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Foreword

Way back when the earth was cooling, I was an art history student at Queen's University. In part, I pursued the history of art because I am a visual learner. But it was also because art history gathered in intellectual, social and cultural history. I recall being fascinated by Paul Gauguin's 1897 painting *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* After his experience in the then French colony of Tahiti, Gauguin returned to Europe to reflect on the violence and the beauty he had witnessed, and this painting—and the questions its title poses—remains both the beginning and endpoint of Gauguin's personal and artistic journey with truth, reconciliation, and with the very meaning of existence.

Similarly, these essays issue from the same foundational questions Gauguin asked himself. They also stem from a shared desire to renew Canada. How did we get to where we are now? Until we answer this, our future as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples living together is uncertain at best. *Speaking My Truth* is animated by a hope that debate—in the spirit of learning and social engagement—will take place in classrooms, reading groups, book clubs... wherever we gather to share

ideas, right across this country. This book is for people who like discussion and who are energized, engaged, and jazzed by the journey of rebuilding, reconciliation, and renewal.

In sharing these stories, I hope that more of us will arrive at an understanding of our shared history and be better able to acknowledge the cold colonial spring from which Canada has come. I hope that more of us will be moved to action and that through this volume, we will deepen our self-knowledge and our empathy. History is the account we present to ourselves of our collective journey. This account, if it is to be faithful and compassionate, must include the first-hand accounts of residential school experiences. The accounts of those who were separated from their families, from their communities, and from relationships with other Canadians. Colonialism is based on an elemental violence: the taking of what is not one's to take and giving of what is not one's to give. "Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?" These questions and the difficult answers they generate can no longer silence Indigenous voices.

This collection of essays delivers us to the proper work of dialogue, answering some questions but inevitably, and necessarily, provoking more. Frankly, I hope it will prod us to get off our big fat complacencies. We must investigate our own complicated histories, asking questions about the land on which we work and live. What is the history of this place? Who was here before us? How did we come to occupy and define it? What was my family's relationship to Indigenous peoples?

To answer those questions, I've been looking at my own genealogy, and I have discovered that my family is complicit in this work of colonialism. My ancestors came from the Orkney Islands, bringing with them the imperialism of Europe. They worked for the Hudson Bay Company and thought that the land was ripe for the taking. My 4x-great-grandfather was Sir George Simpson. Having learned more about him, I now better understand the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the colonizers. This relationship is saddening, and it's troubling. People like Sir George were credited with "opening up" the country. However, when I remember that Sir George and his contemporaries would not have been able to even survive had it not been for the help and guidance of Indigenous peoples, who were then often exploited by the HBC, I need to know: Why do we not read about this in school textbooks? Why have we not yet learned the true history of Canada? Why do we not have history told and taught from the point of view of Aboriginal people?

The experience of reading these pieces is engaging. The variety in this collection represents the full range of emotions, from sorrow to joy, from anger to forgiveness. And these texts are not without humour. Who knew that a book such as this would contain references to singers Brenda Lee and Connie Francis (c.f. Drew Hayden Taylor's essay)? Don't be afraid of what you will feel as you read. It is important that you allow yourself to feel uncomfortable. You may feel shame if your relatives were among the colonizers. I have felt this shame. I had to witness before more than one thousand people, at the Northern Gathering of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The day set

aside for me to talk about what I'd seen, heard, and learned was July 1st—Canada Day. I felt deeply ashamed of my country and the policies that lead to residential schools. But an Ojibway elder told me that this feeling was the beginning of real learning, as rational understanding makes way for the heart to take it in. The real shame, he said, would be to feel no shame.

The longest journey is from the head to the heart. Let us open our hearts so that we may help carry the pain that Indigenous peoples in Canada, for centuries, have been carrying alone. Non-Aboriginal people will not be fully at home here as Canadians until we acknowledge the troubled genesis of Canada, its colonial past and present. When that is recognized and accepted, we will have a chance to live on this land with some feeling of wholeness and integrity.

Colonialism is not over. Its tentacles reach into the present, and it is the greatest stain on Canada. If I may quote from a publication by the The Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research Series “No other population group in Canada’s history has endured such a deliberate, comprehensive, and prolonged assault on their human rights as that of Aboriginal people. Yet, despite growing recognition of past wrongs, many Canadians remain unaware of the full scope of these injustices or their impacts.” And that’s because colonialism has put a wall up between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. The journey from truth to reconciliation begins with hearing the stories, acknowledging our shared history (as Mr. Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the TRC, repeatedly states, “this is not an Aboriginal issue. It’s

a Canadian issue”) and then setting out to fix and heal what is broken. This building and re-building will involve taking apart a whole system of colonialism and entrenched relationships—personal, political, and philosophical. In short, let’s talk to each other. And let’s really listen. This book is a great beginning. It isn’t going to be easy, but it’s our only chance. And the very soul of Canada is at stake.