

*A Brief Reconciliation Story*

By Brian Perkins-McIntosh

(as told at Toronto Conference Annual Meeting, May, 2001)

My story of reconciliation begins in the Maritimes, at an annual meeting much like this, where I was deeply moved from afar by an aboriginal theme speaker named gkisedtanamoogk. He spoke with great gentleness and peace, and yet with clarity and conviction, about the history and hopes of his people here on Turtle Island. A few years later I moved to New Brunswick, and became part of an ecumenical group who founded the Aboriginal Rights Coalition in the Atlantic region. It was here I met gkisedtanamoogk personally and repeatedly, and we began to build a relationship of respect and trust that has left me profoundly changed forever.

One incident stands out in my mind – a simple act that confirmed mutual trust between us. I had, in the few years of our meeting, both in the larger and in other sub-groups, often deferred to his spiritual leadership as a medicine man and healing elder of great wisdom, though I also knew he honoured my place as a leader within my own Christian tradition. We frequently began meetings with sweetgrass ceremonies, prayer and circle sharing, which were always times of learning and inspiration for me, especially when gkisedtanamoogk led them. One day, in a broad gathering which included many people beyond our coalition, as we were about to begin, gkisedtanamoogk simply looked at me from across the room and indicated that I should lead the opening that day. I remember the joy and sense of solidarity I felt at that moment, as well as after my words of prayer and reflection, when he caught my eye with a look of deep recognition and respect. Many times in the following months and years we shared leadership and advocated with people in his community and in mine for justice and peace, but in that simple moment of mutual recognition, our friendship was forged, I was changed from the inside out, and there was no turning back. I had glimpsed reconciliation.