

Brandon University Alumni Awards Remarks, October 15, 2016

I was told I had a maximum of 2 minutes to make any remarks so first I'd like to acknowledge the Anishinaabe and Dakota peoples on whose traditional territory we are gathered tonight.

I also want to thank Carla Eisler for all her work organizing this event. I feel like I've known her for a long time.

In 1973 my wife Rae and I got married in Toronto and moved to Brandon where she became assistant minister at Knox United Church across the road from the university and I enrolled in the fledgling Bachelor of General Studies program specializing in Native Studies and Anthropology.

This was the beginning of an amazing journey that led us to Tucson, Toronto, Thompson, Manitoba, Vancouver and our present home in Ottawa.

But it all began at Brandon University where I encountered amazing faculty, like archaeologist Leigh Syms and Sam Corrigan, and later Professor and artist Colleen Cutschall who is here tonight. Thank you for honouring me with your presence.

Brandon was one of the first universities in the country to have a Native Studies program. Dr. Corrigan offered one of the first Native literature courses in the country in 1974. And Cree students taught Cree language courses under the auspices of linguist, Paul Voorhis.

Dr. Corrigan fostered my incipient interest in Native art and arranged for me to teach a slate of courses for Brandon here on campus and throughout northern Manitoba.

When I graduated with my Bachelor of General Studies degree in 1975 Dr. Corrigan took my wife and I out for dinner. He gave her a red rose and gave me a red-leather bound ethnography with my name stamped on the cover in gold.

That extraordinary gesture of generosity and confidence and caring changed my life, and forty years later I try to emulate his mentorship by doing the same for some of my students.

Sam also wrote reference letters for me for twenty-five years – the last for the position I have today. I tell my students that's the standard I hold myself to when they ask me to write a reference letter for them.

So much of what I get to do is dependent on the generosity of others. At Carleton I try to honour the knowledge that has been shared with me by professors, faculty, elders and artists.

I get to do some of this by celebrating the achievements of Indigenous artists at the New Sun Conference which is now in its 16th year. One of those artists, Riel Benn, from the Birdtail Sioux Reserve, is here tonight and I thank you for honouring me with your presence.

A few weeks ago I got to screen films by Canadian Aboriginal film makers in China. It was one

of the most recent stops on a wondrous journey that began here forty-three years ago. It is a journey that is not over yet.

I am deeply honoured to receive this Distinguished Alumni Award for Career Achievement tonight and hope I have done justice to those who have taught me and put their faith in me.

Chi miigwetch, wopida and thank you.