

Healing Two Communities

by Gary McHale

Today the Tekawennake newspaper is printing a half page column written by the key members of CANACE and Doug Fleming. It is our hopes that open communications with Six Nations will allow some within their community to see beyond the propaganda that has been spread by many of the radicals. The first step in healing must be an honest review of the facts.

Native people demanded and deserved an apology from the Canadian Government regarding Residential Schools in order that their communities could start the healing process. It was improper that for years many people believed Canada didn't have to recognize past wrongs or accept responsibility for these wrongs.

There are many in Haldimand who would rather forget and move on without truly dealing with the issues. Some claim that it hurts business or interferes with tourism if we continue to talk about such issues. Such views belittle the pain and suffering of those near DCE and are also very short sighted.

There is little doubt that the government, the OPP and Haldimand Council did everything they could to silence anyone who spoke out. Their logic was controlled by fear and/or intimidation by repeated threats of barricades as well as political correctness that always views Native people as the victims and never the abusers.

The vast majority of Native people didn't cover their faces and attack the residents of Caledonia. The majority on Six Nations are appalled by the violence used by the few.

If healing is to start there must be a way to reach out to those who reject violence. However, the problem has been that so many people have been willing to work with the very groups that caused the violence. Many times these groups from Six Nations did not get along with each other. Therefore, when people from the government or from the county chose to align themselves to one of these groups then they got a reaction from another group.

Recently Councilor Grice found this out when he chose to work a member of the Haudenosaunee Men's Fire and with Diane Woods, an Ontario Government representative, entered DCE to plant flowers and trees and attempted to hold a Silver Covenant ceremony.

The result was that Native protesters stopped the ceremony and threatened to pulled the hydro tower across the road. The flowers and trees that were planted were destroyed once again demonstrating that any superficial appeasement ceremony isn't going to resolve anything.

Why does Councilor Grice and other members of Haldimand County choose to meet and work with the very people who promote or believe in the use of violence?

Step one in true healing is the acknowledgement that both sides deserve respect and that people from both communities have grievances. Six Nations has a grievance against the Canadian Government and the people of Haldimand County have a grievance that they were used as pawns by radical Native protesters to force their will upon the government.

Step two is to stop the attacks upon groups of people because of your own personal dislikes and/or agendas. For Haldimand County this means remembering that the majority on Six Nations didn't agree with the radicals and for Six Nations this means stop carrying signs saying

KKKCanada or claiming residents of Caledonia are members of the KKK. The Teka newspaper has helped start the healing regarding this issue by printing today the following clarification:

"Between June 24 - 30, 2009, the Tekawennake published several stories in our on-going coverage of the Caledonia conflict which might lead some readers to believe that members of CANACE (Canadian Advocates for Charter Equality) organization, which has advocated on behalf of the residents of Caledonia, includes members or associates with Neo-Nazi, KKK or other white supremacist ties. The Tekawennake wishes to clarify that we have no evidence that Doug Fleming, Merlyn Kinrade, Gary McHale or Mark Vandermaas are associated with or sympathizers of such groups,..."

Step three is to acknowledge that violence begets more violence, and that solutions can only be found within the Rule of Law. The cycle of violence will not end with additional threats of violence but only when people acknowledge how wrong the use of violence is. Whether it is Six Nations people or residents in Caledonia, people cannot use past wrongs to encourage current abuses of the law.

We can learn a great lesson here from the Jewish reaction to WWII. The systematic killing and abuses of Jewish people by Germany did not produce a group of people who see all Germans as evil or see Germany as a nation that needs to be attacked. There are no groups of Jewish men roaming the streets blocking roads, carrying baseball bats and beating people because their ancestors were victimized during WWII. Respect for the Rule of Law means those responsible are held accountable while not labeling the entire group of people.

Step four requires those responsible to apologize for the wrongdoing. Is it outrageous that the government should apologize for residential schools? If not, then why shouldn't the McGuinty government, the OPP and Six Nations (who supported and provided money for the ongoing occupation of DCE even at the height of the violence) apologize to the people of Haldimand County?

The day must come when the OPP stops lying about two tier justice and admits it was wrong and apologizes to those who were victimized by it. The day must come when the Ontario Government must accept responsibility for its policies that placed the residents of Haldimand County in the middle. The day must come with the leaders of Six Nations, who claim to be a sovereign nation, act as a group who is responsible for their decisions.

The events in Haldimand County are a matter of historical record, and the reality that some Six Nations residents, with the support of their leaders, victimized and traumatized their innocent neighbours cannot be denied, diminished or 'justified.' It does neither community any good to pretend that the last four years did not happen any more than we should pretend that Residential Schools never existed.

Despite the terrible things that have happened we believe the people of Caledonia remain open, and they are eager to restore the longstanding and deeply-valued relationship with their Six Nations neighbours. We believe there are many good people in Six Nations so we may find true partners for peace who recognize the inherent wisdom of a path to healing and reconciliation based on truth, justice and apologies.

Anything short of this is merely playing politics and will not last.