

A DAY TO LISTEN - HEATHER BEAR

My name is Heather Bear. I'm from Ochapowaces First Nation from the beautiful Unceded, Unsurrendered Treaty Four Territory, and I am Vice Chief for the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations. I want to, first of all acknowledge our Heavenly Creator today. It's a beautiful day. And with the unearthing and the evidence that has come forward with the little children that went missing so long ago, the little children that went missing that we heard stories about and we say whispers.

I'm a survivor of not only a residential school in Lebrét, but also I was a day scholar at a residential school in Maryville where, of course, we all know 751 unmarked graves were discovered. I know there was always stories as a day scholar at Maryville, and when you think about the realities, just imagine those children, those babies and every one of them, they had a name. They were loved. They had families. They weren't just a number. You know, the thought that they had died lonely. They died afraid. They died abused. The way they died, the whole circumstances. It's just so profound in light of everything that's coming. And, you know, that understanding about healing, that we don't all heal at the same time, you know, and thinking about where do we go from here now? What is the path forward and why? There's a reason why. Why at this time has this happened? And I can only think about the revitalization of our culture.

Of course, you know, when you look at the genocides of our people, it was cultural genocide. You know, our language, our culture, our values, our customs. Everything good about us was being stripped away. Our descendants that were left back without their children. Can you imagine your town, your city with every child was taken? You know, there's an amazing song called Amazing Grace. I was lost, but now I am found. I think of those little children that they're uncovering. And I think of "I was blind, but now I see", you know, I think of our white brothers and sisters. 1772 I believe, John Newton, I think was his name, a captain, slave trader, wrote that song after a miserable storm and he cried onto God. A miracle happened and he wrote that song. If he could change, they say, there is hope. And I think that song does represent hope and humanity for all of people.

When we go back to treaty, we made that promise that we would live in harmony with our white brothers and sisters. So that to me is something that is sacred, though those promises were made with a pipe, so the creator is involved. And I'm a strong believer in that, and I know that there's hope down the road for us. Our white brothers and sisters need to do the work in repairing and doing what you can do to reconcile and reach out. Because I know there's a lot of you that are traumatized. It's not only First Nations, there's many non-First Nations peoples right now that are crying and feel ashamed and feel hurt. And, you know, what does that say about your history and legacy? And that's not a lot to be proud of, but it's not your fault either. But I think we all have a responsibility for, you know, a better world, a better tomorrow. When you look at the whole reason why this happened, it had to do with land, power and money and to get rid of the Indian problem. But we're here to stay. And like I say, tomorrow, there's always tomorrow.