15 years
20 on welfare because they're not educated.

21 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:**

22 Exactly.

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1 **CHRISTINA DELANEY:** And I'm not really
2 speaking to the Commission right now, but to my fellow
3 students in front of me here, just to keep on going and
4 if there's more people wanting to go on, then we don't
5 have to get as many non-native people to come and look
6 after us as physicians, as teachers, as lawyers.

7 We've been doing this for so long, to
8 be paying money to people to look after us, in the sense
9 of health and teaching our children these other ways.
10 You have said that we have to learn to live off the land,
11 and I have, and I can skin a rabbit and I know how to work
12 down physics equations. I'm doing all this stuff and I'm
13 still caught in it.

14 To be stronger as a race we have to go
15 education in both ways. But, what would be more sound
16 for us?

17 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:**

18 Yesterday the chief here and I had an
19 interesting conversation.

20 I asked him: What kind of teacher is
21 it that, you know, we are looking at? Is it one where
22 every aboriginal person is a doctor, a lawyer, a scientist,

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1 a professional? And if we did achieve that and we took
2 all the aboriginal people on one side and all the non-native
3 people on the other side -- and over there, too, we have
4 the doctors, the lawyers and all the rest of it -- the
5 scientists -- what would be different? What would be
6 different between the two groups?

7 Then he told me that what would be
8 different would be what is inside, the beliefs, the values,
9 the understanding, the outlook at the world. And so, even
10 though you perhaps became professional, similar to the
11 non-native people, the difference would be that you
12 continue to be an aboriginal person and that that would
13 probably mean that if you were going to maintain your
14 culture, even though you were a social worker, even though
15 you were a lawyer, even though you were a medical doctor,
16 you are probably not going to do things exactly the same
17 as the non-native person.

18 You probably will start to challenge the
19 way they do those things.

20 If, for instance, you are a medical
21 doctor you might, as an aboriginal person, decide also
22 to look into the kind of herbal, holistic, spiritual

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1 medicine that existed in the past. And so, to also be
2 able to combine the two and to treat the whole patient,
3 not to treat the symptom of the problem.

4 Likewise, if you were in any of the other
5 professions, you would probably influence that culture
6 in a way -- and that professional group -- in a way in
7 which it would be different.

8 And so, it would be still possible for
9 aboriginal people to maintain their culture, but it would
10 mean that being professional would change over a period
11 of time. You could not do things precisely the same
12 because, if you did, you would be dropping your culture.

13 If the school systems stay exactly the same, if all you
14 are doing is, you are just transferring white people and
15 you are putting Indian people in, it is exactly the same
16 -- nothing changes, it is exactly the same -- then, what
17 you have done is you have just shredded everything of the
18 culture that existed in the past and you have just adopted
19 a completely new culture.

20 And so, for people like myself, I do not
21 have -- I encourage young people to go to school -- but
22 I know that we are taking an immense risk because we could

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1 lose, we could lose badly. We could actually be the cause
2 of total assimilation. We could be the people that are
3 encouraging our young people to go out there and lose
4 everything that is culturally meaningful to them, to be
5 different from other people.

6 So, I do not encourage young people just
7 to go to university and just to become a professional like
8 other people. That is not enough. That is not the answer.
9 The answer is not to have Indian teachers -- or First
10 Nation teachers -- that simple do exactly the same thing
11 that somebody could do from Europe that comes here. That
12 is not the answer.

13 If that was the answer, we would have
14 been in Heaven a long time ago, because they have been
15 doing that to us for a long time.

16 It was never the answer because it was
17 insufficient. It was not culturally sensitive. So, the
18 curriculum has to change. The manner in which education
19 is delivered has to change and, in every profession,
20 likewise.

21 But, to start it, we have to get our
22 people in there. Then you have got to challenge them.

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1 And that is what is happening.

2 We are getting aboriginal people into
3 universities. They are challenging the universities.

4 But always there is a possibility they could be co-opted.

5 They could become just exactly like the rest. And we
6 see the individuals that try to maintain their culture.

7 And we see the other ones that get lost. We see the
8 lawyers that become just exactly like the others. And,
9 unfortunately -- well, it's good for that person, I guess.

10 They're making good money and they are making a career
11 and all the rest of it.

12 But, are they giving back to their
13 people? I mean, there was a lot of investment. There
14 was a lot of hope. There was a lot of -- you know, a lot
15 of young people said -- you know, old people said, "Look,
16 we're really taking a chance with our young people." But
17 that seems to be what would have to happen.

18 And so it is not enough simply to become
19 scientists and leave your culture behind. But, yes, it
20 is important to go out and get that education. There is
21 no other way you are going to be regarded as equals.

22 **UNIDENTIFIED TEACHER:** (no microphone)

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1 I also think that one thing that's been
2 touched on that hasn't really been looked at, too, is how
3 much do you people have to offer to the dominant society?
4 Just listening to you talk about university and I want
5 my kids to know physics equations, but I also want my
6 children to know that our earth is important. I want my
7 family and my children to have values that include caring
8 about other people and that causes them to realize that
9 just making \$150,000 a year is not enough.

10 And I want for myself and for my children
11 to develop a sense of spirituality and I think more and
12 more native people have to look at what you have to offer
13 to the dominant society. I think Viola mentioned the fact
14 that you have been learning from the dominant society for
15 500 years and maybe it is time to switch that around.
16 And I think that's absolutely right.

17 So, I think the most important thing is
18 a sense of balance. And what everybody -- it is amazing
19 what some people have within themselves. Having
20 only been for a short time period of a month and I am just
21 amazed in class at the things we come out with to show
22 me that their parents and your grandparents have given

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1 you a whole lot that no one realizes you have.

2 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** I would
3 agree with everything that the teacher just said. I think
4 that we do have a lot to give to the dominant society.

5 **TERRY LEGGE:** I hate to break in at this
6 point but we are a way behind now. We will vacate for
7 a short time and we will set the tables up -- just a sec
8 -- before you go, please
9 -- I would like to thank Viola and George for the time
10 they have taken --

11 (Applause)

12 Recess 12:14 p.m.

13 Whereupon the Commission resumed with a workshop type of
14 discussion with a group of chosen students at 1:07 p.m.

15 **TERRY LEGGE:** Well, we designed this in
16 the hopes that with a more informal situation you might
17 be more open to more discussion.

18 My role in this is zero. I am simply
19 go aid the reporter here by writing down your names in
20 order, as you speak. And I believe we have until 1:40
21 and we are at 1:08 now.

22 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** So,

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1 where we left off was, we were either being asked questions
2 or people were making comments.

3 Let us continue. There is no need for
4 Viola or I to start again, if people want to make a point,
5 or ask questions, or comment.

6 **WILBERT WESLEY:** I'm just curious, as
7 all of these meetings that the aboriginal people are
8 having, it seems in the eyes of people that I talk to it's
9 just like we're are being led around like a dog on a chain.
10 We're going to where these meetings were. We're trying
11 to talk and associate.

12 After these meetings what is the
13 government going to do to meet the needs of native people?
14 What solution, what solutions will they come up to?

15 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** Our
16 meetings? The constitutional meetings?

17 **WILBERT WESLEY:** Yes, and the meetings
18 with the people, the native people themselves, as well,
19 the ideas given over, what are they going to do and --
20 we're coming to the meetings all right. We are trying
21 to talk out the situation and give an idea what the youth
22 as well -- after all these ideas are put together, what

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1 is going to happen to those ideas?

2 Are these just going to be pushed aside?

3 Or, somehow, are they going to try and meet more the needs
4 of what we want?

5 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** You are
6 talking about our process, right?

7 **WILBERT WESLEY:** Yes.

8 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** Okay.

9 Well, we are an independent body. We
10 are appointed by the Prime Minister and the House of
11 Commons, but we are independent. And they do this once
12 in awhile to create, like a study group, but they're
13 separate. And we're a mixture both native and non-native
14 people. And we hire our own staff. We have about 100
15 people and 70 per cent of them are aboriginal.

16 Our recommendations will go to the Prime
17 Minister and to all the Premiers and the House of Commons,
18 and they have to consider them.

19 Most Royal Commissions have some kind
20 of an impact, some more than others. Some have a very
21 significant impact and their recommendations are taken
22 quite seriously.

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1 It was a royal commission that
2 recommended, for instance, that both French and English
3 should be treated equally in this country and that there
4 should be two official languages and that there should
5 be, you know, an office of Official Languages, and so forth.

6 Other studies have been far less
7 significant. And, even though their ideas were never
8 implemented, people have referred to them for many years.

9 The climate we are operating in seems
10 to be one where the Canadian public seems to be quite
11 prepared to do something in relation to aboriginal people.
12 And, when we were created, both the government of the
13 day -- which was Mulroney's Conservative government --
14 plus the two major political parties, the Liberals and
15 the New Democrats -- and the House of Commons -- were very,
16 very supportive of this initiative.

17 We will probably be reporting after the
18 next federal election. So, we do not know who will be
19 the Prime Minister.

20 But we expect that, whether it is Liberal
21 or Conservative, or New Democrat, that we will be getting
22 a fairly reasonable reception. So, there is a real,

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1 serious obligation on us to do our work right and it will
2 probably implemented.

3 So, what we hope to do in relation to
4 people putting their ideas in, then, is to help us kind
5 of shape the ideas for the future. And it will be long-term
6 solutions that we will be looking at.

7 But, obviously, we also have to focus
8 on what is going to happen in the next four or five years,
9 because that is when the major implementation will probably
10 occur.

11 **WILBERT WESLEY:** My grandparents told
12 me, and my parents as well, they say the further you go
13 up the coast the more they are concerned about the situation
14 that's happening to the aboriginal people and the land
15 itself.

16 Is there any steps taken to take this
17 meeting further up the coast? I know this is the
18 publication of this meeting is narrow and very quick --
19 I believe you guys only had, like, three days here -- or
20 somewhat like that -- are you taking any time to go further
21 up the coast where the need there is stronger for the people
22 up there?

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1 You see, when they had taken the matter
2 -- what time I can't remember -- but I know they've taken
3 something to deal with the native people up the coast --
4 I think it was due to dealing with the dams -- the native
5 people had stronger points, came across with stronger
6 emotions to talk about that specific thing, the specific
7 situation that was occurring.

8 I'm asking, is -- will this be taken
9 further up the coast where they can have a -- where you'd
10 see the impact of emotion that's on them that really deal
11 with the people up there that actually live the life of
12 what they do, like --

13 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** There is
14 over 1,000 aboriginal communities in Canada. We can't
15 hit very many of them. Maybe we will hit a tenth of the
16 communities.

17 We're travelling in three groups, so we
18 can hit more communities. We will come back to northern
19 Ontario again. We will see small communities. But we
20 are also going to go to large communities and we are going
21 to go to the urban areas.

22 We may well go to one of the coastal

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1 communities in James Bay and further up in Hudson Bay.
2 We certainly intend on seeing every situation in the
3 country.

4 Before we're finished we will have a
5 very, very good idea of the whole country, because we have
6 to have a good sampling of Inuit communities, Metis
7 communities, of First Nation communities, you know,
8 whether it's in an isolated situation or if they living
9 by a large city -- or else downtown Toronto -- we will
10 -- but, on the other hand, we also have to go to the
11 non-native communities. We also have to make sure that
12 across the country Canadians at large feel that they've
13 had a good opportunity to meet with us and so we have to
14 cover them.

15 So, it means a lot of travel for us in
16 the next year-and-a-half. So, I can't say 100 per cent.
17 If we don't go on the coast, then we will be going to
18 equivalent communities, very, very similar.

19 **CHRISTINA DELANEY:** When we heard that
20 you were coming and everything we were kind of nervous.

21 And I just wanted to know if you could
22 talk to us a bit about what -- as a youth what you could

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1 remember what happened -- stuff that we can --

2 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:** What I
3 remember most about my youth?

4 **CHRISTINA DELANEY:** Yes, please, the
5 struggle.

6 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:** I could
7 sit here all afternoon, you know.

8 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** When I
9 was a young person.

10 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:** Yes --
11 my father was an Indian doctor, herb doctor. We lived
12 in a -- we did not live on a reserve at first. We lived
13 just in a regular community.

14 And the Department of Indian Affairs
15 wanted to move all the Indians onto reserves -- they created
16 reserves, because Micmacs were scattered all around Nova
17 Scotia.

18 So, they went through the process in the
19 early '50s, late '40s and they got all the people who
20 weren't living on reserves and tried to create two big
21 reserves -- there were a lot of little reserves, too --
22 they called it "centralization." They moved all the

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1 families to one big reserve.

2 So, actually, we have a choice. And
3 I'll tell you, when we were living in this community my
4 father made good money, because he was practising Indian
5 medicine, herbal medicine. And he was treating mostly
6 non-aboriginal people and he made big money.

7 We had a home. We had a car. We had
8 all the things that even the average citizen didn't have.

9 But, we were told we had to move on a
10 reserve. So we had a choice, either to move to this one
11 reserve, or to the bigger reserve. So we chose the bigger
12 reserve and we moved. And we got a house -- but all we
13 got was the shell of a house.

14 And then when I started school on there
15 I was just a little girl. He continued to make his
16 medicine. I went to school on the reserve. And I spent
17 a lot of time -- I think what I remember is -- I spent
18 a lot of time with my parents and my grandparents -- my
19 grandfather -- going in the woods picking medicine --
20 picking -- you know, we had to go pick all different things.

21 We were told that everything that grows
22 has a purpose for healing. So we had to pick just about

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1 everything. Every time something was growing we had to
2 go pick it and bring it home and he'd grind it up, or
3 whatever he had to do. Then we used to have to take all
4 the -- sit there with newspapers all around the table and
5 we'd have -- we had what you grind oranges and stuff with,
6 you know, those grinders -- spread papers on a table and
7 just have to sit there and grind these
8 -- all the little trees into a big sawdust pile. And that
9 was medicine for something

10 But, anyway, I used to have to do that.

11 And then I left but, you know, I went
12 to school, but when I got in high school I had to go to
13 a convent. Down there, as kids, our school only went to
14 grade. And once you went by grade 9 we were sent to
15 convents, the high school -- I guess you'd call them
16 residential -- I never thought them as residential schools
17 -- but they were convents and they were, like boarding
18 schools, but a lot of other kids went there. And they
19 were usually in French communities. We have a lot of
20 French -- Acadians down there, we call them, French people
21 -- so there was a lot of -- the one I went to was down
22 in western Nova Scotia, Meteghan, a whole French community.

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1 So, it was everything in French. And
2 it was run by the Sisters of Service. They were all French.
3 They talked in French. But they taught us in English.
4 But, like, we had to go to church every day -- every
5 morning. And Sundays we went to the big church. And the
6 priest was French.

7 I should be speaking French, but I didn't
8 have any desire to. So, I was stubborn and I refused to
9 learn French. I'm sorry now I didn't.

10 But, anyway, I got out of there.

11 But growing up, it was difficult for me,
12 because I lost my mother when I was twelve years old.
13 And then my father, I didn't stay around him much. And
14 then I went to my grandfather and I lost him. And I've
15 been pretty much on my own since I was about 14 years old.

16 I finished high school. And I got
17 married young. I got married -- I'm getting up beyond
18 my youth. But the thing that I remember most about my
19 youth I think was, you know, that part of my life. And
20 it went by very fast, really fast. The blink of an eye
21 and it was over.

22 It seems far when you look ahead, but

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1 when you look back it's gone by really fast.

2 **WILBERT WESLEY:** You see, that's what
3 you can remember. You can remember the significance of
4 gathering what you want to make the medicine that your
5 father needed. You had the experiences with your
6 grandfather, the experiences of gathering things, the
7 meaning behind the things you gathered. Like you said,
8 every plant a meaning to what it could do.

9 You see, here, as a native people we
10 don't even have that experience. You said it was gone
11 in the blink of an eye. Yet, we didn't even get a chance
12 to have that blink of an eye.

13 And I'm just wondering, what is the --
14 after this meeting, how are they going to make the terms
15 of what we want? Like you said -- you just pointed it
16 out -- that we had to go to a boarding school, a convent.
17 Well, this is the same thing here too.

18 We have a native school here and it is
19 only a class that it's not compulsory to speak Cree. But
20 the rest, we have to -- it's compulsory to learn French.
21 It's compulsory to learn English in order to graduate
22 the get the education and survive.

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1 But, what we're losing behind that is
2 the native way of life, I guess, for the students yet.
3 And what we want is what you just had and experienced that
4 blink of an eye. We want that part. We want the
5 experiences with the elders -- not only that, but with
6 the native culture for students.

7 That's what we're missing.

8 **ELI CHILTON:** As we discovered,
9 governments cannot provide those types of things, that
10 blink of an eye, like you said. We have to provide that
11 for ourselves through our elders and through our parents,
12 whoever it may be. They cannot provide that for us. We
13 have to provide it for ourselves.

14 **WILBERT WESLEY:** But we have a class --
15 a native -- we have a class in Cree here that teaches us
16 to read and write Cree. As well as taking English class
17 we learn about the past history of the English. We know
18 the literature of English. We are taught to write English.
19 You learn the history, the background. You learn about
20 poets and the things they have done, the things they have
21 achieved.

22 And when it comes to Cree you just learn

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1 to read and write. You don't learn the things behind --
2 like, the elder chief, Dan George -- there are small books,
3 but that is only one of many elders that we should learn
4 of, as well as Shakespeare and other poets as well.

5 We learn the background during English,
6 but we don't know enough behind Cree. What I want is --
7 and I'm pretty sure of what most of the Cree people here
8 want to -- is some of the history that goes behind Cree,
9 the language.

10 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:** I think
11 that the problem that you are expressing exists there now,
12 too, in Nova Scotia. You know, they are saying the same
13 things that you are, you know, that they don't -- they've
14 sort of lost that too, now. You know, I just happened
15 to be in a family that it was -- that I had the opportunity
16 -- not everybody gets the same opportunities.

17 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** Well,
18 that is a responsibility for both the school and the parents
19 in a community.

20 I think the point that was made there
21 about what you can do yourself. I mean, if you really
22 want to learn, then young people should be going to elders.

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1

2 If you don't have your own elders, then
3 go to someone else's --

4 **WILBERT WESLEY:** That is what was lost.

5 And when they went to my dad, he doesn't know about the
6 Indian religion behind, because he was taken away from
7 his parents and sent to St. Ann's School, where he was
8 taught something different than what he was. He was made
9 into something he wasn't. And it was lost and you can't
10 really go to my grandparents because now my grandparents
11 are losing touch with that as well, because nobody comes
12 to them any more.

13 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** Right
14 --

15 **WILBERT WESLEY:** -- and as you lose
16 touch with something you begin to lose it even more, and
17 you don't express to somebody else.

18 That's what was lost when you were sent
19 to schools, when you were sent to places where you were
20 taught something you didn't want to learn -- like you said,
21 you didn't want to learn French -- but you have no choice.

22 In here for us we don't even hardly have

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1 any more choices anyways, because we don't see enough,
2 we don't have the elders to come and teach any more because
3 they're not there any more. That is what we lost out on.

4 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** That is
5 something other schools do, bringing elders into the
6 school, so that the elders that exist in the communities
7 are being shared by the student body, so that you create
8 a situation where that occurs. But, then, that should
9 occur outside also.

10 I mean, I know it is much easier to say
11 than to go to a stranger or to an older person and say,
12 "Well, you know, I'm not related to you, but I'd like to
13 hear your story."

14 Interesting, what you are saying about
15 your parents and their experience by going to St. Ann's
16 School. We've been hearing that everywhere. The first
17 couple of weeks of our hearings virtually we didn't hear
18 anything else except the impact of the residential school.

19 And then the sexual abuse that followed from -- it was
20 really, really a powerful message. And then, when we
21 started going to the prisons and it started connecting.

22 But, you know, for a while -- first we

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1 had two things -- we had two things happen. One was that
2 we had a government forcing natives to go to school. The
3 Christian church was being involved and thinking that they
4 were doing a really wonderful thing to native people by
5 giving them a new language and a new way of life and telling
6 them not to speak their language, strapping them if they
7 did.

8 And, for a lot of native people, they
9 actually accepted that. They have actually -- even if
10 they could speak the language, they did not teach it to
11 their children. They made a mental decision that the way
12 for their children was going to be, you know, English or
13 -- I guess in Quebec it would be French, whatever -- and
14 that is the way of the future.

15 And it is only now that I have heard --
16 I don't know how many times -- parents say, "If I only
17 would have taught my child her language," -- or his
18 language. They are just now starting to realize the impact
19 of what they did.

20 And for the churches, I think they are,
21 you know, very, very sorry for what happened and they're
22 wondering what to do to repair. But there needs to be

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1 an extraordinary amount of change, because you go to places
2 like here and you are into -- perhaps this is not even
3 as bad a situation as we've seen -- here, you still hear
4 the language being spoken amongst a lot of people.

5 We have been to places where there is
6 just five people left in the community that really know
7 the language, and they are elderly, and they are going
8 to pass away soon.

9 So, they really have some serious
10 problems on how they are going to bring it back.

11 Here, what you would have to do is just
12 convince the authorities that be, whether it is the
13 province or the chief, or whatever, and you would have
14 -- you have enough elders in the community, you have enough
15 people speaking the language and you could have instruction
16 in the language. Things could be turned around here
17 relatively quickly.

18 That does mean there is not going to be
19 a struggle, but it is obvious that the Cree language here
20 is not threatened. It can be passed on and it's going
21 to take a bit of work.

22 But in other places other languages are

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1 seriously threatened. There are just a few left in the
2 world that can speak them.

3 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:** I think
4 one of the other things, too, that is happening in some
5 schools is that they're trying to change the curriculum
6 to have more native content. Like, for instance, in my
7 area it would be to have more Micmac content and history,
8 to revise the history, the history that is being taught
9 in schools.

10 I think that is one the mandates that
11 we have here too, is to correct the historical relations
12 between aboriginal people and society in general because,
13 we have not been -- the schools have not been teaching
14 the correct history about our people. And that's a
15 mistake.

16 We have to try and correct that. And
17 in some areas where there has been a lot of history and
18 books are starting to be written, the more people get
19 educated and learn about their history, the more they can
20 produce literature. And then you have to convince the
21 education system to incorporate that into their
22 curriculums and to start looking at changing their history

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1 books to reflect the true history of Canada and aboriginal
2 people.

3 So, that move is on in different parts
4 of the country. And that is something that has to take
5 place. And that will bring back at least some traditional
6 culture of aboriginal people.

7 **ELI CHILTON:** I believe in your
8 situation, Wilbert, the way you say that your grandfather
9 and your father don't really -- they don't really -- they've
10 lost that tradition value, whatever.

11 In my case my grandfather and my father,
12 they seem to have taught me pretty well and that I think
13 every elder needs a fresh outlook, which is youth, to give
14 him that little push or that influence to teach whatever
15 it may be that they know, because my grandfather is Metis,
16 my father is white and my grandmother, she went to a
17 residential school -- not really knowing her mother and
18 her father.

19 So, basically, they've both been
20 influenced by whites. But they seem to have taught me
21 and my brothers and my cousins a lot. And, obviously,
22 their children. And I think that youth are that fresh

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1 outlook, that's the breathe of fresh air that pushes them
2 to teach.

3 I think that everybody needs to just
4 approach, is all they need, because my grandparents have
5 had a lot of influence by whites, but they seem to be
6 teaching pretty good.

7 **WILBERT WESLEY:** Maybe you look at that
8 and it's only one aspect -- on one or some individuals
9 -- but you've got to think about -- what about the native
10 people that have moved down south, the people that are
11 in the community here.

12 I go out with my friends and none of them
13 even hardly speak Cree, let alone they hardly speak --
14 they don't have that -- I guess you say that "youth push,"
15 you know, the push -- as you stated.

16 Sure, some of us are being taught to
17 keep, you know -- being taught by our grandparents and
18 our elders, but how many actually out there are being --
19 others than the ones who already know -- but others out
20 there who don't even know? How many of here at this meeting
21 can relate to native things -- I guess native religion,
22 the speaking of the language, the writing, the

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1 understanding of the story, what's behind and what's being
2 told? The native sense of humour, it's changed
3 dramatically back then to now.

4 When looked at -- just to count us that's
5 here at the meeting, how many of us can really go back
6 and really understand the history of what's being -- like,
7 not many of us here have our grandparents, you know, really
8 pushing us because we don't have grandparents -- or some
9 of us have grandparents but are not -- we are stuck because
10 -- basically what I'm trying to say is because the
11 grandparents can speak Cree. The parents are starting
12 to use it because of the boarding schools they went to.
13 The young children such as us, the generation here, can't
14 speak Cree, so how can we communicate to our grandparents?

15 That's the big gap. How are we supposed
16 to be taught if we don't even understand one another?
17 As Christina said, you can understand by touching and
18 feeling, and that's true too -- me and my grandparents
19 can express things to -- the way we act toward each other
20 -- but still, you've got to have that communication part
21 beyond that touching and beyond the understanding that
22 the action being given. You need the communication part

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1 to understand the rest.

2 You can look at a picture and you can
3 determine what is going on, but to actually read the title
4 that's underneath it, then you get the whole outlook, the
5 whole, entire outlook of what's really going on in that
6 picture.

7 That's what is we're missing here, the
8 title words, the writing of what's going on.

9 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** What
10 would you suggest?

11 **WILBERT WESLEY:** What I'm trying to
12 suggest is that -- sure, we are getting -- to get the elders,
13 yes, we have elders here that do speak the language and
14 do understand how to do the religion and et cetera about
15 what is going on.

16 But what we need is to teach -- somehow
17 get the elders and the young people to get together, build
18 up that communication, build up a bridge that the gap is
19 between us, to get the-- to come together.

20 Like, we have one Cree teacher here, out
21 of a whole high school. And we do have some in here that
22 do speak Cree, but are not involved. We have Cree elders

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1 here in Moosonee that are just, you know, they're in
2 Moosonee. There's no specific thing that they're doing.

3 We have talked about before in the one
4 meeting that we should get the elders involved. It's been
5 talked about, but it hasn't been done. It's time that
6 we stopped talking and get the elders in to teach the young
7 generation to learn the Cree, learn what's behind, and
8 learn the whole aspect of the Cree aboriginal people.
9 And it also goes for Metis as well, and white people.
10 They can learn. There's nothing wrong.

11 Like, us natives, we learned about the
12 ways of living out in the world and I'm sure it's not going
13 to hurt for them to learn as well.

14 I've heard people say, "They'll never
15 learn, they'll never understand." Well, that's just a
16 negative look. I'm thinking of a positive look where
17 people all come together and learn one thing and to get
18 the elders involved with the young people to build up that
19 bridge.

20 And I would also involve -- like, maybe
21 here she teaches Cree and she tries to help us write it.
22 Well, she could also have help by the elders that could

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1 support her and that also could help us as well, then build
2 up that bridge that's between us. That involves getting
3 the elders out, actually involved with the young generation
4 and that's what should be done to restore the native people.

5 **CHRISTINA DELANEY:** We have a need to
6 bring out -- instead to bring them in, we go to them, we
7 go out, because that's the only world they've known --
8 we've known both sides -- to bring elders in would be like
9 another culture shock.

10 We should go out to them because we know
11 about the knowledge that's given to us. And we know what
12 it's about, but we don't have the tools for it. Just like
13 a wood carver, if you don't give him the tools he can't
14 mould anything out of it.

15 I don't know if the elder can come in
16 like that. I know my grandfather, I did a video tape and
17 he found it very awkward to speak on camera and he didn't
18 want to do it. It's just not part of him.

19 You have to go to their world.

20 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** I think
21 you are right, for a lot of elders would not know how to
22 operate within a school setting.

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1 Then there are others that might. In
2 fact they are doing it in other parts. They are also going
3 into prisons -- they are being asked to do things that
4 they would normally not have done.

5 So, I think you need to do both. If you
6 really -- it seems to me you are being very honest and
7 very sincere in the points you people are making.

8 I was just going to say that our work
9 will have some impact on what you are saying, but you should
10 not wait for the Royal Commission. There are lots of
11 things that can be done.

12 And, you know, you may think that adults
13 really know what you people want and all that, but it is
14 really not the case. Generally we don't know, at all.
15 And the hardest part of our work is trying to get an idea
16 of what young people want. And it is generally the
17 generation gap that continues to exist between different
18 generations.

19 So, what I would suggest here is that
20 you express your points of view locally, firmly, because
21 there are things that could be done here very, very quickly,
22 if people were convinced -- if the adults were convinced

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1 that this was what you really desire. They would start
2 to see it as something that needs to be done. And so you
3 could put pressure on them.

4 And I would suggest go to elders
5 yourselves. And if you actually started doing something
6 yourselves, that would even be speaking louder yet again,
7 than if you just sat back.

8 **PHOEBE SUTHERLAND:** Well, the message
9 that we've been getting so far they've been asking us,
10 "What do you want?" And we've been screaming, "We want
11 our culture back." But in a same way they're asking us
12 to go ahead and go to school and that way.

13 But there are just so many questions and
14 she says "If you want to learn from elders you go to their
15 environment." And you try to tell someone, like, what's
16 it like fishing? I try to tell someone what's it like
17 hunting. And we could sit here and say, "Oh, well, you
18 just sit in a blind." And we're not going to experience
19 that. You don't know what it is until you sit out there,
20 sit in the mud and you numb your bum -- and stuff like
21 that -- you can't experience sitting at a desk.

22 And I'm just trying to say what Christina

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1 said about going out and learning, but in the way that
2 they want us to learn -- like, what I want to do is, I
3 want to go learn to become a physician and come back here
4 and help my people in that respect.

5 But the question has been raised and one
6 of the teachers said, "But what if people think your an
7 apple?" Have you ever heard that label?

8 Too many students have gone out and have
9 come back and they say, "Yeah, you're brown on the outside,"
10 or, "you're red on the outside, and you're white inside."
11 That's a term that has come up.

12 And in a way I'm afraid of becoming that,
13 but I'm strong. I'll learn to be strong in the sense that
14 I want to learn how to -- I want to give my children the
15 best of both worlds, the cooking, set the bones and skin
16 fish -- I know how to do it -- and do the -- what do you
17 call it? -- the native thing, but I want to stress education
18 which my parents have said, "You're not going to do anything
19 unless" -- or, "You're not going to stop school unless
20 you're finally done. You're not going to stay home, unless
21 you're finally done." And this fall I'm coming back to
22 school.

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1 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:** And
2 there's nothing wrong with that. I think you can do both.
3 And it does not matter what other people think, or what
4 they call you. It is what you know and what you can do.

5 **PHOEBE SUTHERLAND:** But the thing is
6 funding -- if it's going to run out on me, what will be
7 there for my children?

8 **COMMISSIONER, VIOLA ROBINSON:** If you
9 will become a physician you will make sure your children
10 get the education.

11 **PHOEBE SUTHERLAND:** Well, it's still,
12 like -- not my children, but other people's children --
13 like, college -- like those who won't go on to university,
14 but they have children and their children have the desire
15 to go on.

16 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** Well, it
17 is something that we have to look at. And if it is going
18 to be that far down the road you probably will be an adult
19 working on it yourself.

20 But you are saying that there needs to
21 be -- for you, you want to learn both. And I think that
22 for many of us that is the way it has to be because, if

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1 they don't have that, they only go one way or the other,
2 then they are really not able to feel secure. There are
3 lots of people that are on the streets that do nothing
4 but have a lot of personal problems when they are in a
5 community. You know, they drink and all this.

6 Take them out in the bush and they are
7 just absolutely wonderful. They really know what they
8 are doing there. They are experts. And they can really
9 teach anybody in the world how to live there.

10 But once they're into an organized
11 community they feel so insecure, so inadequate, that they
12 have to hide their personal insecurity by doing a lot of
13 drinking.

14 On the other hand, you have aboriginal
15 people that have been put into a formal education system
16 -- and that's all it is -- it is a formal education system
17 -- life is an education.

18 You can't go out and learn how to live
19 on the land without getting an education on how to do it.
20 That is an education also. You can't learn about herbal
21 medicines and how different plants do different things
22 and different roots do different things, and so forth,

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1 without getting an education on what that really is.

2 So, what you are talking about is the
3 formal concept of education that we have come to know as
4 mass education in the western world.

5 But native people that just go through
6 that formal education also feel totally incomplete, you
7 know, if they've lost their language through it, if they've
8 never had the time to learn their culture and they've just
9 put their nose the grind and learned English and they've
10 learned, you know, an academic way of life. And they could
11 be really good academics. But then, you know, those are
12 the people that sometimes are called apples because, what
13 they have done is, they have lost every shred of what it
14 means to be aboriginal, the values, the understanding,
15 and so forth that makes them different is gone.

16 And so they are just a shell of what they
17 could be in relation to if they had a much fuller
18 understanding of what it is to be an aboriginal person.

19 And what we need today, and what we are
20 going to need even more in the future, is aboriginal people
21 that have both, people that are pipe carriers and that
22 are psychiatrists, people that know how to do a sweat lodge

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1 ceremonies -- we need medicine people in the future that
2 both know how to treat people from the traditional medicine
3 perspective and modern day psychiatry and the western
4 concepts of medicine. And if you can put in acupuncture
5 and eastern oriental ideas in there too, then you'll have
6 it all. You'll have it all.

7 **PHOEBE SUTHERLAND:** There are
8 programs in the University of Alberta and --

9 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** And what
10 you will be able to be doing then is, you will be able
11 to challenge all the concepts that accompany it, on an
12 equal, horizontal level. But if you left something
13 behind, if you are challenging on the basis of
14 aboriginalism but you do not really know what it means,
15 then you are really not going to be able to deliver. You
16 are not going to be able to really operate there.

17 But, for people like yourself, right now
18 -- what people like, you know, Viola and I -- we are just
19 laying the foundation. We are laying the foundation so
20 that the younger people will be able to challenge
21 everything.

22 They will be able to challenge the

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1 education system. They will be able to challenge
2 scientific concepts, anything -- the way the world
3 operates, the way organizations operate, the way
4 management curves, the way there is a hierarchy and so
5 there is a lot that aboriginal people can offer.

6 But first we have just got to keep --
7 we have got to stay alive. We've got to quit killing
8 ourselves before we're 20 and then drinking ourselves to
9 death after that. So, let's get rid of the insecurity.

10 And the way to get rid of the insecurity
11 is to be -- first of all, to feel content by being an
12 aboriginal person. Because, not only is there nothing
13 wrong with it, it is wonderful. There is a lot of things
14 there that you can continue to get a lot of strength from.

15 **TERRY LEGGE:** I hate to be the bearer
16 of bad news, but we are already five minutes over the limit
17 and there is a plane that they must catch and airline
18 schedules do not vary for us.

19 **CO-CHAIRMAN, GEORGES ERASMUS:** Thank
20 you.

21

22 --- Whereupon the Commission adjourned for the day

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1 to resume June 11th, 1992 at 9:00 a.m. in Sault
2 Ste. Marie, Ontario.
3
4