

Book Review: *North of Nowhere: Song of a Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner*

Mary Beth Doucette

Wilson, M. (2024). *North of nowhere: Song of a Truth and Reconciliation commissioner*. House of Anansi Press.

North of Nowhere: Song of a Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner, written by former TRC commissioner Marie Wilson, is not specifically about Indigenous-led economic development, but the TRC's impact on economic development has been significant. I read the book because I wanted to understand how the commissioners, as project administrators, navigated the seemingly impossible five-year mandate that was part of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA).

I've been following public and administrative responses to the TRC since its conclusion on December 18, 2015. There is something unusually compelling and resonant about the Calls to Action, which led me to learn more about the Mandate, the IRSSA's administrative processes, and the TRC's deliverables. By multiple accounts, the TRC was a success. It not only delivered the mandate on time (excepting some minor extensions) but also on budget, leveraging goodwill to amplify its message. It makes me wonder why it succeeded and why so many other commissions and inquiries failed.

I chose to review this book for *JAED* on the heels of editing the special issue of Two-Eyed Seeing. As a teacher, I have witnessed Two-Eyed Seeing become synonymous with truth and reconciliation. As a Mi'kmaw, a seventh-generation settler, and a Canadian scholar of Indigenous-led economic development and reconciliation, I'm constantly thinking about perspectives, placement, positionality, and values. I read the book because I am eager to learn from the commissioners. What administrative lessons can project managers—who often have five years or less to complete seemingly impossible projects with limited resources and carefully controlled budgets—learn

from the commissioners? How did the commissioners leverage community goodwill and support communities' needs?

I was fascinated to read about the commissioners' choices and struggles and how they learned from their missteps. I was also intrigued by the ways the TRC infused their process with ceremony, especially since these ceremonies were not part of their mandate. By doing so, the commissioners and their networks were modelling reconciliation and learning throughout the process.

North of Nowhere was published a decade after the TRC's official mandate ended. Yet Wilson describes the book as part of her commitment, as a commissioner, to continue to raise awareness about Indian Residential Schools' and state-funded institutions' ongoing impacts on Indigenous communities and Canadians: she views the book as part of her ongoing contribution to reconciliation. In the book, Wilson reflects on her firsthand experiences as the lone non-Indigenous and female commissioner. It is a thoughtfully constructed compilation in which she highlights and uplifts the words and experiences of the survivors who attended TRC events from coast to coast to coast. With her heartfelt memories and anecdotes, Wilson reflects on her personal story while still centring the survivors' stories.

Wilson's words are carefully chosen to highlight a sense of relationship with, and responsibility to, the people who entrusted her with their stories. The book was deliberately structured to convey the impression of a unified journey while still honouring the uniqueness of everyone's story, shared in ways that honour the place, time, and emotions expressed. For example, the book is organized in seven sections that mirror the seven sacred teachings embraced and activated by the TRC processes: respect, courage, love, truth, humility, honesty, and wisdom. At the events I attended, Wilson asked the audience to be attentive to the traumas disclosed. As adults, she explained, we can read through tragedy—although she tempers this tragedy by ending each chapter on a hopeful note.

Even though I have been working in the field and with communities for most of my career, reading this book reminded me of how much healing is still required. In business, there is a tendency to rush to meet deadlines, a rush that is mirrored in the desire to move forward and complete the calls to action. This book is a gentle reminder of the time that was stolen and the time that will be needed to heal.

For Economic Development Officers, the book is a reminder of the ties that bind us as a network nationally. And it is a reminder of regional dynamics, where we are tied, politically and socially, to the histories and economic development efforts of others.

For educators in business administration, *North of Nowhere* is a reminder to be considerate of the personal lives of partners, employees, and students. It is a reminder that students and colleagues are their own people, often dealing with grief, healing, and systems that were never designed to support them.

Finally, for students, *North of Nowhere* is a chance to learn from and about the past, as well as an introduction to potential futures. It highlights the interconnections between policy, organizations, people, and communities—past, present, and future.