



Steve Payette's Quilt Block – Vaudreuil – Dorion, QC

I wish to submit this square to those in need of healing, not only from the residential school program but also from everyday encounters. My name is Steve and I am not of Indigenous descent. I wish to offer you today this quilt square in solidarity with you who have suffered directly or indirectly from Canada's infamous residential school legacy. It is my understanding that the quilt is to be made in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission investigating Canada's residential schools program and that the squares are to come from Indigenous Peoples. I offer this square, conscious that it may fail in its attempt to bring some kind of comfort to someone, but hoping to share the burden of your grief and confirming that your cries are not unheard.

Let me begin with the story, which my square represents. When I was young, my family was stationed at the army base in Chibougamau, Québec. I have very little recollection of this three year period as I was quite young, I do remember camping a lot, fishing and my first year in school. As some of you may or may not know, Chibougamau is to the north of Lac St. Jean, in an area most urbanites would call remote. Many Indigenous Peoples lived in the area outside the military base. As my family would leave Chibougamau to visit relatives in the Montréal area, we would pass by tattered houses and the occasional teepee: trash, old cars and KFC pails scattered among the yards. I recall someone's remarks about how unclean "you people" were, obviously not accounting for cultural *vecu* and lack of funded infrastructure. During a camping trip, one of "you" wandered over to the chalet we had rented out. I remember being frightened from the adults' obvious displeasure with the intrusion. Who were you to intrude on our space? But "you" were savage and therefore, unpredictable. Then came my first experience with one of "you". Upon my first grade in school, a third grader by the name of Andy was the taunt of just about all the kids. Andy dressed differently, had darker skin and even smelled differently. I remember feeling bad for him because he never had a moment's reprieve from the others. I felt bad and finally mustered the courage to ask one of the other kids why Andy deserved this treatment. He answered as if the reason was obvious, "C'est un kawiche." For some reason, I remember no longer feeling bad for Andy.

Much later, my understanding of "the Indians" remained limited and stereotypical. When the Oka crisis erupted, I saw the conflict as not my concern like many of those around me. I treated it as petty land-grab, not knowing the historical, symbolic and real nuances of what was happening to occasion the standoff. At the time, I was under the belief the "we should just give them a piece of land, take away the technology they're using, give them bows and arrows and leave them be."

Chance occasioned that I had an automobile accident on my way to college. I was sent to a rehabilitation centre to learn how to adapt to living with a spinal cord injury. It was there that I spent much of my time contemplating about life, about disability, about society's exclusion to marginalized groups. It was there I met a friend. Joe David. Joe was a quiet man from Kanehsatake who had been paralyzed from being shot in the back by police. He kept to himself, mostly, and smoked a lot. He was in constant pain from the injury and was perhaps the most medicated of the rehab centre's patients. During a discussion in his room on one of his more lucid days we came to talk about Native rights and the Oka crisis, which he had been involved in. I remember how passionate he became when our worldviews clashed. I had asked him straight-up why First

Peoples were so troublesome. During a heated debate, I learned that I knew absolutely nothing about First Peoples, the hardships, the systematic abusive conditions and treachery. It was after this lengthy conversation that I saw Joe as a friend. Joe died in 2004.

Since my encounter with Joe and my musings on marginalization, I have realized how I perpetuated the offenses by my mere conformance without thinking. I have since advocated for Native rights and make it a duty to stay informed. In crafting this square I required the assistance of several people who are now aware of the plight of Native Peoples who have suffered from the residential schools. Although I would like to tell a tale that ends with me achieving something redemptive for the Indigenous Peoples of the world, I cannot. What I can is that my way of thinking no longer see “you” and an “other”, but you as a result of “us”. Looking into the residential schools I empathized with the inhumane experience of being violated from you land, your culture and your family. I apologize.

Reading the square:

Since it seemed to be a common belief to send “the Indians” back into the woods and to regard First Peoples as indistinguishable, I have deliberately omitted putting a face on either heads, with the “white” person pointing the stereotypical “Indian with a feather” back to the woods. The black, linear, square border enclosing this half of the square symbolizes the rigid, black-and-white, conforming way of thinking. The grey smoke that rises from the wheelchair separates the square. I read somewhere that when smoke rises it brings our thoughts to the Creator. This symbolizes how my thoughts have changed but is also a testament to Joe David. On the other half of the square, the face demonstrates the realization of the wrong doings but also the wrong thinking that have shaped the world. The border around this half is round with colours of red, black, yellow, to signify the inclusion of all people in this healing process. Once its meaning told, I ask that you read my square from left to right – as a personal journey which harmed my sisters and brothers through thoughtlessness. Starting the right, I am now more aware and will always remember the pain I’ve caused you in the past.