

## A DAY TO LISTEN - TANYA TALAGA

My name is Tanya Talaga in English. My name in Anishinaabemowin is Little Bird, Big Wings, carries a heavy burden. We've been through so much for a long time, but lately it's been very heavy. And so I'm thinking about the Anishinaabe Seven Grandfather Teachings. These teachings are a guide. There are seven truths, and these teachings are handed down by our ancestors. And, you know, while there are hundreds and hundreds of different First Nations from coast to coast to coast, many of us share a version of the Seven Grandfather Teachings.

The teachings are respect, humility, love, honesty, bravery, wisdom and truth. Without these teachings, we'd be lost. I wanted to tell you a little bit, too, about the teaching of love, and I can't think of a better person to help me illustrate that teaching other than Elder Sam Achneepineskum. Now I'm going to talk to you today not about romantic love, but about a love that comes from a love of community, of caring for one another, a love for our people. And I got to tell you, too, that I often visit Sam when I'm in Thunder Bay and we'll often go to Tim Hortons. And when you first meet Sam, it feels like you've always known him. He's got an ease about him. He's got a warm, deep voice and a very subtle, wicked sense of humour. Sam is always there at Timmy's. Everyone knows him there, and they also know that if you're down on your luck, if you're in need of food, some coffee, a gentle ear, Sam is there for you.

But like many First Nations people, Sam's also had a lot of loss in his life because of racism, because of colonization. His road to love and to peace, it has not been an easy one. I know for a fact that he works on it every single day, and I know his motivation comes from his own source of love, his love for his family and for his people, and trying to make sense of the Anishinaabe's place in this world. And so when I ask him, why is it important that we live our life listening to these seven teachings? This is what he said, "Well, you got to have some kind of guidance. When we were given this life. We were given instructions on how we should live our life, how we should remember our roles and our responsibilities. How we are all tied to nature and we're all tied to each other. Every person born is part of the continuum of life".

Now, I just want you to know that Sam is a survivor of three Indian residential schools. And as you know, 150,000 of our children were taken away from their parents in their homes, in their communities, and sent to the government-funded, church-run schools. There were more than 140 of these schools across Canada. The goal was assimilation, to turn all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit into good Canadian citizens. But we know the truth of what happened in these places. We know they did so much damage, inter-generational trauma, that we continue to live with.

Sam was 12 when he went to his first of three schools. You should know that one of the schools he went to was St Anne's on the James Bay Coast. It was a notorious place that had a homemade electric chair used to discipline the students. And he also went to Cecilia Jeffrey. And that's where his cousin Chanie Wenjack, also was a student. And so when I asked Sam, I asked him, how do you do it? How did you survive? He told me it's because when he was young, living in the bush with his

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parents and his family, he learned everything that he needed to know how to live on the land, how to be in lockstep with the earth and the air and the water and the trees and the animals. He learned his language. He learned his teachings. He had a good foundation. He said to me, "That's what kept me whole". And I have to tell you, the teachings that Sam gives, those are the teachings that keep so many of us whole now. And those teachings are a commitment that Sam makes every single day, a commitment to love, a commitment to understand, and a commitment to make Canada a better place for all of our people. And with that, I'm going to say Chi Miigwetch.