

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHIEF ROBERT JOSEPH O.B.C.

By Debbie Douez, Reconciliation Art Project Coordinator
April 27, 2017 Vancouver, Canada.

Chief Joseph is currently the Ambassador for Reconciliation Canada and a member of the National Assembly of First Nations Elders Council. He was formerly the Executive Director of the Indian Residential School Survivors Society and is an honorary witness to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). As Chairman of the Native American Leadership Alliance for Peace and Reconciliation and Ambassador for Peace and Reconciliation with the Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace (IFWP), Chief Joseph has sat with the leaders of South Africa, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Mongolia and Washington, DC to learn from and share his understanding of faith, hope, healing and reconciliation. Chief Joseph is the Hereditary Chief of the Gwawaenuk First Nation. He was interviewed at the Reconciliation Canada office in North Vancouver and was asked to explain what reconciliation means and why participating in the upcoming Walk for Reconciliation is so important for Indigenous People in Canada today. This is what he had to say (Modified for a younger audience)

Chief Joseph, what does reconciliation mean?

For me personally reconciliation is finding peace and contentment within. Once you find peace, and love of self, you never want to hurt anyone ever again, or be hurt by anyone else. I grew up at a time when I believed that no one cared about me because I was terribly, terribly hurt. I've learned that there is only one force that is bigger and greater than all the hurt and darkness and it's the idea that I can love myself again. If I really truly discover how to love myself, I discover how to love everybody else. So this is why I say, reconciliation begins with you, as it begins with me.

The need for reconciliation of course expands to include the many ways Aboriginal People have been hurt. Reconciliation calls on all of us to just talk about the ways that we have been hurt. We can ask: is this the way to be treating one another? Of course the answer will be no. None of us were ever born to be mean or angry or full of hate. It's not natural! So reconciliation is really about treating others as we would want to be treated regardless of who they are or how they are living. If we accept each other the way we are then we don't need to hurt each other.

Why is the walk important?

There are many Aboriginal People who are really sad and are still having bad things happening to them. Bad things have been happening for so long that they don't believe it will ever change - they think that nobody cares. Then all of a sudden they see thousands of people come out on the streets of Vancouver and they think - oh my god, people do care! At that last walk, (in 2013) there were a lot of Aboriginal People and they were crying because they didn't know that people could

care about them. Our history was so bad. It's been so bad that most of us grew up feeling that we weren't loved, even by our own parents. So to create this powerful demonstration of caring like this walk, is really important. It will tell Aboriginal People, that Canadians STILL care about them.

What is your vision for a future Canada should reconciliation take root?

Ahh it's going to take root and it's going to survive. There will be a lot of challenges of course. But when we are reconciled, I see a Canada that is one. That Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals all belong here and we finally recognize that the best way forward, is by working together. I see a Canada where every child born to this country has the same potential and the same opportunity to dream and become whatever they want to become. I see that as so important. Everyone will have a place here. When we get there, to this future Canada and we are celebrating our differences we are going to be so rich. I think we could be a model for the world.

The Walk for Reconciliation takes place on September 24th, 2017 in downtown Vancouver.

Video Resources:

1. A video series produced by SFU, interviewing Chief Joseph about Reconciliation
Part 1: Culture and Ancestry https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ge_pM9k1CPs
Part 2: Residential School Experience <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2hk7JEQtI>
Part 3: Reconciliation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLjcpO1JC84>
2. 2013 Walk Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJZWNN0egfo>

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