

***At the Forks: Where Indigenous and Human Rights Intersect***

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## **Pride in Health 2024 – Two Spirit History and Health**

Elder Albert McLeod, Elder Charlotte Nolin, and Danielle Hart



*Photo from the Two-Spirit History and Health Panel on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024.  
From left to right: Charlotte Nolin, Albert McLeod, and Danielle Hart.  
Image Credit: Kristy Sytkowski*

## **About the Event**

In October 2024, the Centre for Human Rights Research and the Queer & Trans Graduate Student Group at the University of Manitoba hosted [Pride and Health 2024](#). As part of the interdisciplinary health research conference, we hosted a panel titled “Two-Spirit History and Health” on the land colonially called

Winnipeg. The panel was held on Friday, October 25, 2024, at the University of Manitoba Bannatyne Campus in honour of 2SLGBTQIA+ History Month in Canada.

The term *Two-Spirits* was gifted to Elder Myra Laramée in a pipe ceremony vision. The gift of the term Two-Spirits was introduced in 1990 at the third annual International LGBT Native American gathering north of Winnipeg.

We were honoured to host Two-Spirit Elders Albert McLeod and Charlotte Nolin, who had a conversation about the history of Two-Spirit and how that identity intersects with the health and healthcare needs of Two-Spirit people. This panel, moderated by Danielle Hart, provides an opportunity for Two-Spirit teachings to be shared and centres the Two-Spirit experience with healthcare, which is challenged by homophobia and transphobia, in addition to racism.

## About Albert McLeod

Elder Albert McLeod is a Status Indian with ancestry from Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and the Métis community of Norway House in northern Manitoba. He has over thirty years of experience as a human rights activist and was one of the directors of the Two-Spirited People of Manitoba.

Albert began his Two-Spirit advocacy in Winnipeg in 1986 and became an HIV/AIDS activist in 1987. He was the director of the Manitoba Aboriginal AIDS Task Force from 1991 to 2001. In 2018, Albert received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws from the University of Winnipeg.

Albert lives in Winnipeg, where he works as a consultant specializing in Indigenous peoples, cultural reclamation, and cross-cultural training.

Find out more about Albert [here](#).

## About Charlotte Nolin, Stands Strong Eagle Woman

Elder Charlotte Nolin (she/her) is a 73-year-old Tastawiniyew Otipemisiwak (Two-Spirit Métis) with Ojibway and Cree background. She has devoted her life to teaching younger people about being Two-Spirit, Trans, and Indigenous. A survivor of the Sixties Scoop, she walks with first-hand knowledge of the trauma that Indigenous peoples continue to overcome today. After training as a Community Social Service Worker in 1990, Elder Charlotte worked for 30 years helping

families, youth, and children in the areas of child and family services and the housing industry.

Retiring from her work in child and family services in September 2020, Elder Charlotte continues to be busy with numerous projects and shares her knowledge and teachings with communities across Turtle Island and beyond. Her accomplishments include the “Spirit of the Earth Award” presented to her by Manitoba Hydro and the 2014 “Keeping the Fires Burning Award” presented by Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc. for dedication to her people.

Find out more about Charlotte [here](#).

## About Danielle Hart, Strong Medicine Woman

Danielle Hart is French, Cree (Norway House), and Ukrainian. She identifies as queer and Two Spirit. She is a recent Master’s of Science graduate from the Department of Community Health Sciences at the University of Manitoba. Danielle’s education and career has focused on heart work, harm reduction, and community-based approaches to health and healing.

## Panel Discussion

**Daneille: I want to offer Elder Albert McLeod and Elder Charlotte Nolin the chance to introduce themselves.**

**Albert:**

My name is Albert McLeod. I originally come from northern Manitoba in little village called Cormorant, which is 40 miles north of The Pas. The Pas is one of the central hubs of economy and transportation in northern Manitoba’s history. My ancestry is Scottish, obviously with the name Albert McLeod. And the tradition in Scottish clan culture is to pass names down per generation. And the other part of my family is Cree, Woodland Cree, and Swampy Cree. And they were involved in the Hudson Bay fur trade for over 260 years. They were at the very beginning of the fur trade of North America. And my pronoun or noun is Fabulous Animate Being or FAB for short. And my sexual orientation is homosexual or gay male as in Rock Hudson gay male. Cult classic. I’ll be 69 in December.

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My journey of coming out began very early. I was about 14 year old, which is when your hormones kick in and your gender identity and sexual orientation begins to form. And so, I did a lot of advocacy locally, nationally, and internationally around Indigenous decolonization and reconciliation, but also the place and history of Two-Spirit or Indigenous LGBTQIA+ people, and I look forward to this conversation around Power and Place, borrowing from the National Inquiry in Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls report (MMIWG).

### **Charlotte:**

Greetings my relatives. I introduced myself by the names that I walk with, which are Stands Strong Eagle Woman, Red Horse Running, and Charlotte. Charlotte wasn't the name that my parents gave me. They gave me a name that was yay long.

I was born at the old Grace Hospital, when it used to be along Preston Avenue. Six months after I was born, I was taken away and became part of the Sixties Scoop. I spent the next 19 years going from foster home, to foster home, to foster home, and then to group homes. While I was a ward of the government, I attended the Indian Day School at Rosseau River. When I left the child welfare system, I went to the streets because that's where most of the youth went when they left the child welfare system – the streets. We had no skills and little education, but we were street smart.

And 57 years ago, when I came out the first time, I realized that Canada was a racist, homophobic, transphobic country. We weren't allowed out during the day, if we did come out during the day, we were met with violence – physical violence. But we met that too in the evening. In 1974, after I lost a friend, I decided that it was time for me to return to the closet because I didn't want to end up dead and so I lived as society wanted me to. I became a father, raised seven kids, helped to raise numerous other children. In 1990, I was in British Columbia working in the construction field. I felt it was time for me to retire from that, otherwise I'd be crippled like many of the old guys that worked in the trade. And so, I went into social work – that was my niche because there I could protect our children – and that's what I've done for the last 35 years – protect our children.

A few days ago, I was with other Elders talking about Spirit names and how when we give Spirit names, those names are already known. But people need to learn the responsibility of that Spirit name. There are responsibilities that come with it. I learned my responsibilities with the name Stands Strong Eagle Woman and I would protect and teach the children. The names Red Horse Running is that

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I've been a fighter for our people for almost 60 years. I've fought for our people in housing, child welfare, and gone to court for many clients.

In 2015, after my late wife had passed away and I was by myself, I went through that empty nest syndrome. When the kids left home, I decided that it was time for me to be me. And so, I announced to my family that I was going to transition completely. My brother and sister, who are still alive, stopped talking to me. My children had a lot of questions, but they accepted the fact that I was going to complete my transition. When I walk in stores nowadays, my 28-year-old son gets upset when somebody misgenders me and he'll tell them "It's miss, not sir." My pronouns are she, her, and never late for dinner.

I began work at the University of Manitoba about five years ago. I was asked to come in and support new Indigenous learners that were coming to campus. At first, I was working two days a week because I had other commitments. And then last year, they asked me to come in three days a week, and I thought okay I can manage. And now I feel like I'll be at work tomorrow and Sunday, seven days a week. My son used to complain about that, but I feel what I do is not work – what I share with the people is what I was given to share with the people. And I had instructions on that after my first fast that I would meet many teachers and be imparted with knowledge and ceremonies.

Most of my life I've wanted to work with our youth. In 2021, we began working on the first Two-Spirit Sundance on Turtle Island. At that time, we saw our youth coming and we saw the trauma in their eyes, trauma they were born into, and that they grew up with. But we also saw after that first Sundance, the life that was in their eyes, the love that was in their spirit, and they were coming back year after year.

Is there an easy answer to all of society's issues and problems? No, but there is an answer. Education. That's why I'm so proud of all the education – it's what's needed to combat the homophobia, the transphobia, and all the other phobias. Because if somebody learns about something, they realize they don't have to fear. I could take any white person, pardon the expression, out in the forest, give them a gun, and I'd walk away. And in their travels in the bush, if they encountered a bear, their first thought? Shoot the bear. Because they're afraid of the bear, not realizing that the bear is just as afraid of them as they are of it. If we can educate people, and we've been doing that now for quite a few years, then it'll lessen the homophobia, transphobia, racism, and all the other -isms. Educate people that we are the same as everybody else. When I get up in the morning, I put my pants on one leg at a time. I don't jump into both legs.

I thank you all for being here, listening, and participating. It's an honour for me to be here with all of you.

**Danielle: What brings you to this work?**

**Albert:**

I think it was the darkness that I experienced as a youth. In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s in the north, it was a time of assimilating to be white, not just Canadian, but to be white. So, anything Indigenous... People of colour had no value, no merit at all. It was about building dams, bringing electricity, and creating an economy in the north with forestry. There was this huge push to get a television, to get a phone, to get a vehicle, to learn in schools and graduate, and I was caught up in that. But I was also a queer youth. So, my family was half-breed and First Nation, and we were poor. I didn't fit into that construct at all. And really, no future, right? Because it was about intentional erasure, especially as Indigenous people, but also as queer Indigenous people.

My family didn't have the knowledge or skills to even talk about it. Or even with my sisters, talk about sex, because it was all Christianized and the harms of residential schools and day schools on sexual conversations. So, I came out of that experience.

But one of the things that I experienced that was really unique was the land. Growing up in Cormorant, we lived on a lake. That was my first experience with the world - with plants, and animals, and water. And that was wonderful, right? Humans, we're really fucked up, so I didn't pay too much attention to them!

Then, the second part was my grandmother. She was born in 1897 and never spoke English. She was the wife of a Hudson Bay Company Factor, and she was really my mentor about authenticity. She felt her Cree language was enough. She didn't need to learn another language. Most people at the time were fluent. She was an artist. She tanned her own hides, she smoked her own fish, she hunted, and she was a fabulous contributor to the community. But it was her tenacity to hold on to what her grandparents and great-grandparents taught her about being Cree, the value of being Cree, and the language. So, that really guided me out of trying to hide my homosexuality and being authentic. And so that's been my journey since then; I don't have to apologize for who I am. I don't have to ask permission.

In the Indigenous worldview, the late Roger Roulette (1958-2022) reminded us that 2SLGBTQIA+ people have always been here. It's something we already know, that over thousands of years of human and social evolution of Indigenous

peoples of the Americas, being 2SLGBTQIA+ was common. People knew about it, included it, and celebrated it. So that's where decolonization fits. As Charlotte teaches us, education, there's such a big push back now against transgender people or LGBT people, particularly in the United States. That's just nostalgia for the old colonial binary that gave people so much privilege and wealth, and they want to hold on to it. But you can't go backwards. You can only go forward.

Even in Canada, with the former feminist Prime Minister Trudeau, and the attack he was under, what Canadians have to realize is that [he apologized to 2SLGBTQIA+ Canadians in 2017](#). Only one of three nations in the world who's ever done that – apologized for the harms of colonialism on our community as queer people. That takes a lot of courage, and I think it's costing him politically.

So that's where I am. I'm an artist who is with my grandmother. Our community is about art. During COVID, in that isolation, it was young women on the internet who said to use your plant medicines, make teas and tonics, smudge, put cedar in your shoes, and hang cedar up in your house. That's what we've been teaching them for generations. That is their first go-to with a calamity, like a global pandemic. Their first go-to was traditional knowledge and traditional medicine. Then they started beading – beading earrings and beading medallions. Then they started making ribbon skirts. That was the medicine coming from these young people. It was about balancing that fear, trauma, and anxiety about COVID with saying, look at what we have, look at this beauty, this art, regardless of our anxiety or trauma, we are still living, we are still artists, and we are still fabulous, right? For me, art is a reflection of health, and I'm glad we made it through that pandemic. And a lot of people didn't know. There was a lot of uncertainty. You know, they thought it would be over in October 2020, and it wasn't. To me, it's really about being your authentic self and using art to fill in the gaps.

**Charlotte:**

Well, I think in simple words, it's my love for humanity. When we were emerging from the pandemic, and people were saying that vaccines don't work, my response to that was you're here because of vaccines. My parents were born in 1907 and 1913. They went through the Spanish Flu. Then in the 1950s, we were vaccinated, again, still have that scar, and our children were born. In 2020, COVID arrives, and people panicked, and everybody was saying this comes from Wuhan, China. My response to that was, no, that's not where it's from. This was sent to us from Creator because we, as human beings, have forgotten how to live. We've forgotten about love, respect, acceptance, and humility. So, we were sent this illness to remind us of who we are as human beings.

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When I share the teachings with the young people, I give them a message – my time is limited here on earth. One of these days, I have to return home. We want you to be ready for when we leave. So, we're teaching the young people about the ceremonies, preparing them to run sweats, preparing them to run Sundance or pipe ceremonies, and how to gather and use medicines. We had a discussion with a group of people who were coming into a sweat about one medicine. This medicine grows on Red Willow, and this medicine will clear your mind. People who suffer from migraine headaches only have to take a little piece of it, light it and inhale it – migraines are gone. All medicines, though, have a twin. One will kill you and one will heal you. That's what we share with the young people. When you go out to gather medicines, know which medicines to gather, take an Elder with you, so that you gather the right medicine. They'll teach you when to gather it, how to look after it, and how to use it.

Working here at the University of Manitoba, I'm hearing the words in the wind on how doctors and hospitals are starting to realize that our medicines are important to our people. When we have patients that come from up north and ask for these traditional medicines, we let them have them. Remember, there was a time where there were no drug stores, and the people healed from whatever illness they had by using those medicines.

What I do is from the heart, from Spirit, because that's how I look at the rest of the world. Yes, we have this human body that we got at the body store when we arrived – I'll take that one, I'll take that one. Then, when we're getting ready to leave, we give it back to Mother Earth to look after and we travel back to the spirit world.

Our time here is limited. Creator knows how much time each and every one of us has. Some will have 40 years, some will have 50, some will have 60. We don't know how much time we have, so we live for each day. Tomorrow is not promised to any of us. Today is a gift, so we thank Creator for that gift – the gift of life, the gift to be able to interact with your relatives, and the gift to see the beauty of creation.

We have a word in Cree, 'wahkohtowin,' which speaks of our relationship to everything in the universe, not just humanity, everything in the universe, because we are related to everything. How we walk in life, we're being watched. I remember Sundance Chief coming up to me when I was dancing, "Pace yourself, they're watching you." He was talking about the ancestors. That's the message I give to our Sundancers: "Pace yourself, they're watching you."

I look at our first Sundance, we had 20 dancers. This past year, we had 30. By the time we left on the Monday evening, we had another 4 committed to next year. So, we'll have 40 dancers next year. And it's spreading. The word is spreading.



You know, we have Elders from the United States that come down and help us. We have a dancer that comes from New Zealand and Australia.

So that's why I do the work I do. My love for humanity. One of the things that I was taught is that we don't have to like everybody, but we have to love everybody as human beings. That's what we are – human beings.

**Danielle: What are some of the challenges that you come into, whether that's personally or on behalf of the community or the folks you're working with?**

**Albert:**

I think part of it is the processes that Canada has undertaken about colonization, particularly with Indigenous people. It goes back to the [Aboriginal Justice Inquiry](#) in 1991 for Manitoba, the [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#) in 1996, the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission \(TRC\)](#) from 2008 to 2015, and more recently, the [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls \(MMIWG\) National Inquiry](#) from 2016 to 2019. Canadians need to realize that it's for them to understand the path forward in a democracy that is not a patriarchy, that does not uphold misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia, because we are a founding member of the [United Nations](#) and the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). It behooves every Canadian to understand what those documents are saying about the pathway forward.

I was involved in writing the Inquiry's [2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan](#), and it took us 40 weeks on Zoom during COVID to write that document. You can [read it online](#). Because when queer people do stuff, we do it really good. It came to my mind what we were actually doing: the message was to Canadians, to Indigenous people, but also to the world, is that Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people are indispensable to the future of Canada as a nation. That's what we were saying.

A lot of people still have not read, or don't take the time to understand the [TRC's 94 Calls to Action](#), or are not implementing them. It's business as usual. That's why we see the violence, that's why we see poverty, and that's why we see misogyny. That's why [women in Canada are still paid \\$0.87 for every dollar that men](#) who do the same job receive. That's discrimination, that's gender discrimination. We see it today in 2024. We're OK with it, right? So really, it is moving forward on this path and accepting the change. No society is static. No culture is static. Having the confidence and courage to move forward with a new vision.

Certainly, Indigenous people have paid for the last 400 years for our place. We survived. We're everywhere. We're in every institution, right? We're drawing on the knowledge and tools our ancestors left us. We're here after colonization. That day is here, today. It behooves people to learn.

Charlotte talked about education. If you are not reading those documents, you are not studying, you are not integrating those into your current discipline of study, and if they're not there, complain to whoever your administrators are and say, "Do you know that you've forgotten these critical, key elements of our pathway as a society and moving into the future?" The TRC, the Inquiry, right? That's one of the challenges, and I'm getting old now, so they don't really listen to me anymore. All my good advice. I told you that before. So, it's that balance of capacity where people are in terms of their understanding of process, and people have to learn, and sometimes they learn from their mistakes.

**Charlotte:**

Here at the University of Manitoba, it's the temple that's here, and how do we open windows in the temple so that the light shines in? The University is over 100 years old, and it was created by, pardon the expression, old white men who had certain ideas on how a university should run and how education should be taught. Sadly, those old white men passed away without learning. Now, we have administrators and unions that dictate a significant portion of the way the university operates. Again, these are systems created by old white men, and they don't want to give up part of the seat so that people can benefit. When I deal with the federal government, it's the same thing. We have a few women now in power. We need more. Same with the University. We need more women in power. We need more trans women in power. We need more trans doctors who understand who we are and what we're going through.

I remember when my doctor asked me in 2015, "When did you first realize that you were not who you are in this body as a young person?" I said I was 6 years old, and at that time, I wanted to take a butcher knife and cut away that part that didn't belong to me. Then I had to pass a test with a psychologist or psychiatrist. I passed that with flying colours.

The systems that are in place across the world dictate how humans behave. If those systems don't agree with somebody's desires and notions, they try to put them down. Well, we've been put down for 400 to 500 years, and look where we are today. We're coming out, we're being stronger, we're voicing our concerns, we're voicing our desires, and we're letting the world know that we've always been and always will be.

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When I think of our ancestors who were Two-Spirit, we were the first foster parents. If a couple died and there were children, it was the Two-Spirit people who raised those children and taught them about the past and the ceremonies. We were peace negotiators. We were warriors. When they speak about the Battle of Little Bighorn, one of the warriors was a woman.

When I look across this nation, I've travelled across Canada so many times that I've never flown as much as I did in the last two years, and I see our young people with Master's and PhDs - wow!

When I was 15, I was sent to see a psychiatrist because I had almost killed this kid. The psychiatrist never told me the findings of spending two days with him. My brother asked me in 1995, "Did they ever tell you the results of you seeing that psychiatrist for two days?" I said, "No, nobody ever said anything to me." At 15, my IQ was 167. I knew more than university professors did. I burst out laughing when my brother told me. He says, "What's so funny?" I said, "If only they had worked with me then, instead of telling me I was nothing but a savage and I wouldn't have ended up as a drunk on Main Street." Imagine what I could have accomplished back then. I might have gone to university. I might have accomplished a whole bunch of different things. Then I realized that no, the journey that I've had my whole life was already written in place before I arrived here. The hardships I went through during the 60s Scoop, the Indian day schools and residential schools shaped me into who I am.

I made a decision when I started having children that they would never have to steal food because they were starving. They would never know violence in a home. If there was violence coming out of schools, they knew damn well that I'd be going to the school to straighten it out because I love my children, still do. I love my grandchildren, all 9 of them. I'm waiting patiently for the day they'll tell me, "You're a great-grandparent."

I watched a documentary years ago. It was about this old Cree grandmother, great-grandmother, and great-great-grandmother. She was taking her daughter, granddaughter, great-granddaughter, and great-great-granddaughter berry picking, teaching them about the medicinal purposes of the blueberries and about the food they were gathering. I told my wife, "I want to reach that stage one day where I could teach all of them." To me, there's nothing bigger in life than that – to teach those that come behind us. In reality, each and every one of you is a teacher. Same with us. We are all students.

I remember saying to my son when he was going to Red River College to become a chef, "I'm off to school too." He said, "What do you mean, school?" I said, "I've been going to school my whole life, every day." I continue to do so every day

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because life teaches me. That's my school. One day, I'll have a PhD in education given to me for life.

No matter what society throws at us, we will overcome it because we are all warriors and we are all peacemakers.



*Photo from the Two-Spirit History and Health Panel on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025.  
From left to right: Charlotte Nolin, Albert McLeod, and Danielle Hart.  
Image Credit: Kristy Sytkowski*

**Danielle:** *Is there anything you would like to add regarding what needs to change in our society, specifically in the education system, government, or healthcare?*

**Albert:**

I was at a conference the other day, and I talked about where Winnipeg would be in 150 years. I thought about something I learned in Indonesia. A man sat in a chair in a temple, contemplating and meditating, and they said that's where we need to be, because that tells me that society understands and appreciates what meditation provides culturally and socially. That society can support someone to do that for 25 years, that's a career. Can you imagine being a meditator as your job? That's where we need to be, right? But we're still struggling. We're a colony. We're a young colony, not even 150 years old. We're a baby. We're just exploring democracy, equity, and equality. We're exploring human rights. But we have to

realize, at the same time, we're extracting resources. That's what the colony is all about. Certain people will get rich, and a lot of others will never be rich.

[The Pope came to Canada in 2022 to apologize for the harms of the Roman Catholic Church](#) because of the Indian residential schools and days schools. The Roman Catholic Church represents 1.4 billion people on this earth as a spiritual belief system. To have the head patriarchal lead of that church come to Canada and apologize was very significant in decolonization, and I believe it was through the power of the surviving students. In the Ojibwe language, there is a word called 'miinigoowiziwin.' It means given or received from the divine. It means that before colonization, Indigenous people could petition the spiritual world, the natural world, the world of our ancestors, for what we needed to survive. And it was given. When settlers arrived here and the churches arrived here, they observed and witnessed that power. But because there could only be one supreme being, the Anglo-Christian God, they decided to destroy it [Indigenous spirituality], and they failed. That is why the Pope came to apologize. He said, we tried to inculcate your brains to believe in monotheism, the Roman Catholic God, and we failed. But we also harmed you in that process, and we are sorry.

That is what we're talking about – the future. Indigenous people have this innate ability and capacity to draw upon that knowledge, that power, that gift to move us forward. We are challenged by violence, flooding, forest fires, and global warming, right? Climate change. Do you think we're going to get solutions from our institutions? We're not. They're not built to do that. They're built to progress resource extraction. Colonization has no endpoint. It was not thought out. They found a big sandbox full of toys, and they're in there throwing things around. But Indigenous people understood the cycle of creation and that we've been here for over 10- to 15,000 years. Canada's barely been here for 300 years. Yet, we say we know everything – we don't.

So that's what I say to people who are struggling. I tell them, 'miinigoowiziwin.' You have that capacity and ability. Whatever you ask for in your mind, the spirits are benevolent. They will give it to you.

That's been my journey since, like Charlotte says, being 6, I knew I was different. Probably at the age of 4, I knew I was fabulous. My family were Methodist, Anglican, and Catholic, and that never stuck with me or attracted me at all. It's always been the culture, the traditions of the ceremonies.

The truth in Truth and Reconciliation, and the late Judge Murray Sinclair says there are many truths, but the late Roger Roulette said that in the Ojibwe language, 'debwetemowin' means the truth. But there's a subtext to that terminology, and it means faith and belief. How much faith do we have in the truths

that we are told? How much faith do we have in the beliefs and practices that we are shown? So, we have our own truths, right? And it's not a competition.

So, it's deeper than decolonization. It is when you choose one of those [94 Calls to Action](#), that's a truth, right? The [231 Calls for Justice](#) are about justice, not just for Indigenous people; it's justice for everybody.

**Charlotte:**

For me, it's how people think. In my work with the federal government, we were in Ottawa last year, eight of us Elders. We met with the Deputy Minister of Forestry, and we asked the deputy minister, "Why is it that Canada wants to plant 2 billion trees of the same variety, a fast-growing spruce tree, that in 5 years can be harvested, and the lumber can be sold?" We told the deputy minister, "Before you go planting any trees, go and sit down with the people of the areas that you're going to be planting trees in and ask them what kind of trees grow there." Those spruce trees might never have seen that land. If they were planted there, they're going to affect waterways, they're going to affect the wildlife, and they're going to affect the original growth that's there. You can do more harm than damage by not asking questions. So go and sit with the people in these territories.

Knowledge is a powerful tool. I remember about 10 to 15 years ago, I was in British Columbia (BC), and a friend of mine from Winnipeg called me up and said, "My younger sister, who is 14, was diagnosed with cancer, and she's only got 3 weeks to live." She asked, "Do you know somebody, a medicine person, that could work with her?" I said, "Let's fly your sister up to BC and then we'll take her up north." We took her up north and left her with this medicine woman. A week later, she returned to us and then to Winnipeg and the hospitals. The doctors were in shock that this young woman, who only had three weeks to live a few weeks ago, was now cancer-free. They called me up in BC. What type of medicines did they use?

I said, "Speaking to you, if I thought for one second that you would use this for good, we would share it with you." But, I said, "The reality is, if we share this with you, this is what you're going to be looking at soon – money." We don't share those medicines.

How will humanity move forward in a good way? It's up to each and every one of us. When I was asked about truth and reconciliation, my thoughts on it, I was holding my file from Child and Family Services (CFS). Now, remember, I spent 19 years as a ward of the government. Those 19 years were documented on 12 pages of paper, single-sided. It spoke about this beautiful childhood that I had. Yes, I was sickly as a child and spent a lot of time in the hospital, but there was never anything bad that happened to me. I said to the reporters from the Aboriginal



Peoples Television Network (APTN), “I want the truth of this document to be known and that this is nothing but a pack of lies.” It doesn't speak about the sexual abuse I went through at 6, 14, and 17. It doesn't speak about the physical abuse that went on for years and years, or the starvation and that I had to steal food to stay alive. I said, “Reconciliation? Take that word to every Canadian and let them chew on it... let them eat it and try to understand it and what it means.” In our languages, there is no word for ‘reconciliation.’ It's up to each and every human that lives in Canada to work on that, to let it be part of themselves.

Yes, I dream of a better world where humanity will get along, but the reality is that it will probably be 1 or 2% of billionaires and trillionaires that will rule the world. We do the best that we can as human beings as we go through our journeys. Would I change my journey? No, everything that life has taught me has made me who I am today. My gift to humanity is the knowledge that I carry in hopes that they will carry it to those coming behind them. When we go through life, it's not just about us. It's about every human being who has come, is, and will be. That's what our lives are about. You take that and we walk with it. Ekosi.

**Danielle: For people who are unaware of the [Calls to Justice in the MMIWG2S Report](#), is there anything you want people to know or that you think people should be reading into?**

**Albert:**

Well, it's an interesting phenomenon of decolonization and reconciliation because the TRC examined the history of residential schools and day schools. There was an over 100-year period where they were in place, which involved removing very young children from their parents, from their Elders, from their communities, and putting them into these gothic schools. They were segregated based on gender, male and female, biological gender. I had hoped during the community consultation process that they would attempt, in the [TRC's Calls to Action](#), or even reference, that this was an artificial construct. The binary that was imposed on Indigenous people, not just in Canada, around the world, wherever Anglo-Christian colonists went, they constructed this binary, right? The idea of female, the idea of male. That's how colonization would proceed. And it didn't do that. I realized that in the analysis, maybe that generation didn't have the objectivity to see an alternative because after you're raised six or seven generations with the binary as the norm, the nuclear family as the norm, you don't see an alternative. But with the National Inquiry (MMIWG), in their process, they consulted with mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and sisters, and they said, “Yeah. We have people that we care for who are Two-Spirit, gay, lesbian, transgender, or intersex, and we care about

them, so they need our support.” So, what they did was decolonize that binary and made space for Two-Spirit relatives. That's why 14% of the Calls for Justice are about Two-Spirit identity.

What they did was reach back into pre-contact history and draw on the reality that existed before colonization. There was inclusion, there was space, there were names, there were roles, as Charlotte talked about, and brought it forward into this time as a way out of patriarchy, gender-based violence, and misogyny. So, we are the solution to gender-based violence and that's why we need to be at those tables because when you have the binary privilege of male and female who are heteronormative, and cis-gender, that's a distinct conversation. It is a competitive, polarized conversation. When you add transgender, gay, and lesbian people to that table, it will change that conversation forever. That's what this is about. If we keep those polarized genders as a function of our society and our politics, we will continue to experience patriarchy, misogyny, and gender-based violence. It won't go away. That's the ingenuity of the Inquiry, people. They gathered their information. That's what it says.

Since 2019, I've been struggling with communities that don't fully understand that those who are comfortable with their binary privilege, because that's all they know. Inviting LGBT people to the table is challenging or threatening to them because they don't know our language, they don't know our culture, they don't know the nuances and they don't know the struggles and the successes we've had around the world and in North America around queer rights. So, they're intimidated, but it's alright, they'll get over it. We will be at that table, and we will change that conversation, and it will be forever. Not just, oh, you know, we're at the end of reconciliation or whatever. No, it's forever, right?

My friend is a jingle dress dancer. She's trans female. Her niece is 12 years old, she's trans female, and she's a jingle dress dancer. That is what Charlotte is talking about. We're seeing it in real time where these trans children are not carrying the burden of the previous generation because it's not their burden. They're kids. They're not adults. They didn't do anything. And she's flourishing. She was on APTN with her dad talking about being transgender. You know, 10 years ago, that would have been unheard of. So, it's happening in real time. I think it just has to happen more. And it will.

**Charlotte:**

I have every confidence that it will happen more and more as we evolve as human beings.



## *At The Forks*

It's to always remember that we are human beings first and foremost. Being trans or being gay or lesbian, that's secondary. We're human beings in the eyes of the Creator. Even before that, we were all spirits in the spirit world. Then we were sent down here to bring about change in the world, and we've been doing that. When I look at the last 50 years and how we've evolved within society, and how we've opened doors for those coming behind us. Our day of reckoning is coming. Might not happen in my lifetime, but it will happen in a lifetime of those coming behind me and those that come after that. You know, I've said this to many people, "I'd love to be a fly on the wall in 50 to 100 years from now." I have hope in my heart, and that's what we've been talking about here for the last couple of days, is hope. Hope for the future generations, and we're bringing that to them. So never stop what you're doing. Never give up for anyone. Just keep being you. Ekosi.

### **Danielle:**

This conversation between Albert and Charlotte – this is sacred knowledge you are receiving. This would and should be a tobacco question. And so, soak it all in, because sometimes we walk for years to get this knowledge that Charlotte and Albert have shared with us.

As a queer and Two Spirit person, I want to thank Charlotte and Albert from the bottom of my heart for the tireless work they have put in throughout their lives to create visibility, safety, and representation for 2SLGBTQIA+ people today. I grew up feeling empowered in my queerness because of their work and lasting legacies. In this current time, where we are seeing basic human rights being stripped from our queer & trans relatives by hateful, bigoted governments, I encourage all people to stand firmly with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and mirror this same effort and dedication that has been so eloquently displayed by Charlotte and Albert. The work we do now has the power to save lives. Let's get to work.



Drawing Change. Image credit: Miranda Maslany

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