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HOST: We've been talking about Inclusion and Diversity as a society for what feels like forever, with limited success in addressing either. But 2020 is a shaping up to be a year of action and maybe even change ... and as Eva Greyeyes will tell you, it's time to stop looking to the past, and focus on the future - Resurgence rather than Reconciliation. This is The Conversation Piece. On this National Indigenous Day, let's listen to Eva Greyeyes at The Walrus Talks Youth Leadership.

EVA GREYEVES: Hi everyone. My name is Eva Greyeyes, and I'm a 16-year-old from Toronto. I'm an, an actor, A dancer, grade 11 student and Shad fellow. I'm also, Nêhiyaw from Muskeg Lake Cree nation. And it is something that I'm very proud of and saying that now it means a lot because for the longest time, I didn't feel that way. To be honest, I grew up feeling very detached from my culture. I wasn't really sure of who I was because I didn't feel like I was part of my community. You see the only Indigenous people I knew growing up were my close family members on my dad's side. And some of his colleagues. I've never gone to school with another Indigenous person who was my age. I remember in elementary school, kids would laugh at the illustrations of Indians running around in the pages of our history textbooks.

And I remember sitting there uncomfortably, not saying anything, wondering if they knew that I was First Nations and wondering if they thought that that was a cool thing to be. So, when I was younger, it wasn't ever something that I really valued. I think the experience that pretty much sums up my feelings. It was during the first week of grade nine for me, I was at a massive public high school in Toronto, and it was the very first class of our Aboriginal arts course. And I remember this moment so clearly. The teacher looks around the room and asks if anyone in here is actually native. And so, I raised my hand up in the air high because I am and expecting to see some others. And it was just me, alone, with my hand up. But how in that class specifically for Indigenous art and even in that diverse school of 2,000 teenagers, was I not able to find another person like me? But soon, thankfully, all those feelings were completely washed away.

And in the past three years of my life, there have been a couple of crucial moments that have changed who I am and who I want to become. Several people in here might know me from my supporting role in the 2017 future film *Indian horse*. I was cast in *Indian horse* in the same month that I started high school. When I say this film changed my life, it is in no way an exaggeration, because it was so much more than just being in a movie. I was excited to be in a film that was important representation of Indigenous history and excited to become an actor, which is my dream career. The experience of being on set though during the filming was the best possible thing that could have happened to me. I met so many other Indigenous youth and became good friends with my fellow cast members.

I was finally hanging around with other Indigenous kids my age, and in a way, it felt like I had been reconnected, not like I was on the outside, looking in after *Indian horse*. So many opportunities opened up to me. I began to speak on panels about the film I was interested and invested in my community. And it started to just become a part of me. Something that I cared deeply about *Indian horse* started for me back in grade nine, but I still go to screenings and talk about my work now in the film over two years later. Now I wanted to base this Talk about my experience with the arts. My belief is that art is important in shaping the future and inspiring change by inspiring people. I love all types of art and I'm so grateful to have spent my life surrounded by a due to my family's careers.



There are so many voices that can be amplified by our end. A key example of this is storytelling through film representation in Hollywood is so important. And most people don't realize that in Hollywood, Indigenous people are like an invisible race. There's been huge improvements in diversity, but sometimes it still feels like that diversity does not extend to us fully. Most of the times representation comes down to stereotypes of the past and the 3-dimensional characters of the future are ignored. And a lot of the times it feels like we're struggling just to be seen as people of the present, not as a group that was wiped out by the past, we are still here today. There aren't enough Indigenous perspectives and stories being told, and there aren't enough Indigenous actors and directors and screenwriters to tell them there are so many amazing Indigenous stories, but in the grand scheme of the business, they are sadly overlooked.

People don't care enough about them. And that's what makes us invisible. A couple of months ago, I spoke on a panel about inclusion and diversity in STEM. And one of the other speakers said something I'll never forget. He said, "diversity is a statistic. Inclusion is something that you *feel*. just looking up at a screen and seeing someone like you up there. That is the feeling of inclusion." My dad started acting because he saw Indigenous people up on the movie theater screens. And then I guess I started acting because it was the coolest thing in my world to see him up on that screen too. Of course, I would love to become an actor, but that would only be a career who I want to be outside of. That is another question entirely. So, I've asked myself many times, who do you want to be? And especially with university applications looming in the distance, everybody asks me all the time.

The answer is that I still don't know, but I do know one thing I want to become a leader and I want to create positive change. It's something that I was made sure of when I went to Shad, which was a summer program for teens. It focused on leadership and collaboration, entrepreneurship, and STEM. Because of Shad, I was a panelist, back in November at The Canadian Science Policy Centre. And they let me publish an editorial piece on their website. There, I was able to express my thoughts on education for Indigenous people in Canada. It was an opportunity to share my opinion on an issue that was really important to me. So regardless of what I do in the future, I want to be able to have an impact and for people to hear my voice, ultimately, I feel like Canada is looking for an answer and I don't believe we're going to find it solely through reconciliation.

Recently I learned of, and also started believing in, the concept of resurgence, which is working towards rebuilding our culture and coming back stronger in the future, rather than focusing on the past. Today, Indigenous leadership is what gives me hope that our culture will research more chances for Indigenous people to become these leaders is what Canada needs. This is what I believe to be resurgence. Resurgence is opportunity. Having opportunities available to you, no matter whether it's for actors to see more Indigenous characters in Hollywood, or for students to have equal access to education, or for everyone to have an access to language and culture. And just being able to have your voice heard on the opinions and topics that matter. Just seeing events like this, listening to people who really inspire me speak and being surrounded by people who support this leadership and resurgence of our people. Unlike that day in the art classroom with my hand raised, I feel like I'm not alone anymore. Thank you.

HOST: Eva Greyeyes is Nêhiyaw from the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, and was a grade 11 student when she gave this talk. She's just one of the over 800 excellent speakers who have walked the stage at The Walrus Talks. Wish you'd been there? Wish granted. Our YouTube channel is the place to find all the Walrus Talks, and we're coming to a city near you, live and in person, as soon as physically possible. Until then, stay in touch with our events newsletter. Find it at thewalrus.ca/newsletters.