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Canada’s churches should make amends

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Pope Francis is planning to visit Canada this summer. He is expected to make at least three stops for Canada’s Indigenous populations – including one in Edmonton.

In an interview with Chevi Rabbit from *Alberta Native News*, Marilyn Buffalo talked about healing and the role of a church in reconciliation.

“From my point of view, I think there’s a lot of healing and fixing the past needed for us to move on,” said Marilyn Buffalo, CEO of Nechi Institute, referring to the victims and the families of residential school “students.”

“Due to the unhealed trauma and family loss that has taken place over many generations.”

“People fall into addictions for many reasons,” she added, “and the number one reason is unresolved trauma, family abandonment, and displacement.”

When it comes to the issues of trauma and intergenerational trauma caused by the multitude of church-run schools, Buffalo explained that there needs to be more resources and initiatives for healing. But, most importantly, they have to be Indigenous-led initiatives.

“We’re talking about Anglicans, Catholics, United Church, Lutherans, all these different faiths have, I think, a moral, spiritual and legal responsibility to help fix the problems,” said Buffalo.

The efforts also have to come from a traditional Indigenous thought process, she added.

“Indigenous people need to become spiritually grounded,” said Buffalo.

“The churches have a responsibility to help rebuild: number one, the languages. Because don’t forget we were forbidden from speaking our languages; for many generations, we lost our languages,” said Buffalo.

“Because of the loss of language, we lost our culture; so the social fabric has now been lost, and we have to rediscover it. And we have to work together to re-establish individuals, families, and then Nations,” added Buffalo.

“It’s a rebuilding exercise.”

Buffalo agrees that we cannot get away from saying that the Church was responsible for destroying the social, economic, and spiritual life of Indigenous communities across Turtle Island.

“I’m a survivor. I experienced that from early childhood and onwards. We often ask ourselves, why did we survive; how did we survive? What happened?” said Buffalo. We are here to stay, she said resolutely.

“And there’s a lot of work to be done to rebuild our nations.”

Not just the Catholics but all faith communities across Canada need to relearn their true history,

she added. First comes truth, then reconciliation.

You look at all the TRC calls to action and start from there, she said. There are decades of work and research already done.

“It’s not like we have to reinvent the wheel. It’s all there in the TRC calls to action,” said Buffalo.

“Part of that is a humbling process – humble yourself; each individual has to decide how they’re going to reconcile and how they are going to participate in the healing process. Everybody has a role to play in Canada. It’s not just us First Nations,” said Buffalo.

“I didn’t do anything wrong. I was only a child,” she emphasized.

“I think there has been enough *talk* about healing; let’s *do* the healing. And *they* need to start listening and learning.”

“Healing is hard work – I’m the CEO of Nechi Institute, created 48 years ago to deal with traumas, to educate people on how to deal with trauma, and become addictions counselors,” said Buffalo.

“We help guide people in how to heal, and many of the people who graduated from Nechi Institute are now working in the communities. We have over 15,000 graduates across Canada.”

They are doing the work and paying it forward, she added.

Indigenous people know how to heal, “but we need the resources and tools... Nechi Institute needs a new building because we are sitting on top of graves... unmarked grave... And the churches have a lot of properties and facilities within the city of Edmonton that are sitting empty.”

Buffalo said an act of reconciliation that Canadian Churches could provide is Church-owned properties for Indigenous Initiatives. “We have these programs and services that need real estate in different cities,” she explained.

Buffalo praised the recent announcement from Winnipeg that the Hudson’s Bay Company is giving its prime downtown real estate to the Southern Chiefs’ Organization for reconciliation initiatives.

The space will be turned into 300 affordable housing units, a childcare centre, a museum, an art gallery, and restaurants with both the provincial and federal government also providing funding toward the Initiative.

Whatever the Church decides to do, it’s got to be meaningful, said Buffalo. It can’t be just more talk. It has to be a significant action, and we must be treated as equal partners in negotiating a concrete action plan.

“Because we know how to do that work. People can learn culture and culture is treatment,” she concluded.

“People will stay sober once they know their culture and practice it in their daily lives.”





Red Dress Day attracts hundreds to downtown Edmonton

By Terry Lusty, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The national day to raise awareness for Canada's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) proved to be another sobering reminder of the continuing pain and trauma that pervades Indigenous communities and families all across Turtle Island. Throughout Canada marches, vigils and gatherings transpired to remember and honour the hundreds of individuals who have perished or simply disappeared.

Scores of individual cases remain unresolved to this day. This, in turn, plagues countless families who seek closure and comfort for the unbearable sorrow and loss they experience for not just a few days, weeks or months, but even years and decades. It is an ongoing tragedy that cries for resolution which is so very slow in coming about.

Although the ages of all the victims are not exactly known, it is obvious that a large number are individuals in their early life – in their teen years - which in itself signifies the predatory nature of this vicious cycle of abuse.

On May 5th in Edmonton, close to 1000 women, men and children of varying ages gathered at Churchill Square, across from City Hall. In a very short span of time the area became a sea of red as hundreds sported red dresses, skirts and shirts in advance of the scheduled 10:30 a.m. march to Beaver Hills Park several blocks away along Jasper Avenue.

Once assembled at the park, heart-rending tales of murdered and missing persons poured from the minds and lips of the "other victims" - those left in the wake of the missing and murdered. The stories spilled from the mouths of so many who had remained silent for so long, but they are silent no more.

One by one, dozens of relatives and friends of the missing and murdered shared their losses,

their grief, their trauma and, of course, their love for those who left this life, all too soon. The speakers bared their souls as they recounted the individual instances of horrific beatings, stabbings, shootings and murders. The impact on family members is indeed harrowing, especially for those who have not yet experienced any closure. This complicates the healing required by the victims left behind who continue bearing the burden of lingering sadness and hurt.

Just a few examples of the speakers and their heart breaking stories shared with those in attendance were as follows: A sister murdered in Montreal; A 13 year-old stabbed to death; A Wabasca family's missing family member since 2016; A female allegedly thrown over a balcony, declared brain dead, who police "tried to say it was suicide"; victim Alex Contois remembered by relatives Violet and Leonard; "I'm still looking for" 14 year-old Melissa and her mother who went missing as well.

A 65 year-old women was murdered at The Pas, Manitoba, along railway tracks; a youngster was found "hog tied" and dead; a female allegedly murdered by "someone we thought we could trust." A male allegedly murdered a woman in a Ft. McMurray hotel - he "walks free" even though "he was caught with the victim's blood on his knife." Nicole Frenchman, has now been missing for three months; two male hunters Jacob and Morris were allegedly murdered/shot by a person going to trial this month.

One speaker cautioned people to "be careful who you meet online." She knew an Ontario girl who "was stabbed and left for dead." Alanna, the sister of Georgina Papin who was a victim of Vancouver's notorious serial killer, Robert Picton, expressed her feeling of "so much love" at the



Red Dress Day. Photo by Terry Lusty.

Red Dress Day gathering. These are important voices to hear, the loved ones of the many missing and murdered individuals.

From time to time, one could hear people calling out aloud their frustrations with legal authorities, especially police, who they criticize for "sweeping so many instances under the rug," and "ignoring Indigenous victims."

"Police! Do your job, quit ignoring us!" shouted one person in the crowd. Another woman who referred to herself as "Dancing Death" drummed and sang the Women's Warrior Song in honour of a 2019 murdered aunt who "would now be 52," she stated.

It certainly was a painful event for so many presenters as they struggled to maintain their composure, choked on their words and/or teared up while delivering their stories. It was a highly emotional occasion, especially for those who have lost immediate family members and more especially for those who have not yet been afforded the opportunity for closure because of the many cases that remain unresolved.

Definitely, our prayers are with them, today and always.

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WBF helps Indigenous women explore new career paths

Submitted by the WBF team

Women Building Futures (WBF) is a registered non-profit based in Edmonton, Alberta that offers programs and support services to help unemployed and under-employed women explore and connect to careers that pay above a living wage. Careers that not only support their own security but often that of their children. Our graduates work in careers that provide them with higher earnings and a rewarding, fulfilling future that positively impacts their families and communities.

We acknowledge our organization is located on Treaty 6 Territory and we have programs delivered across Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8 in Alberta. In our commitment to truth and reconciliation, we have prioritized Indigenous supports for our prospective students and graduates.

WBF offers tailored supports and coaching for Indigenous women to explore new career paths and succeed in our programs, including financial aid. We are proud to partner with The Chemistry

Industry Association of Canada (CIAC) to offer the John Vincett Responsible Care Award. This award provides financial relief to Indigenous women who attend our programs.

After struggling to find steady employment during the pandemic, Alex Hoffer had applied to WBF and was offered a seat in our Syncrude Heavy Equipment Operator program. “I was ecstatic, but also a little overwhelmed with the amount of time I would be unemployed until my official start date.”

Our admissions team encouraged Alex to apply for the John Vincett Responsible Care Award. Once her application was approved, Alex was relieved to be able to cover her expenses during the month of employment training.

“I’m so grateful to have been given the support I needed to help me get to where I am now. Being an Indigenous woman, I never thought I would be fortunate enough to be accepted into such an amazing program but to also receive financial aid in the



WBF award recipient Alex Hoffer.

process. Working hard for something you want means you have the will and determination to see it through. I am bettering my future and proving to my family that if you truly want something in life you have to give it your all.”

Are you an Indigenous woman looking for support in your employment search?

Connect with our Indigenous & Community Relations team today. For more information contact indigenous@womenbuildingfutures.com.

BTPS appoints human trafficking co-ordinator

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Blood Tribe Police Service (BTPS) has announced the appointment of Senior Const. Jennaye Norris as its first Indigenous human trafficking coordinator, the first role of its kind on Turtle Island.

“There’s definitely a need on the reserve, as there is everywhere in Canada,” Norris told Lethbridge News Now (LLN).

Human trafficking is, of course, not new, but the way police investigate those files through criminal intelligence is, she added. “So that when this intel comes in, then we know how to approach it, how to help the victims, and how to investigate these files appropriately.”

This position is the first part of a broader initiative dubbed “Project Kokomi-Kisomm Aakii,” which means Project Moon Woman.

The human trafficking coordinator will take a three-pronged approach to the issue — awareness and education, training front-line police officers, and conducting investigations.

“Now the next step would be to educate the community as to what human trafficking is, what the indicators are,” Norris told LNN, “and then once the knowledge is out there, then once information starts coming in to the police service, then we can start investigating these files.”

Norris pitched the idea to BTPS chief Brice Iron Shirt in January after her work on the reserve’s opioid crisis uncovered the extent of human trafficking, the CBC reported.

“I was getting intel about Blood Tribe girls getting trafficked, [being] taken off the reserve [by] non-nation members [to] cities like Lethbridge, Calgary, Red Deer, Edmonton, and then brought back or not brought back at all,” Norris said.

She said Blackfoot culture and tradition will be integrated into the healing process for victims.

Continued on page 6

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“PROUDLY SERVING ALBERTA’S FIRST NATION COMMUNITIES FOR OVER A DECADE”

Writers’ Circle participant readies debut memoir

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter



Edmonton-based teacher Scott Olsen is getting ready to publish his first book after working with some of Turtle Island’s top Indigenous writers as part of the Audible Indigenous Writers Circle. This year’s program is accepting 21 emerging writers who will be partnered with one of seven mentors including Richard Van Camp (returning mentor), Angela Sterritt, Reneltta Arluk, Ryan McMahon, Janet Rogers, Dr. Jas M. Morgan and Clayton Thomas-Muller. Van Camp had high praise for Scott Olsen. “He has written the most beautiful manuscript, and I was lucky enough to be called a mentor, but I have been humbled by this man before you, Scott, floored me with this talent.”

Prior to Van Camp, Olsen worked with Vowel — a fellow Edmontonian, who was his official mentor for the Audible program. After working with Vowel, Olsen reached out to Van Camp to get a second pair of eyes to look over his memoir, which is now in the hands of Van Camp’s literary agent, Janine Cheeseman, who will sell it to a publisher. Van Camp said that’s the ultimate goal of the program — “to get every single student one step closer to an agent and or a publishing house.” Van Camp’s approval means a lot to Olsen, who has taught Van Camp’s literature in his social studies class and was inspired to take up writing by his work. “If nothing happened from this moment on, I could die a happy person just knowing that you fell in love with the work,” he told Van Camp. Olsen was a late applicant to the program after one of his professors told him to submit one of his final papers for his master’s to the program. He found out later that he was one of the top applicants.

“I couldn’t believe it. I was like you’ve got to be kidding me. I just started writing stories less than a year ago for grad school, and it seemed like everything was a step forward as this whole process unfolded,” he recalled. His memoir is a tribute to the value of education, despite its historical use as a tool of assimilation and abuse against Indigenous people. “I’m quite open about it, that I’m an inner city high school dropout. I hated school as a kid. And now to be in the walls of that very institution, celebrating it and saying, no, this has value, this has purpose,” Olsen said. At one point, Olsen recalled “hitting a wall,” which Vowel and Van Camp encouraged him to break through by simply continuing to write. “Richard kind of put the icing on the cake for it, I believe,” Olsen said. Van Camp said he appreciated the ability to hear “all these new voices that just knocked me on my ass” while cultivating a community of Indigenous writers, which served as “an island [of] friends and heroes for six months.” “I really miss the discourse and the conversations we would have through email. And I really loved once a month calling all four of my mentees. That was something that I didn’t realize how much I missed — just calling people and really talking to them about their craft and about their lives and how they were doing,” he said.

BTPS *cont. from p 5*

“We need to help our own girls and our community members safely exit this sex trafficking lifestyle,” Norris told the CBC. According to police data, in 2019 there were 511 incidents of human trafficking across Canada, with 31 in Alberta, but Norris says the crime is by nature difficult to track. “Everyone is really stats driven but unfortunately this is such an undetected crime. [Victims] are so brainwashed into not coming

forward or not trusting the police,” she said. Dr. Esther Tailfeathers, a family physician on Blood Tribe, told the CBC she knows women from her practice who have been “[n]aively lured” into the sex trade from human trafficking “by thinking a male was paying attention to them, actually [helping] them out of their situation.” Norris told the *Calgary Herald* that human trafficking can often resemble a normal relationship because the perpetrator grooms and brainwashes the victim. “I’ve talked to victim-survivors, and a lot of the

time they didn’t even know they were being trafficked,” explained Norris. “People perceive human trafficking as being this extravagant thing, not a situation where they believe they’re just working with their boyfriend.” The primary goal of the program is to ensure the victim has a safe place to stay, including access to services to help deal with their trauma and the ability to reconnect with their Indigenous traditions through community elders, she added. “If the victim is safe and they’ve exited out of of that lifestyle, it’s a huge win for us.”



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Stay off social media after being injured in an accident

By Bill Hendsbee, Q.C.

Social media is a part of modern life. It’s a way to stay connected with family and friends, but it is also a gold mine of information about you. As a result, we frequently encourage clients to take a break from social media until their lawsuit is resolved, either by settlement or adjudication.

You should assume that defendants in a lawsuit related to your accident, their lawyers, private investigators, insurance adjusters and claims managers can and will use social media as an investigative tool. Continuing to post to your social media accounts after an injury provides free surveillance that may come back to hurt your case.

How social media posts can be used against you

Most personal injury claims in Alberta do not end up in court. Instead, they are settled during negotiations with the defendant’s insurance company. Your negotiating position is only as strong as the defendants believe your case would be if you went to court.

Opposing parties in a lawsuit can use your social media activity to undermine your claim and minimize the amount they will have to pay you by:

Confronting you with photos, videos, or commentary during questioning or submitting them as evidence at trial to undermine your credibility or account of how your injuries have affected you.

Challenging the cause of your injuries by looking for proof that you suffered the injuries before your accident or aggravated your injuries after the accident.

Minimizing the injuries’ impact on your ability to work and your regular activities.

Looking for evidence of pre-existing injuries or diseases that explain your symptoms.

Trying to prove you are not following your doctor’s orders or prescribed treatment plans.

Social media distorts and misrepresents reality

People tend to present only the positive aspects of their lives on social media. Photos, reels and video snippets only capture a brief moment in time. Social posts may portray you on a rare, good day without capturing how miserable you may feel or how altered your life may be most of the time due to your injuries. This can misrepresent what is really going on for you and undermine your claims about how your life has

been altered by the accident.

Some people think that no one can access your social media accounts if your settings are set to private. At one time, the courts held this was so, as it violated privacy rights. However, recent case law holds that even posts behind a privacy wall can be accessed by the defence if the defence can prove that they are relevant and material to proving (or disproving) the issues raised in your lawsuit. In that case, they will likely be ordered to be produced regardless of your privacy settings.

The best course of action is to assume that nothing is private on social media.

Should you deactivate social media accounts or erase any unfavourable social posts? The case law suggests no. First, the defendants may have screenshots of the posts already. Erasing them could be seen as trying to hide evidence, which undercuts your credibility and attracts judicial sanctions. Second, an adverse inference may be drawn against an injured plaintiff if social accounts are suddenly deactivated. We recommend consulting your personal injury lawyer about your social media activity to avoid being accused of trying to manipulate evidence.

If you can’t stay off social media

If you can’t stay off social media for the duration of your lawsuit, you should, at a minimum:

Set privacy settings to the maximum level of security, but remember that internet usage records can be subpoenaed, and courts can order social media content to be produced. So, “private” settings are not a guarantee.

Be wary of new followers and don’t accept any new connections or friend requests. You can’t be sure who is behind a social media profile. Don’t get catfished!

Do not post anything about the accident, including photos of the damage to your car, and do not let your friends or family post about the accident either. Do not post anything about the lawsuit, especially conversations with your lawyer, as this may waive lawyer-client privilege. If something negative is written about you due to the accident, resist

the temptation to respond.

Do not inadvertently admit fault in your posts by, for example, stating “I’m sorry” or “I crashed my car.” Do not post about your injuries, including statements like, “I’m OK,” “Don’t worry about me,” “I’m lucky,” or “It could have been worse.” Do not post about your injuries or treatment, physical or emotional well-being, or advice from doctors or health professionals.

Be mindful that photos, videos or commentary on fun activities can misrepresent what’s actually going on in your life. Before you post, think about how you would respond to claims by defence lawyers that the images show that you are doing just fine. Tell friends and family not to post about you or tag you in photos, untag yourself from photos taken after your injury, and do not tag yourself in other people’s posts. Be aware that people can tag you without your knowledge. Set your notifications to alert you when you are mentioned in posts or status updates by other people.

Tell your lawyer EVERYTHING

When you speak to a lawyer about your accident, tell them about any social media accounts you have. Let your lawyer advise you about posts you made before realizing it was better to stay off social media. Your lawyer needs to know what is out in the public domain that may present problems that need to be addressed. It’s much better to be prepared to meet an argument than to get caught by surprise.

At CAM LLP, we understand the impact and ripple effects that an injury can have on your life and the lives of those you love. Years of experience evaluating claims, negotiating settlements with insurance companies, and helping injured people get fair compensation makes a difference. If you need help, contact us at camllp.com for a free consultation.



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