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In Conversation: Albert McLeod and Rob Innes

Albert McLeod is a Status Indian with ancestry from Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and the Metis community of Norway House in northern Manitoba. He has over twenty years of experience as a human rights activist and is one of the directors of the Two-Spirited People of Manitoba. Albert has managed youth programs at Ka Ni Kanichihk and more recently at the Youth Peacebuilding Project at Menno Simons College. He is a proud godfather to his godson, Walks Tall, who he has mentored since childhood. Albert also works as a consultant specializing in HIV/AIDS and Aboriginal peoples, cultural reclamation, and cross-cultural training. [www.albertmcleod.com](http://www.albertmcleod.com)

Robert Alexander Innes is a Plains Cree member of Cowessess First Nation and an Associate Professor in the Department of Native Studies, University of Saskatchewan. He is the Co-Lead on Bidwewidam Indigenous Masculinities (see site bio).

The recorded interview begins part way through a story that McLeod was sharing with Innes, pertaining to gender fluidity.

MCLEOD: They needed one of their daughters to become a hunter. So they consulted the community. This one girl would be able to transform into a male to be able to go with the men to hunt, so she could provide for the family. So, she dressed as a male, and then she went hunting with the men. She wore a belt of bear ovaries which was meant to balance her period or female power. And it only lasted a period of time where her gender was transformed to that of a male and she was allowed to do male things, hunting, specifically hunting. They said she got married; she had children. But that's an example of how a gender can be traditionally transformed with the agreement of the community.

INNES: Right. Right.

MCLEOD: From my observation and research, there are people who are gay males and gay females, and then there's what we would call transgendered, female to male and male to female, who are distinct from the gay community. And being at this two spirit gathering is interesting, because I kind of watched all the activities of the people throughout the four days, and I thought this could easily be attached to a community event. I could see the role, the function, the involvement of two spirit people in a community event just from seeing what we were doing and they were doing. So I think it's present today, but it's just not obvious the way we see it. Like when an event occurs, there's so many facets of the community involved; you just don't see the two-spirit role being identified or acknowledged whether it's a powwow, or a Sun Dance, or a funeral. But two spirit people are there, you know, doing their traditional roles, whether it's cooking or singing songs or that kind of thing.

INNES: Right.

MCLEOD: But I think the problem now is, because of colonization and Christianity, our role has become taboo, as it would have been in the early days of Christianity in the Americans. And that's the political struggle that I have with the leadership is to get some kind of demonstration of inclusivity, politically, from the leaders of the day, because most of them, our Chiefs are males, right.

INNES: And what kind of response do you get from Chiefs?

MCLEOD: Silence.

INNES: Right.

MCLEOD: Well, part of it to me is, "Are gay people human?" Because that's the role of the leadership is... to protect the rights of all the citizens, right, your band members. So if your band members are gay, how do you protect their rights? Because the thing is, if the only way that can be done is, if you assimilate to being heterosexual, that's not respecting people's rights.

INNES: Right.

MCLEOD: The only time I've heard a First Nation leader actually speak publically about gay rights was Clyde Bellecourt from the American Indian Movement. We had a conference here on decolonization in 2007. He talked about making alliances against racism in Minnesota with a GBLT Committee, and he talked about gay people rights as well. And he was 72 at the time. So I've never heard a Canadian Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis, or Inuit leader do a comparable public announcement, and it needs to happen.

INNES: I just came across something in Washington.

MCLEOD: Yeah, the same sex marriage.

INNES: The same sex marriage. Yeah. Yeah. Just a couple days ago. But yeah, nothing close like that in Canada. I don't... Yeah, that's kind of interesting. ...Go ahead.

MCLEOD: So this starting me thinking about cultural reclamation. It is not about imposing these colonial, Christian based views of what gender should look like, what family structures should look like. And now we're letting creationists or traditionalists take over. And whoever your child is, the family adapts to what that child is, and what that child needs. If you have a two-spirit child or a transgendered child, that is what your family has to relate to or become, as opposed to the child trying to assimilate into a family that is based on a colonial structure. So to me, I think, it's difficult for people to understand that because we're so used to a Western way of

structuring family.

Whereas pre-contact, we lived in groups, three or four families, extended families, and roles were much more complex. And that within that role, children were enabled to become who they were meant to be and contribute what they were meant to contribute. Now, all families are segregated, and we are creating these groups of children who don't know each other and don't know their traditions and don't know their family history.

In the two-spirit community, we created our own families to replace these traditions. And we parent each other. We adopt each other. There's a society in Vancouver that has been there for 30 years, 32 years, and these are mostly two-spirited people from across Canada, who were shunned or neglected and they left their communities and went to Vancouver. And they created their own family groups. And to me, I believe that's an Aboriginal tradition, that we do that with each other. Like I'm Cree from the North, but I mostly know Ojibwe teachings because I was adopted into the culture in the south. And to me, it wasn't obvious, but it was a very deep feeling of belonging to the people.

And that's what I mean when we say, you know, when you enter the Eastern doorway, that doorway's open to everyone and we can't say who can come in and who cannot come in. Because the strength of culture is based on that, whoever enters that doorway, we have the strength to accept that person and relate to that person. But for a long time, the doors have been closed because we don't feel that we have that strength because we are still reclaiming our culture, our traditions, and identity.

So, transgenders for me, the male to female transgenders, I'm more familiar with and I see them transition between gender identities within a half-hour. For example, I once saw a transgender female pick up a big powwow drum and carry it across the room like a toy. And to me, that's a classic example of a transgender, in that, even though the identity is female, the physicality is male.

So, that's the gift of both.

INNES: So then, explain or talk about some of the challenges?

MCLEOD: Poverty. Artificial poverty. Usually, it's because people, two-spirit people can't or won't assimilate into a heterosexual identity. In fact, in families where there's still a lot of homophobia, a lot of streaming to male and female identities, pressure by families, like my friends, their family members will say, when are you going to stop being gay? So, it was like they saw it as a phase and that eventually, this person would become heterosexual, get married, and have children.

But what happens, many gay and lesbians do assume a heterosexual identity and get married and have children. There are a number of two-spirited grandmothers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers, and great-grandmothers who are two-spirited. They've always been. They have got married and they have children and grandchildren. There was a grandfather at the two-spirit gathering who brought his two-spirited grandchild, grandson. So, to me, those are just realities, and they are not unique. And to me, they are norms and they should be norms in our Aboriginal community, because what that says is, you can be gay and lesbian, or transgender and you can still be a father, a mother. And so the whole thing about parenting is a non-issue, because biologically, two-spirit people can still have children.

So interesting though, one of the things of, that I think is really important is about those spiritual power places, and I really see in the western society, we have shelters for women, for Aboriginal women where they can receive support and counselling and programming and culture, culture-based programming. But there isn't anything for Aboriginal men who presumably experience the same degree of racism and trauma in our society, but there doesn't seem to be any acknowledgement of that reality. That, men might need supports, those types of supports.

A lot of times, men get sent for treatment in prison. That's the equivalent. Those are your options. You are expected to function as any other male in our society, which is to get a good education, which would be a university degree, get a good paying job, have one or two vehicles, have a house, have wealthy and influential friends. And that's the norm in our society that is expected of males. Yet, for Aboriginal males, who experienced racism and poverty and the Indian Residential School era, there's no acknowledgement that they might need some support to achieve those norms. You know, financial norms. And if you don't, you are seen as a failure, you know.

INNES: And so, supports. What kind of supports would you think...?

MCLEOD: Well, I think some of the work that Greg Murdock is doing. What is the Aboriginal male identity and role in Canadian society? Other than being a Chief or a lawyer or a CEO, whatever.

You know, in 9/11, when they did the memorial, there was no First Nations involved in that first memorial of 9/11. Yet, it was First Nations who built those towers (World Trade Center). Although, they did include a memorial in Minneapolis; the First Nations were included in one of the memorials for 9/11. So to me, there's that lack of spiritual recognition of the contributor role of Aboriginal men to North American society.

In some of the work that Sabine Lang has done, she noted that in most Indigenous communities, there was a men's sweathouse. It wasn't, per se, only a sweat lodge. It was a gathering place for males in the community. They usually went there once a day. Part of it was sweating, but it was also a ritual gathering place for males. And she noted, in terms of how women were integrated into that in some communities. In some societies, post-menopausal women could come into the men's sweathouse and transgender males to females because they were seen as they couldn't create life. Like there's something about that, the female linkage to creating life that's significant culturally around traditions and teachings. So in that instance, it was the women in the community who could come into the men's sweats as long as that was no longer an option for them. So I thought that was interesting. But the irony though, with the transgender men, they could still create life because they had the equipment. They were biological males.

They could create life that way. But, so I think, in terms of urban centres, where a lot of Aboriginal people are concentrated, there is no sacred, spiritual place for a male to be a male, an Aboriginal Indigenous male. Where would that be?

INNES: You might get men's circles

MCLEOD: And they're usually therapeutic.

INNES: Right. Right.

MCLEOD: There's a pathology attached to it (non-Indigenous perceptions of Indigenous men), so it's like they are trying to fix you, or you did something wrong or you need be this to be that. So I think we have to realize that the landmass that Winnipeg is built on—there were ceremonies here. There were power places here, that men probably had their own sweathouse and that they had their own relationship to the land that's underneath this concrete. From what I see, those men's sweathouses need to come back where Aboriginal men can gather to be that identity that is connected to the land, to their history, to their roles.

You know, how many Aboriginal men go hunting today? Do they have linkages to the ecology, and to the animals? I did a workshop up in northwestern Ontario on HIV, and it was interpreted, translated to the Chief and Council. What they said was, these new diseases are coming because there has been a disconnect from the land and that historically, Aboriginal people accessed medicine through the animals and the ecology, water-based animals. And they said that the muskrat, the moose, the fish, the beaver, they all ate plants in the water, and these were medicine plants. So by them eating these plants, they ingested the medicine, and then they become medicine animals and when humans ate these animals, they ingested that medicine. They said, that's the link, that's the break, the link that's been created. If you say to people, here's some muskrat, they'll turn their nose up to it, because it's been removed from their experience for so long. But if you think about what they said, because to me, that's the ecology. You're connecting to the water, to the animals, to the plants, just by eating these plants. So that's why the relationship to the animals are so ritualized.

My mother told me, she said that when she was growing up, if they ate an animal, they always returned the bones to where it came from. Like they would hang the moose bones in the trees, because the moose is always antlers against the trees. And they would put the fish bones and duck bones in the water. There was a way of honouring the animals.

That was a story from the Chief and Council. And so, from my perspective, I think we can reclaim some of history, but we'll never know it all and it may not be possible to repeat or to replicate what is traditional practice, pre-contact or post-contact. And my position is, there is evidence that two-spirit people were integrated in and integral to societies. And that in terms of cultural reclamation, that aspect has to be a part of it. So if you're involved in decolonization and cultural reclamation, including two-spirit people is a part of that process, otherwise you're picking and choosing what you want to reclaim.

INNES: And how would you do that? How would you think it could be done?

MCLEOD: Well, I think we need to be at political tables. You know, we need to be part of decision making about community. We need to ensure there are programs for two-spirited people. Housing or education or whatever.

Because I think there's still a lot of homophobia and transphobia as a result of this artificial poverty. A lot of youth quit school early because they are being bullied and harassed. That's all about power. Like you know, you feel disempowered as a male, you will bully other people to become empowered. And you do that by seeking out vulnerable people. And so feminine boys or transgender boys or gays are the ones who usually get targeted by the bullies, and so they quit school. And right away, one of your determinants for health is missing from the equation, because what do you do with a grade ten education in today's society.

INNES: That's right.

MCLEOD: You come to the city, work in Burger King, right. And how do you get respected as integral parts of that community? Because otherwise, the community is not going to function.

INNES: What is, generally speaking, what is the relationship between two-spirited people/youth and non-queer people like today?

MCLEOD: It's surviving the bullies. That's the smart part.

INNES: Right. Right. Not facing them.

MCLEOD: The ones who don't commit suicide. They make it. Many leave their communities, but many stay in their communities. Out of all the six hundred and some First Nations, there is two-spirited people who live in their communities, work in their communities, are accepted and function. But I think my work is more around the ones who leave their communities and live in



urban environments to try and find a better life. But I know there are people in their communities, some are political, some have been Chiefs, are Chiefs, who are two-spirited in our country and in the United States. So it's there, but it's not spoken about or acknowledged.

I'm seeing it more and more like with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and their community events guideline for communities to apply for funding support, it asks, how are you going to include two-spirited people in your community event? So, that's a precedent right there.

INNES: So how often is that part of funding events?

MCLEOD: Well, the gathering we hosted here in 2010, we received funding from TRC and then this gathering that happened in BC also received funding from the TRC. They sent Statement Gatherers to the event to gather statements of former students, or intergenerationally affected family members. So there's that, then I think the National Aboriginal Health Organization whose suicide prevention toolkit has included a module on two-spirited people. And the Assembly of First Nations made a recommendation in 2001 in their HIV/AIDS Strategy to educate people about the traditionally respected role of two-spirited people in most First Nations.

I think at the University in Saskatchewan, at their powwow, they brought in the Pride Flag this year.

In terms of sexuality, because we have mostly been talking about social, cultural roles. In terms of sexual behaviour, like in the AIDS community, we use the term, men who have sex with men. We don't say gay men, because there are gay communities in North America, around the world. And that's a recent phenomenon, since the '70s. Well, I think there's always been gay communities in urban centres, but mostly through the gay movement in the Americas, in the '70s, there's much of gay areas of cities, like The Village in New York or on Church Street in Toronto. I think, through what we know now, and a lot of it has come through the HIV research about sexual behaviours, because it's about using the condom or not, and who you're having sex with. So the term, men who have sex with men, so that's a broader identification of men who have a number of identities, but have sex with men. And there's groups of men who identify solely as gay and that's their social and cultural identity as a gay male.

And then there's other males who are, bisexual, it's a term that's been used, but there really isn't a broad bisexual community. It more refers to men who have primarily a heterosexual identity. Many are married, some have, you know regular male partners or casual male partners, but essentially their social and cultural identity is that of a heterosexual male. You can't just assume by looking at someone whether they are gay or not. Like there's the whole spectrum from very feminine looking female transgender to very masculine male heterosexual males who would have sex with other males. And what it means to them is quite a range. Like bathhouses in urban centres, that's where a lot of bisexual or closeted males would go to.

INNES: But they're not necessarily closeted right?

MCLEOD: Well, it's difficult, especially to find a partner. You know, generally I think. But, so it could be a married bisexual male who goes to the bathhouse because it's private. So to me, in the Aboriginal community, that's the other issue. I think it's more of a struggle if you're a very masculine looking Aboriginal male, to talk about your sexuality if you're attracted to other males or had male partners.

INNES: Oh right. Because someone who is feminine, people will assume...

MCLEOD: It would be obvious. It wouldn't be an issue. But if you, like the streaming that happens in high school is one about peer pressure. It's the rites of passage. And I think that's the other thing that is missing in terms of the Aboriginal male identity. A lot of the rites of passage are really, now it's like you have sex with a girl, you get your car, you drink. So those rites of passage are a bit westernized. So traditionally, what would it be? What would a rite of passage be for an Aboriginal male? But you know, your first moose kill or something. And we don't know. There's so little research on that.

INNES: And you were just saying that, all those rites of passage are tied to heterosexuality. Right?

MCLEOD: Now they are.

INNES: Now they are, right. But you know, so perhaps maybe traditionally someone who hunted a moose, that didn't necessarily mean they were heterosexual. That was just, okay, now they are going into the next stage of life. Where now, it seems a lot of it is...

MCLEOD: Well I think there is some blending there. There is one documented story by Alexander the Younger, who was in this area early in the 1800s, where he went down to Minnesota, where he observed an Ojibwe group. This Chief had this son whose name was Berdash, which was the European term for two-spirited person, male to female. And there's a story that was recounted where they were being chased by another group and this group was shooting arrows at them. So Berdash kind of became a hero, because s/he would gather all the arrows that landed near them and s/he would shoot them back, so it gave people time to get away. It said that the Chief had encouraged his son to become heterosexual, but it never happened.

And there's another account, I think his name was Yellow Head. John Tanner was taken by the Ojibway in I think, the western Ontario area. He wrote a biography later, and he recounts a story about this two-spirit person, transgender person who approached him and wanted to be his wife. And John Tanner declined. But he noted that the woman-man was 50 years old.

So there are a lot of historical accounts.

S/he was still ready to get married, still a bride. It was about those rites of passage. There was someone who recounted a story about this two-spirited guy, that as he was growing up, his father took him moose hunting and he didn't want to go. And he cried and cried. And then his father realized he was, you know, going to be gay. So he said "that's all right my son." But it was the way he said it. It was so funny, because it's like the father realizing not to force the child to do something he didn't want to. That was to be a rite of passage too. But again, there's so little research about what would have been a rite of passage in the community.

So I know my uncle was making snowshoes, carving snowshoes, like making miniature snowshoes as children it was really something. Carving and stuff like that.

So to me, the sexual piece, and again, there's very little research around Aboriginal male sexuality, sexual behaviours. They did a study here in the early '90s in Winnipeg of bathhouses

and gay bars; they said the Aboriginal males found in these places were more likely to be bisexual than non-Aboriginal males, than other men found in those bars. So you could see there was acknowledgement that the Aboriginal males, you know to have a relationship with gay men or transgender men. Like it wasn't as taboo I guess.

In terms of the suicide issue, we advocated with NAHO's [National Aboriginal Health Organization] First Nations Centre on including two-spirit people in their suicide prevention tool kit because on their first print there was nothing or very little about two-spirit people. So we wrote a letter to them and they created a module and they're going to roll it out with their new kit. But this really shows the inherent bias, which creates obliteration and inertia.

But you know, I keep writing this letter to the National Chief. I wrote him a letter in February 2010, reminding him of the AFN [Assembly of First Nations] recommendation from 2001, that First Nations be educated on the traditional role of two-spirited people in First Nations communities. We, [Two-Spirited People of Manitoba] are asking him how, with the repeal of Section 67, of the Canadian Human Rights Act, how they are going to include two-spirit people in the process. And he hasn't replied. So it's a year that's gone by. So to me, that's the challenge. You see, when you embrace people as allies in a human rights effort, you strengthen the process. You don't weaken it. And that's the shift that needs to occur with the Aboriginal male leadership, which is presumably heterosexual. That you demonstrate your strength when you protect the vulnerable. When you are protecting yourself, it just shows, you feel, you know you're the one who feels vulnerable. So when they get to that place of inclusivity, that's when there is that sense of strength and ability.

If you look at Adam Beach and the roles he's played. Billy Merasty he's played, Elijah Harper. Billy's gay, so a role of a lifetime I guess. What is the role of Aboriginal males in our society other than the political?

And for me, I believe the solution is when you start to create, reclaim these sacred spaces where there is no interference. And I say this because there was an anti-gang project here with Aboriginal males, the Circle of Courage. That was the model that they created. It was for Aboriginal youth in trouble with the law. They created this home for them where they had cultural workers come in and they go to eat, and they got to study. They had their own space where they could be Aboriginal males without outside interference.

INNES: So, how's it working?

MCLEOD: They just got refunded. It came out yesterday. It was a three-year pilot.

INNES: So they've gone through the first three years are done.

MCLEOD: Yeah, should maybe be talking to Leslie Spillett because she can talk about that project. Because that to me, that's the gang prevention piece. The gangs are attempting to replace the social determinants of health. Because you could go down that list of determinants of health and do one for society and do one for gangs, and you could match them up and, an example in terms of how it would be culture, economy, all of that. So it's come out of the pressure of colonization, and all of these youth, Aboriginal youth didn't have a place. There was a place in our society for Aboriginal men, right, because of that historical relationship to the land. It's a political stance. So now they're building prisons, right, to be these places.

ROB INNES Right. You know exactly. The gangs and the prisons. Where are Aboriginal men going?

MCLEOD: Yep. You have to be locked up because you still have title to this land.

INNES: Right. Right.

MCLEOD: Growing up in the North, I saw the independence. I saw the independence of men. You know, the providing that they did. You know, the contribution they did. The community organizing, their involvement and thirty, forty years later to see where we are; it had to be created. In four decades, to devastate a community, you know, it happened by policy. And that's the work I do. You have shitty policy, because you're [colonial state] afraid to share.

INNES: Who do you work with?

MCLEOD: Well, I have a part-time job. I work at the 595 Prevention Team. I work in harm reduction around HIV and Hepatitis C. I'm the community development coordinator. The other one, I am one of the board directors of the Two-Spirited People of Manitoba Inc.

We're (Two-Spirited People of Manitoba) thinking of applying for funding because we're seeing the youth not getting the services they need, people living in poverty, a lot of bullying still, a lot of suicides still. And so we're looking at doing some transitional housing for people. But yeah, this gathering was the 23<sup>rd</sup> [annual international Two-Spirit] gathering that we just went to.

There's about 28 regional two-spirit groups in North America. There's been an organization in Toronto since 1989 and it's been funded by different governments and it's still going strong. But to me, I am much more about the politics, being at the table.

INNES: Right. Oh I see. Right, right. Because you need these different forums. Yeah, you definitely need the different prongs. You can't just...

MCLEOD: Well, because the community has to come from inclusivity, it has to begin at the beginning, right, with family. Before anything else comes, who is in the family? Heterosexual boy, heterosexual girl, maybe a transgender, maybe a two-spirit, and maybe that's the basis of your community. Nothing else can be. So that's how you move from there. And because that's decolonization.

We have to get over the Christianity and the homophobia, because what I see being regurgitated is Christianity. It's homophobia, based on Christianity. Yet the perpetrators were the Christians, the same sex perpetrators [in residential schools]. There were heterosexual perpetrators too. One of the things I was told about one of the [residential] schools in the north was that the priests would come at night, and they'd go in the boys' dorm, and they would masturbate the boys. And so it's dark, you don't know which priests, you don't know which boys. Other boys would hear it, but no one would talk about it. It would be ritualized oppression or however you want to call it, trauma.

From a colonial point of view, if you think about how churches were involved in colonization, is that this group of religious, so-called sacred beings were sent to America to assist with

colonization. And one of the things they got rid of was the [Aboriginal] traditionalists, like the medicine people, the medicine men, women, the shamans because they resisted colonization the most. So they got rid of them. How they did it was by bringing these Christian Catholic, Methodist churches, etc, as part of colonization.

But in the schools, undermining the person's gender identity was a part of that process because the children were away from their parents. Tomson [Highway] calls it brainwashing or mind-fucking, as a part of colonization. Because whether it happened to you, if you knew it happened in the same school, you're in that same place, so the whole thing becomes tainted with that act, and the lying, and the double standard of the priests, right, the powers that be.

In terms of colonization, there was psychological component to it. And from my perspective, what the priests were doing was they were taking the seed of these boys as a part of controlling the male, the very essence of their ability to give life. These priests would come at night and take their semen from them. Like if there's no other classical demonstration of colonization. That's it. Because the children then become complicit in the lie, right? - Because they're pretending that this didn't happen.

My mother once told me a story from up north where she said that when the priest asked [a family] to send their daughter to clean the priest's house, it became a privilege. So the priest asked for the granddaughter of my mother's great-aunt to come clean his house. And so she went. And the girl complained that the priest was trying to touch her. So when her grandmother found this out about her granddaughter, she went and had that priest kicked out of the community. And that really spoke to the power of the women at the time. That era. They were able to expel these perpetrators. Later on, I don't think that was an option.

Then she told me about one of her uncles. The priest had called the boys to the church because he was going to do something with them, a presentation. Then she said her uncle came back. He was really upset. He was really angry. And he never said what happened. But what he said was, those are not holy people. He said, they're humans. What we have to understand is that these priests were presented as spiritual beings. I think what it was, he [the priest] started talking about sexuality with these boys, and my mother's uncle realized he was human because the gods wouldn't need to talk about human sexuality with humans, right.

And she said he never went back to the church after that experience. So I don't think the [churches] are owning up to what they did, or what they were doing, or why they were doing it.

And it's a part of colonization to suppress the people, oppress the people, create secrets, create lies, keep secrets.

And you know, this healing thing we did in May. One of speakers, he was talking about the priests who would come, would select boys, and he was chosen one time, and they were abusing him physically abusing him. And he said later, he realized they were also, at the same time, sexually abusing him. And he was upset as he got older, because he couldn't protect himself. And when he was sharing that, he was crying. This was in a schoolyard in Winnipeg. He was crying when he was telling the story. And this little boy came up to him with a Kleenex from the audience and stood beside him. That little boy wouldn't leave him until he saw him and he gave him the Kleenex. It was incredible to watch, because it was like that was the little boy in the story. That was probably the same age as he was. It was strange because this little boy wouldn't leave his side. It was almost like it was a spirit, like the spirit of this little boy hearing the adult, in his adult self, telling the story. It was quite awesome to see that. But to see a child who would, you know, help this man who was grieving. He wouldn't leave his side.

INNES: Yeah, that would have been quite powerful.

MCLEOD: That's what these things are. You can't create them. They're dynamic processes. That's what that circle is. It's what is the truth? When do people feel safe, protected enough to articulate what actually happened? And we have to be strong enough to hear it, to witness it, and to move forward from that point. So to me, that struck me with the recollection of those priests, you know, masturbating these boys in secret. And that sexual abuse is what, control of a lifetime, not just a moment. It's a secret between the priest and the boy and the other boys in the dormitory.

*Albert McLeod is a Status Indian with ancestry from Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and the Metis community of Norway House in northern Manitoba. He has over twenty years of experience as a human rights activist and is one of the directors of the Two-Spirited People of Manitoba. Albert has managed youth programs at Ka Ni Kanichihk and more recently at the Youth Peacebuilding Project at Menno Simons College. He is a proud godfather to his godson, Walks Tall, who he has mentored since childhood. Albert also works as a consultant specializing in HIV/AIDS and Aboriginal peoples, cultural reclamation, and cross-cultural training. [www.albertmcleod.com](http://www.albertmcleod.com)*

1 Gregory Murdock coordinated a series of Indigenous men's healing gatherings in Manitoba in the mid 2000's. 2 Lang, S. (1998). Men as women, women as men: Changing gender in Native American cultures. Austin: University of Texas



Press.

3 New light on the early history of the greater Northwest. The manuscript journals of Alexander Henry ... and of David Thompson ... 1799-1814. Exploration and adventure among the Indians on the Red, Saskatchewan, Missouri and Columbia rivers by Henry, Alexander, 1765?-1814; Thompson, David, 1770 1857; Coues, Elliott, 1842-1899, Published 1897, Pages 53-54.

4 Before it was defunded in 2011, the NAHO First Nations Centre released a separate document addressing suicide and First Nation LGBT/Two-Spirit people.  
[http://www.naho.ca/documents/fnc/english/2012\\_04\\_%20Guidebook\\_Suicide\\_Prevention.pdf](http://www.naho.ca/documents/fnc/english/2012_04_%20Guidebook_Suicide_Prevention.pdf)

5 As a result of section 67, some First Nations people living on reserve are denied full access to the human rights complaint resolution system available to other people in Canada. Section 67, part of the original 1977 CHRA legislation, was to be a temporary measure, a short-term expedient. Retrieved from  
[http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/sites/default/files/report\\_a\\_matter\\_of\\_rights\\_en.pdf](http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/sites/default/files/report_a_matter_of_rights_en.pdf)

6 May 26, 2011: “Moving Forward Together” – A Day of Healing and Reconciliation, Children of the Earth High School, Manitobans for Healing and Reconciliation, Winnipeg, Manitoba