

*Ningosha anishaa
wenji-bimoseyan*

“I am the
reason you
walk”

Anishnaabe travelling
song



The Teachings:

The life of Tobasonakwut

A life of learning,
love and forgiveness

The Storyteller

Wab Kinew on
Reconciliation

I am the Reason You Walk

The four meanings
behind the
Anishnaabe
travelling song

Leadership

Indigenous way of
leadership and their
connections to
leadership theories

Intergenerational Impact

A case study of the
impacts today

Critical Evaluation

How the book
affects the reader



To be hurt,
yet forgive.

To do wrong, but
forgive yourself.

To depart from this
world leaving only
love, this is the
reason you walk.

- Wab Kinew

The Life of Tobasonakwut Kinew

Tobasonakwut set out on a path to find reconciliation and define it by leading a life of patience, empathy, love and understanding. It took a lot of work and sacrifice by the family who loved him while he rediscovered himself after having survived St. Mary's Indian Residential School. He fought for political recognition, for civil rights for Anishnaabe people, for apathy among his own people, and for recognition in the courts, and in the

streets. He worked hard to share his culture and revitalize his language, stay on a personal path to wellness, to be a better father and husband. He forged ahead to reconcile his spirit to his residential school experience and sought to embrace and love representatives of the institutions that sought to 'kill the Indian in the child'. Tobasonakwut experienced extreme inhumanities at the hand of the church and the government of Canada, but
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“Reconciliation is not something realized on a grand level, something that happens when a prime minister and a national chief shake hands. It takes place at a much more individual level. Reconciliation is realized when two people come together and understand that what they share unites them and that what is different between them needs to be respected.” p.211



that did not deter him from seeking out a way forward for all Canadians. Tobasonakwut became a leader in many rites including a Spiritual Leader in his community and Grand Chief for Treaty #3. But it was his involvement and participation in the 2008 apology from the Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, to the survivors of the Indian Residential School system that afforded him his first victory.

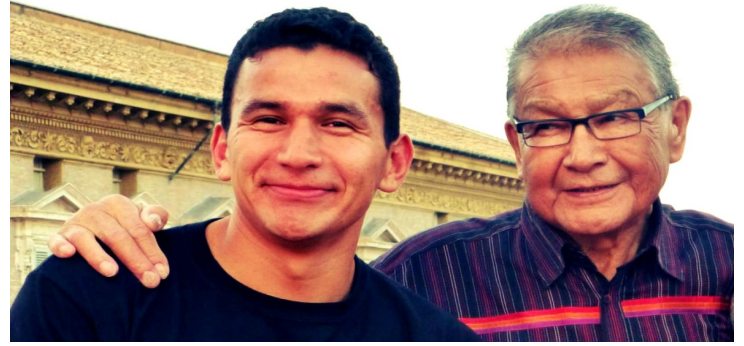
Tobasonakwut accompanied Chief Phil Fontaine to Parliament Hill and was there to witness the standing ovation as the Chief and other Indigenous leaders walked into the chamber of the House of Commons. His fight for recognition had finally been won. A year later, Tobasonakwut traveled to Vatican City, Rome with Phil Fontaine to hear Pope Benedict XVI express sorrow over the suffering of children in residential schools. While some

criticized the language chosen by the Pope in that apology, Tobasonakwut took that as an opportunity to stand up as a leader and show acceptance.

Tobasonakwut offered the Pope an eagle feather, a most sacred gift in the Anishnaabe culture. It was in Rome where Tobasonakwut befriended the Archbishop of Winnipeg, Jimmy Weisgerber, who in turn traveled with Tobasonakwut to participate in Lakota Sundance ceremonies. The closeness grew between Jimmy and Tobasonakwut which lead to the two men participating in a peacemaking ceremony called the *nabagoondewin*, an adoption ceremony to make Jimmy and Tobasonakwut brothers. For most, it seems unnatural to make a kin out of someone who represents a time of torture and pain in your life, but they did not see it that way. The

Archbishop spoke at the ceremony concluding that if the government's apology was a wedding, they were now in the marriage and committed to the hard work of making the relationship work. Shortly after, Tobasonakwut fell terminally ill and the Kinew family spent his last year on a healing journey. Wab Kinew experiences visions that could help to save his father, but the visions play out in an unexpected way. As Jimmy prays with Tobasonakwut, Tobasonakwut in turn prays for the priest asking the creator to bless this 'black robe' as he is his brother and thanked the creator for all the gifts they encounter in this world, for loving all children. “My father lived long enough to see an apology and now he had lived long enough to show us forgiveness as well.” p. 246

"The pipe is a model of reconciliation. The bowl is feminine. It is of the earth, and it receives the stem. The stem is masculine. It is placed into the bowl, but also grows from the earth. Each has integrity on its own..."



...When we place the bowl and stem together, the two elements form a new unified entity, which is stronger than each on its own...

...This is how we might think of reconciliation—two disparate elements coming together to create something more powerful."
p.129



The Storyteller: Wab Kinew

Wab Kinew was born to Tobasonakwut in 1981. He was the first child to his father and mother, Kathi. His older siblings from Tobasonakwut's first marriage were well into their 20s with children of their own and much younger than them, he had to figure his father out for himself. Through his childhood and adolescence, the relationship Wab had with Tobasonakwut was strained but they eventually grew to be very close. Wab's view on reconciliation was ever changed by his father's acts of love and kindness towards the people who had hurt him the most. Because of this, Wab considers reconciliation to be a global movement and that our interconnectedness in the world today will eventually

lead to more mixed races that will force us to be more invested in each other's lives. His father's death has inspired Wab to share and reflect on the true message of his father's life, which he believes will shape a global movement towards reconciliation. "When we are wronged it is better to respond with love, courage and grace than with anger bitterness and rage. We are made whole by living up to the best part of human nature - the part willing to forgive the aggressor, the part that never loses sight of the humanity of those on the other side of the relationship, and the part that embraces the person with whom we have every right to be angry and accepts them or her as a brother or sister." p.265

The name of the book, 'The Reason You Walk' comes from an Anishnaabe traveling song called

"Ningosha anishaa wenjii-bimoseyan"

and it means

"I am the reason you walk."

#1 The First Meaning is

" I have created you and therefore you walk."

It relates to our physical purpose to walk the earth. One of our innate goals is to learn how to walk.

#2 The second meaning is

"I am your motivation."

It calls us to persevere when the path becomes difficult. It is to encourage us when all else seems impossible or hopeless.

#3 The third meaning is

"I am that spark inside you called love, which animates you and allows you to live by the Anishnaabe values of kiizhewaatziiwin."

It is that driving force that compels you to help others and to animate you with love so that you might take steps backwards towards your forgotten brothers and sisters.

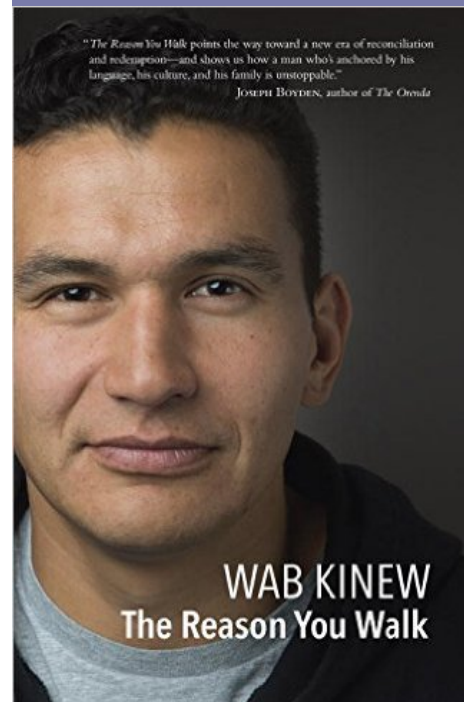
#4 The fourth meaning is

"I am the destination at the end of your life that you are walking towards"

It is the calling we receive in the end of our days to go home.



Meanings behind 'The Reason You Walk'



Indigenous Leadership and Leadership Theories

"He waited until the last of the residential schools was closed, a move spurred by leaders such as himself and others of his generation. He waited until it was okay for him and others to tell their stories, a moment brought about in large measure by the leadership of his good friend Phil Fontaine" p.214

In 'The Reason You Walk' Wab Kinew highlights key leadership theories as outlined in Northouse's book 'Leadership: Theory and Practice'. The theory of Servant Leadership is described as an approach that "emphasizes that leaders be attentive to the concerns of their followers, empathize with them, and nurture them. Servant leaders put followers *first*, empower them, and help them develop their full personal capacities. Furthermore, servant leaders are ethical and lead in ways that serve the greater good of the organization, community and society at large" (Northouse, 2016, p.225-226) Wab Kinew recounts instances in his life where he was called upon to lead in this manner. The first was when Kwekwekipiness, one of Wab's Elders and mentors gave Wab his first teaching about leadership in the middle of a ceremony. He said, "When you say your prayers, always thank the Creator last" as Anishnaabe believe that the most powerful put themselves last. The second was when he was made a Lakota Chief after having distanced himself from that community and those teachings by leading an unhealthy lifestyle that ended in him being arrested. The Lakota people lifted him up to remind him to lead a good life and to repay his family and his community. He was given many opportunities and was now being called upon to be a positive influence on those around him and to take that responsibility on his shoulders. Wab would connect those two lessons to his purpose and to the responsibility he had in the Sundance Ceremony. He understood the sacrifice that Sundancers make is a physical display of backing up their prayers by "showing that we want good things

for our friends and relatives more than we want comfort for ourselves." This notion of sacrifice is steeped in the Lakota adage that a Chief should be the poorest member in his community. He should be poor because he gives everything away to help his people. This adage is honoured in the Sundance Ceremony whereby Chiefs will put themselves last only offering their sacrifices and prayers after all other Sundancers have done so. Wab concludes that if Indigenous people can rise to the occasion and work past their challenges, that they too can become leaders to create a more sustainable society and create healthy meaningful lives for all of our children and grand children. Wab shares his visions for future leaders and how his teachings could guide his community and deliver a call to action: "If we grow up hearing that the chief ought to be the poorest member of the community and that true leadership is about service and sacrifice, we might think harder about income inequality. And if people on opposite sides of seemingly intractable showdowns over land and resources began to take one another as kin, perhaps we might find peace in situations that we currently consider lost causes."

The other leadership theories that are similar to Indigenous leadership is

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Transformational leadership. A chief is identified with qualities similar to those outlined in table 8.1, Personality Characteristics, Behaviours and Effects on Followers of Charismatic Leadership. A Charismatic leader shows personality characteristics like a desire to influence and strong moral values. Their behaviours include setting a strong role model, they express confidence and arouse motives. The effects on followers include emotional involvement; trust in leader's ideology, and affection towards leader.

A third connection can be found between Indigenous Leadership practices and Adaptive leadership behaviours. In particular is the necessity for leaders to go on visions quests where they fast and reconnect with mother earth. The purpose is to gain clarity and find perspective to support his community. This is very similar to "getting on the balcony"

"Share our ceremonies with these business people. Let them see the beauty of our ways. Help them understand who we are."
Tobasonakwut Kinew



(Northouse, 2016, p.263) where leaders remove themselves to see the bigger picture and forecast solutions to potential or existing problems. In a vision quest, leaders focus on empathy and putting themselves in the shoes of those around them. Adaptive leadership is also about helping others to "change and learn new ways of living so that they may do well and grow." (Northouse, 2016, p.258)

Recommendations

8th Fire, Televisions Series - <http://www.cbc.ca/8thfire/index.html>

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada -
<http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3>

Legacy of Hope Foundation - <http://www.legacyofhope.ca/home>

The Indian Act – Indigenous Foundations, UBC -
<http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/the-indian-act.html>

Canada Suicide Rates

Youth suicide is an urgent issue for First Nations and Inuit youth in Canada. While there is much variation among communities, overall rates are high.

Suicide rates are five to seven times higher for First Nations youth than for non-Aboriginal youth. Suicide rates among Inuit youth are among the highest in the world, at 11 times the national average.

Government of Canada - <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/promotion/suicide/index-eng.php>

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A Case Study for Intergenerational Impacts of the Residential School System



Thomas Moore before and after his entrance into the Regina Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan in 1874.
Library and Archives Canada / NL-022474

Why is reconciliation important today? Why do so many people step forward as leaders to help manage the impacts of residential schools?

The intergenerational impacts of residential school are still prominent in Indigenous Communities today. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death for young Indigenous people and is approximately 5-6 times the national average for First Nations groups and 11 times the national average for Inuit groups. In 'The Reason You Walk' Kinew shares an experience visiting the Eskasoni First Nation in Nova Scotia. The Eskasoni First Nation had undergone a period of time where youth suicide was rampant in the community. It prompted them to open a suicide prevention centre and a team to start researching prevention techniques. What they have found is that is in part due to the effects of the residential school system, which Kinew witnessed in his own family. "Generations were raised by strangers, and in some cases abusers. When those generations came home and started families, they treated us, their children, as they had been treated in those institutions. I know Ndede pushed Darryl away when the young man confessed to contemplating suicide not from a lack of love but because my dad did not know how to express the love he felt in his heart" p.184. It has been shown in some First Nations communities that where they have culture, language, and self-determination, there is little to no instances of suicide.

According to the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, here are some other health consequences of colonization:

- Changes to diets and lifestyles resulting from the disruption of traditional food supplies, a significant result of dislocation from traditional territories and the establishment of "reserve lands." Health impacts include higher rates of diabetes, obesity, and the prevalence of other major chronic diseases such as arthritis/rheumatism, hypertension and asthma.
- Inequitable access to health services and economic opportunities. For example, the federal government's failure to officially recognize the status of the Métis has excluded them from many federal Aboriginal health programming and service initiatives.
- Overcrowded housing conditions among Inuit, linked in part to forced relocation to permanent settlements, has contributed to high rates of severe respiratory tract infections.
- Elevated rates of suicide, alcoholism, violence, and "pervasive demoralization seen in Aboriginal communities" associated with residential schools and the "Sixties Scoop".

'The Reason You Walk' is not only applicable to any person interested in learning about Indigenous Leadership, it is also an invaluable and inspirational story that all people could inherently acquire a positive message from; a message of love. There are two stories of reconciliation happening simultaneously in this book. One is the story of Tobasonakwut Kinew and how he survives through a time of adversity to become a leader, Elder and spiritual warrior achieving a new kind of reconciliation. The second story of reconciliation is that of Wab Kinew's life with his father, Tobasonakwut. Wab's story is multilayered with instances of his own reconciliation with his father, witnessing a new kind of reconciliation through his father, and finally forming new ideologies about reconciliation and modeling leadership after reflecting on his father's demonstrated leadership. The two stories being shared concurrently allow the reader to be a part of Wab's journey. By reflecting on his life and that of his father's, the story leads the reader through Wab's cognition and we witness him forming his own ideologies and conclusions about leadership and reconciliation by recounting his father's life.



Wab shares intimate details of his life and his father's experience to help identify how profound his father's leadership behaviours and characteristics were. There are many stories with the same message about turning a horrible situation into something good like creating a charity in the memory of a loved one, but it is rare to hear stories about victims and their assailants making peace with each other, let alone becoming best friends and then adopting each other into their families. This kind of forgiveness is rare, but the point Wab is trying to make is that it's this kind of forgiveness that we need to practice on each other and ourselves. This will result in more people rising to their true capabilities and more people demonstrating effective leadership.

As a biography, and autobiography, this book has a lot to offer in terms of demonstrated leadership and it's relation to leadership theories. In Indigenous Education we emphasize the importance of learning by discovery and by active participation. There is value to Eurocentric ways of knowing when we are learning finite things like math or reading, however the process of regurgitating information and then demonstrating that you have either memorized or retained this information is not always applicable in every subject matter. How have you learned? I have effectively learned more about Indigenous leadership and reconciliation than I would have by reading a text book that describes the particular approaches, processes, behaviours or activities associated with being an Indigenous leader. By reading this very personal story, Wab has made the reader feel that they are important to him, that they have value to him and that they are loved: the mark of a true Anishnaabe chief.

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Kinew, Wab. 2015. *The Reason You Walk*. Toronto, Ontario: Penguin Canada Books, Inc.

Websites:

Social determinants of Health by the National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health - http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/docs/fact%20sheets/social%20determinates/NCCAH_fs_culture_language_EN.pdf

Photo Credits:

Pg. 1) People carrying a tree -

http://www.slate.com/blogs/behold/2014/02/20/aaron_huey_photographs_the_pine_ridge_reservation_in_south_dakota_in_his.html

Moccasins – <http://nextstarfish.com/?p=8105>

Photo of Wab Kinew – <http://www.cbc.ca/books/canadareads/wab-kinew.html>

Pg. 2) Archbishop Jimmy Weisgerber with feather – <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2012/05/27/archbishop-adopted-anishinaabe-reconciliation-gesture-115211>

Tobasonakwut and Jimmy Weisgerber - <http://www.torontosun.com/2012/04/14/reconciliation-on-residential-schools>

Pg. 3) Passing the pipe - <http://store.winnipegfreepress.com/photostore/photo-details/23486/>

Tobasonakwut and Wab in Rome - <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/buffy-sainte-marie-wab-kinew-and-how-dna-remembers-trauma-1.3242375/wab-kinew-reveals-joy-and-pain-of-reconciliation-in-the-reason-you-walk-1.3243687>

Pg. 4) Book Cover - <http://www.amazon.ca/The-Reason-You-Walk-Memoir/dp/0670069345>

Pg. 6) Tobasonakwut and the Pope - <http://www.cccb.ca/site/eng/church-in-canada-and-world/catholic-church-in-canada/indigenous-peoples/3203-pope-benedict-xvi-meets-with-representatives-of-former-indian-residential-school-students-and-the-church-in-canada>

Wab's parents kissing in St. Peter's Square, Rome - <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/buffy-sainte-marie-wab-kinew-and-how-dna-remembers-trauma-1.3242375/wab-kinew-reveals-joy-and-pain-of-reconciliation-in-the-reason-you-walk-1.3243687>

Wab Kinew - http://wabkinew.ca/photos/wab_kinew_4/

Pg. 7) Picture of Thomas Moore - <https://purposesearchers.wordpress.com/2014/03/29/residential-schools-in-canada/>