

# Mohawk elder invited to sit with Prime Minister Trudeau

By Jim Windle

OTTAWA – Six Nations Mohawk elder Janice Longboat was stunned but honoured when asked by a Trudeau aide if she would sit with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at the Truth and Reconciliation wrap up in Ottawa recently.

Longboat was asked to join a group of about 10 healthcare workers in Ottawa and to attend the closing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

"When I was at the Truth and Reconciliation meeting, one of Prime Minister Trudeau's aids asked me if I would go and sit with him," says Longboat. "I was really quite shocked to be asked because of all the security around him. She said 'well you are here for health support and I believe he needs your support.'"

Although a little surprised by the invitation, Longboat accepted.

"The aid escorted me to the table and I sat beside him," she recalls. "We looked at each other and I said, 'I have come to give you some support.'"

What happened next was totally unexpected and deeply moving.

"He took my hand and squeezed it and tears began running down his face," said Longboat. "It was just at the time that Justice Murray Sinclair (chair of the TRC) was doing his closing speech so it was quite emotional. He held my hand so tight for quite a while. I knew that he was sincere and I could feel his positive energy."

"It was such an honour to share his emotions of both joy and sorrow," Longboat continues. "Maybe he considered me a grandma sitting beside him because he felt really at ease, and I believe that this young man is a true spiritual warrior."

Longboat has been active for many years in attending to the damages done to people through the Residential Schools.

"Being a first generation survivor and feeling first-hand the emotions of my father, who survived 12 years at the Mohawk



Trudeau sits with Six Nations elder Jan Longboat at the TRC event in Ottawa. SUBMITTED PHOTO

Institute, I understand the healing process. That is what motivated me to assist hundreds of residential school victims and council, many who have been through the system as well as second and third generation of indigenous women across Canada, to close off the legacy of residential schools," she said.

Longboat has recently been given a citation by the Canadian Council of Herbalists Association certifying that Jan Kahehti:io Longboat is a recognized Herbal Elder of Canada.

This recognition was for "being in clinical practice for more than 25 years and for her outstanding contributions to the field of Herbal Medicines."

She has also been selected to serve as a Community Advisor Council member for a three-year term by the Waakebiness-Bryce Institute for Indigenous Health through the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health.

"Sitting with the prime minister reminded me of how much emotion people have shared over these past six years during which the Commission has gathered stories from former students," Longboat says.

Longboat has also met Trudeau's wife Sophie and feels that same compassion and honesty she felt with the prime minister.

"I met Sophie last June at an Indigenous fundraiser gala," she recalls. "She made a very eloquent speech and pointed out that her personal

experiences in her own life has caused her to carry on to help and understand other people as well. She is a very humanitarian person, just like the prime minister."

She, like many other Onkwehonwe people, can't help but compare and contrast the mood carried by former Prime Minister Stephen Harper and incoming prime minister, Justin Trudeau.

"It's like night and day," she says. "It feels really refreshing and encourag-

ing to see that there is a window of time that has opened for us because of the TRC and the new Liberal Government under Trudeau. I believe we now have an opportunity across Turtle Island to take this window of time and to work for the best for our people and the coming faces."

There have been other promising moments for indigenous people in the past which never really panned out the way many had hoped for, but Long-

boat believes this time it is different.

"There is a Prime Minister in place now that really cares," she says. "He hasn't wasted any time to put things into motion, especially the inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and I really like how he never misses an opportunity during interviews to say he is supporting indigenous people across the country."