

Our Story

By Brian Payer, advisor to the K'ómoks First Nation and keynote speaker at the ceremonial event commemorating the signing of the historic protocol agreement on communication and cooperation, June 14, 2010.

Ke Chee Migwetch Komoks elders, Chief and Council, Melinda and team,
band members

Ka ba git knee aik ohma key ta keen

Da nish na bay tabshcoe a key no ma guy eyek

Eye en doan gee Garden River

Brian Payer dish knee cash

I thank the K'ómoks leadership, administration and band members for
welcoming me into their traditional territory.

I am Anisnabee, or as you may know in English, Ojibway.

I come from Garden River Reserve and my name is Brian Payer.

I am truly honoured to have been asked to share a few words with you on
behalf of the Nation. Not being from this Nation, it puts huge
responsibility on me to not say the wrong thing.

I'd like to start with a story....a true story because it involves many of you.

In the summer of 2008, Chief and Council and Melinda began speaking
about the disconnect between our communities; the lack of understanding;
the mistrust; the them and us syndrome.

They began to explore how to take the first step in changing this....what can we do....how do we start...who do we talk to.

The planning began, and out of this planning came the Recognition and Reconciliation workshops.

K'ómoks First Nation only asked one thing...they asked that if you commit to coming to the workshops that you are not committing for only one, but for all three.

The workshops were attended by Mayors, Council people, senior staff, selected developers.

On March 31, 2009, the first workshop was held. Mr. Matt Vickers shared with you, from his heart, nothing held back.... about pre-contact, post contact, residential schools.....and you were there.

On April 27, 2009, one month later you had the opportunity to hear Chief Judith Sayers from Hupacasath First Nation, an honorary Dr., as well as Merle Alexander from Klemtu, a world renowned expert on Indigenous intellectual rights and title...and you were there.

And then on May 27, 2009 the last workshop was held, that provided the tools of the HOW TO; How do we form a relationship; what are our first steps....and you were there.

The story is about the commitment of you, the Attendees; the story is about the commitment of the Nation; the story is about making the first step to recognition and reconciliation by all.

The commitment to this process was a commitment by all to want to make a difference.

Was this the first time in the History of BC that such a comprehensive set of workshops had been put together for a Nation and its Municipal neighbors.....you bet. You are and you were the first....and for that, the Nation is honoured. And for me, a witness to this, I marvel at such an incredible feat....a feat that likely you do not even realize the importance of ...for other First Nations...for other municipalities.

I commend each and everyone one of you, both from the K'ómoks First Nation and the surrounding communities on making the first step.

But the story continues. There are working groups that are put together to follow the recommendations for building a relationship. And over a number of months, what is produced is a document titled "Protocol Agreement for Communication and Cooperation".

There is agreement on the wording; there is agreement on its importance; Most importantly, there is a change from misunderstanding to understanding; there is a change from mistrust to trust; there is a shift from disrespect to respect; there are words that use to be "them" changed to "us".

Today, the story ends and a new story begins.

But the story ends in a big way; in the most important event in First Nations protocol.

We as outsiders to this great Nation, have been invited into where all important events and decisions have been made since time immemorial. Maybe not in this Big House, but in Bighouses before this one.

I would like you for a moment to close your eyes....Hear the fire....feel the presents of those next to you.....feel the presence of this great Nation.....this Bighouse is filled to the brim...with our elders of today...of our elders of yesterday...of our elders since time immemorial who are with

us in this big house today to witness this great and wonderful event. Your elders are here to....our elders are here to ensure that our hearts and our minds are clear and pure in our intentions with this communication and cooperation protocol. We are all crowded into this Bighouse...standing room only.

Please open your eyes now. See through our eyes. See with clarity that when you ink this agreement, the ink is not near as important as the significance of what you....K'ómoks Chief Ernie Hardy; you Mayor Greg Phelps; you Mayor Fred Bates; you Mayor Paul Ives and you Vice Chair Edwin Grieve; are doing in front of the witnesses you see here today.....and the witnesses of our elders that you do not see; that are here in standing room only in this very important Bighouse.

Today when you walked through the door, you experienced a cleansing ceremony. That ceremony is critically important when entering the Big House, because what we are to do, is leave our egos outside....rid ourselves of any negativity that we may carry.....so that as we conduct this important work of signing this agreement, that we do it with clear minds and an open heart.

In First Nations Culture, this is our history book...our oral culture. The witnesses have a big responsibility....to make sure that the message of what has happened today is shared. To make sure that if the truth is not being told about this important event, that the story is corrected...that the truth is told.

We all know that there are these things called elections...municipal elections, Band elections...So you may ask yourself....what is the responsibility of those that have signed this document. Do they just get to sign and walk away?? Each one of the signatory names I have mentioned earlier has a responsibility under First Nations protocol, to ensure that

their successors know and understand the significance of today. You have been given that responsibility in front of all of these witnesses.

I started out by saying that I wanted to share a story with you. What I have shared is a non-fiction story...of you...it is your story....it is the oral story of the events that you will share with your peers; other politicians; your family; your successors.

Today we honour each of you for your foresight and vision....for coming here to witness this important event.

This story is ended, and today moving forward the new story begins through mutual trust, honesty and respect.

I close what I have shared with you today with this.

Manitoe, Key chee migwetch; mee shom suck... no quok.... key che migwetch;

A key na.....din a ma gin a ninonic..

This means that we thank the Creator, all our grand mothers and grand fathers for their guidance today, All My Relations.