

I had the privilege of delivering the speech on behalf of the official opposition when the Agreement was tabled in the House, and during that speech I had to stop midway and breathe ... because I didn't think I could do it. I kept thinking of my family and my extended family and my grandparents and so many of the people in the communities.... [O]ur cultures, our languages, our values, and spiritual beliefs that have taken care of us at this gathering ... they will become tools for the healing of a nation.²⁰⁰

At the Québec National Event, TRC Honorary Witness and a former prime minister, the Right Honourable Paul Martin, reminded participants about the role that education played in the attempted destruction of Aboriginal families, communities, and nations, and the role it must play in repairing this damage. He said,

I've talked to a number of the people here, some of the members of parliament are here ... and the question we asked ourselves is, "How come we didn't know what happened?" ... I still can't answer that.... [L]et us understand that what happened at the residential schools was the use of education for cultural genocide ... [let's] call a spade a spade. What that really means is that we've got to offer Aboriginal Canadians, without any shadow of a doubt, the best education system that is possible to have.²⁰¹

Although some Honorary Witnesses already had significant knowledge of Aboriginal issues, including residential schools, through the act of witnessing Survivors' testimonies, they learned about this history in a different way. At the Saskatchewan National Event, a former prime minister, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, said that the Saskatchewan National Event gave him a better understanding of the intergenerational impacts of the residential schools, and a better sense of the challenges and opportunities for reconciliation with the rest of Canada.

When I came to take my place this morning, I knew the storyline, if you will. I knew what had happened. I had some idea of the consequences it [the residential school system] involved, but I had no real idea because I had not been able to witness it before ... the multi-generational emotion that is involved in what has happened to so many of the victims of the residential schools.... [Today] I heard, "We are only as sick as our secrets." That is an incentive to all that have kept these emotions and this history too secret, too long, to show the courage that so many of you have shown, and let those facts be known....

There are cross-cultural difficulties here as we seek reconciliation, the reconciliation of people who have not been part of this experience with those who have. We are going to deal with cultural differences, but no one wants to be torn away from their roots. And there are common grounds here by which consensus can be built.... Reconciliation means finding a way that brings together the legitimate concerns of the people in this room, and the apprehensions, call them fear ... that might exist elsewhere in the country.... Among the things we have to do is to ensure that not only the stories of abuse as they touch First Nations and Aboriginal people, but also