

**INDIGENIZE OR DIE, THE PART GORD MISSED: A REFLECTION FOR
VOICES BY KEVIN BEST****Kevin Best**

We were trained our entire lives to ignore, trained our entire lives to hear not a word of what's going on... And what's going on up there ain't good. It's maybe worse than it's ever been... It's really, really bad, but we're going to figure it out, you're going to figure it out. - Gord Downie during the last ever Tragically Hip concert, August 2016.

It has been 20 years since I began my journey home to “Indian Country.”

At a conference in Milwaukee, while looking for peers with whom to discuss how to move the broader sustainability agenda forward, I had a chance meeting with an Anishinabe man, Walt Bresette. This meeting was to change my life. Over the next months we agreed to team up, to restore a sustainable culture in the Great Lakes through Indigenous sovereignty, language and ceremony

Walt was a treaty-rights expert, a passionate defender of Lake Superior and his people's rights. Through talking with him I realized that I had been looking at the issue of sustainability from a very privileged lens.

“We need to look at this from a long-term perspective,” blah blah. And while that is certainly true, what I was reminded of by Walt was the issue of environmental justice—that Indigenous people are literally dying because of the ecocidal assault on the earth of which they and we are part.

I remember Walt telling an enviro guy at the head office of a mainstream church, “don't help us to save the poor brown people: you need to do it to save yourselves.”

Indigenize or Die flows from this sensibility.

Hosted by Unify Toronto Dialogues, [Indigenize or Die](#), holds a monthly dialogue series held in various locations around Toronto, of which I am the curator.

Yes, the injustice Indigenous people here and around the world have faced is staggering. One can frame that in a larger context. The assault and injustice creation has experienced is staggering. We can throw all things feminine in there! And that is the point: we are all victims of this oppression; we are all in a crisis because of it. Those of us who are fortunate to be privileged may be able to, for a time, forget this crisis of injustice, but it is there nonetheless.

The Indigenize or Die series has educated Toronto folks about the Indigenous context of this place now called Canada. Why? To begin to build the alternative to the madness we are in—by re-indigenizing, by returning to the social structures, the laws of this place that are a way of living on this land in harmony with each other and all of

creation.

Through this series, we have learned about the diversity of nations that live on this land, the ongoing preexisting societal structures, spiritual practices, economies, treaty and legal frameworks. Through Indigenize or Die, “settlers” have begun the slow process of entering into right relationships with the Indigenous, with all of our relations.

So Mr. Downey, Migwetch for stepping up and saying what you did. Indigenous People are grateful. I would just like to point out that it is “really really bad” everywhere and if everybody, from all the directions, doesn’t Indigenize, we will Die. The point is, however, not to be a doomsayer but to share that there is a way out. Guided by the prophecies, armed with the culture, we can, as a species, “figure it out.”

Kevin Best, managing director of Rivercourt Engineering, will be speaking during The Canadian Institute’s [First Nations Housing & Infrastructure Forum](#), at the Double Tree by Hilton in downtown Toronto, December 6 & 7, 2016. Best will present a case study entitled, Restoring Minobimadziwin “The Good Life” through Building Better Communities, along with co-presenter Brad Ritchie, community economic development planner at Saugeen First Nation.