

This summer I participated in a canoe trip to work on reconciliation between indigenous & non-indigenous peoples. This trip included 12 indigenous youth and 12 non-indigenous youth from all across the country, for instance BC and the Northwest Territories. This trip's mission was to erase the negative stigma about indigenous people, by focusing on teaching the younger generations how to change the future. As well, create new friendships between people with different cultural backgrounds.

This experience mainly opened me to a very rich and important culture through teachings from elders, learning about stories, traditions and beliefs. This trip not only introduced myself and many other youth to the indigenous culture, but taught everyone important life skills in harsh conditions. By participating in team building and open circle activities during the trip I developed relationships with the group and I now feel like they are family. The harsh and difficult conditions we experienced through the trip brought everyone closer by leaning on each other.

When I first arrived at the campus where we were staying our first night I was absolutely terrified, knowing nothing going into the trip. Immediately, I met many new welcoming people and youth participating in the trip that I got to know better over the bus ride and flight. At the first base camp we began to learn some teachings, such as smudging. Smudging is when dried sage is burned and the smoke attaches itself to negative energy and as the smoke clears it takes the negative energy with it, releasing it into another space where it will be regenerated into positive energy.

When I talk about harsh conditions I'm referring to when it rained for a solid 3 days on the canoe trip. As a group we had to cook our food in a hard downpour, collect firewood, set up camp and sleep. The last night in particular my tent group decided to set up camp 2 meters from the water, for a nice view in the morning. We did not consider the fact that there could be a thunderstorm or other dangerous problem by pitching the tent there. In Fact, there was a thunderstorm and the lightning hit so close that the site beside us had a tree struck by lightning and fell down beside their tent. My whole tent group was up the entire night listening to the intense raindrops on the tent and the roaring thunder that made us jump every second.

By being on this trip and sleeping, eating and living with new friends for a fair amount of time you learn the best teachings and stories from each other. I learned about my friends day to day lives and how they are different on their reserve than my community. I was told about the huge problem of missing and murdered indigenous women and how it's an awful problem in many of their communities. I was made aware of the very large cloud of racism still occurring just outside many of my friend's communities, and in their schools where they have to leave their community for education past grade 8. This all seemed very unfair because I don't experience this on a daily basis and from my eyes the people that I lived with for 8 days were wonderful, passionate, caring, loving, and funny people that i now call friends that deserve better.

At the end of the canoe trip we were invited to a reserve for a celebratory feast with the whole community. Elders made traditional moose stew and there was cultural dancing and singing. I felt honoured to be allowed to participate in this event.

From this trip I have taken away many lessons and memories that have changed my perspective. I went into the trip not knowing what to expect and came out having gained a lot of friendships and knowing alot about the indigenous culture. I learnt that reconciliation should bring people together as people and not exclude each other. I'd like to thank the United Church for giving me this opportunity that has impacted me greatly.