**Indigenous Hope**

Previous contributions by this writer might leave readers assuming he believes there is little hope for the future of Indigenous Canadians.

Nothing could be further from the truth. First Nations and other Indigenous peoples can be exceedingly proud of their contributions to Canada, one of the most successful countries in the world. And, given determined leadership, they can be hopeful about future generations’ sharing our country’s bounty, equally.

Our history is replete with Indigenous contributions. The danger of attempting to list them is that many will not be mentioned. However, a few examples follow.

Chief Tecumseh, Shawnee, was important to the security and development of Canada as a country. Without the support of Tecumseh and his warriors, Canada might well have lost the War of 1812-14 to the Americans, and today we might have Donald J. Trump as our president! One of Tecumseh’s great qualities was his ability to unite Indigenous tribes. In this respect, we could certainly use another Tecumseh today.

The late artist Daphne Odjig, Odawa/Potawatomi/English, was a founding member of the “Indian Group of Seven.” She was awarded the Order of Canada and the Governor General’s Award in Visual and Media Arts, among many other honours.

Tom Jackson, Metis, an Officer of the Order of Canada, endured a homeless life in his youth and emerged victorious as a singer, actor and philanthropist.

Phil Fontaine, an Ojibwa, former Sagkeeng chief, three-term grand chief of both the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), is an officer of the Order of Canada. He is also a former Indian residential school student who, as did thousands of his fellow students, suffered abuse and privation. Despite that, Fontaine has distinguished himself in Canadian history.

Hockey fans will remember Ojibwa/Scottish Toronto Maple Leafs Captain and Hockey Hall of Famer George Armstrong, who played NHL hockey for 21 years. He was awarded the Charlie Conacher Humanitarian Award for his charity work.

The late Chief Dan George (born Geswanouth Slahoot), was a former chief of the [Tsleil-Waututh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tsleil-Waututh_First_Nation) Coast Salish Nation, a former residential school student, actor, poet, author and Academy Award nominee.

Ovide Mercredi, a Cree, lawyer, former two-term National Chief of the AFN, chief of the Misipawistik Cree Nation and president of the New Democratic Party of Manitoba. He played a key national role in the negotiation of both the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Constitutional Accords and has, among other honours, been named chancellor of a university college.

The late Senator James Gladstone, was a Cree/Blood former Indian residential school student and president of the Indian Association of Alberta. Gladstone was a status Indian appointed to the Canadian Senate by Prime Minister John Diefenbaker in 1958, two years before status Indians were allowed to vote. His portrait will appear on Canada’s new $10 banknotes.

The late Mary Two-Axe Earley, a Mohawk/Oneida, was an Indigenous women’s rights activist whose work led to the end of *Indian Act* discrimination against First Nations women through the passage of Bill C-31 in 1985.

Others include Pauline Johnson, Mohawk; Buffy Sainte-Marie, Cree; Susan Aglukark, Inuk; Tommy Prince, Ojibwa; David Greyeyes, Cree; Brigadier Oliver Milton Martin, Mohawk; Graham Greene, Oneida; Jordin Tootoo, Inuk/Ukrainian; contemporary Manitoba politicians Wab Kinew, Robert-Falcon Ouellette and Senator Murray Sinclair.

Syd Moore, an Indigenous Canadian soldier who served his country in the Second World War, said, "We're proud of the word volunteer. Nobody forced us. We were good Canadians—patriots—we fought for our country.”

Space does not permit a complete list but, clearly, Indigenous Canadians have more than distinguished themselves in many pursuits, including politics, business, military, activism, films, music, arts, sports.

Despite obstacles in the way of the above-listed individuals, they made their way through them, dreamed dreams, worked hard and did good things for themselves, their families and their country.

Day in and day out, ordinary Indigenous Canadians get out of bed, go to work, take care of their families, pay their taxes, obey the law and share in all the responsibilities and benefits of citizenship in a country like Canada. All the while, nothing stands in the way of their observing and celebrating their own Indigenous cultures and traditions.

Everyone is challenged in one way or another. Some are challenged more than others. But given these examples of Indigenous achievement and the thousands of others across our country throughout our history, there surely is ample reason for all Indigenous people to be proud and to be hopeful that whatever obstacles they face can be overcome.

It has been demonstrated many times - sometimes amazingly - what can be achieved when ordinary people make up their minds to do something good with their lives. I remain hopeful the day will come when First Nations’ access to opportunity is equal to that enjoyed by all other Canadians. When it does, only the imagination can limit the future blessings for all of us.

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