

Transcription Episode 4 -Roberta Jameison

00:00:02:19 - 00:00:34:08

Reeta

I'm Reeta Roy, and this is Transcending Boundaries Podcasts that features deep conversations with exceptional leaders. Each episode dives into the lives of women and men who have changed their communities, their countries, and the world for the better. Join me to discover the relationships, experiences and insights that have shaped their remarkable journeys. Today, I'm honoured to host an inspiring leader.

00:00:34:10 - 00:01:34:09

Reeta

Whose groundbreaking career has transformed the landscape of indigenous rights, justice and education in Canada and beyond. She is the first. First Nations woman to earn a law degree in Canada. She has spent decades advocating for indigenous people, creating meaningful pathways for reconciliation, and she has inspired a whole new generation to follow in her footsteps. From her early days growing up on Six nations of the Grand River territory, to breaking barriers as the first First Nations woman in Canada to earn a law degree from serving as the first female ombudsman of Ontario to leading as the first female chief of the Six Nations of the Grand River.

00:01:34:11 - 00:02:11:08

Reeta

From groundbreaking initiatives that inspire and significantly impacting indigenous education to advancing gender equality with the Prosperity Project. She's also been recognized with the Indigenous Women in Leadership Award. I am thrilled to welcome a trailblazer, a visionary, and a tireless advocate for equality. Roberta Jamieson. Roberta, welcome and thank you for being part of this podcast, Transcending Boundaries.

00:02:11:10 - 00:02:13:15

Roberta

Who could say no to you Reeta?

00:02:13:15 - 00:02:23:22

Reeta

I Don't know about that, but I'm so happy. I'm so happy that you're here. This is just a conversation about learning to get to know you and all the events.

00:02:23:22 - 00:02:25:08

Roberta

The people.

00:02:25:10 - 00:02:46:02

Reeta

the worldviews that shaped the leader that you've become. And, we have an audience which is keen to listen, especially young people, to get to know you. So I always think a fun thing to start is to start back at childhood. Now, I understand, having done a little bit of research on you, that, you grew up in a very tight knit family.

00:02:46:04 - 00:03:04:16

Reeta

Your dad ran something called Bobby's Grill, and it was a hangout place for elders who listened to, I guess, cool music, but they must have also been debating politics. And that was sort of the ambiance, growing up. Would you tell us more about that childhood and what it was like?

00:03:04:17 - 00:03:38:20

Roberta

Well, yes. I mean, I grew up at Six Nations of the Grand River, which is the most populous First Nations community in Canada. So we were. I'm a mohawk. My father was a mohawk. But together in the community were Mohawk, Cayuga, Oneida, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, and Tuscarora peoples, all living together. Quite unusual. So the restaurant Bobby's Grill, named after my father.

00:03:38:22 - 00:04:06:13

Roberta

Was kind of a hub in the community of Ohshweken or Ohsweken, as our people pronounce it. Meeting of four parts and, my mother had been nursing, and then she left nursing to also work in the restaurant. I'm one of eight children. I'm number three, which maybe accounts for my interest in mediation later in life.

00:04:06:15 - 00:04:32:14

Roberta

And, because if you're not a mediator and third in eight, you don't survive. So, Bobby's grill and yes, that that place I used to our school that I went to on reserve. I did not attend residential school, though members of our family did. Was just up the road. And so, at lunchtime, I had to come back and wait tables.

00:04:32:16 - 00:04:34:03

Reeta

All right. So they put you to work

00:04:34:03 - 00:05:02:16

Roberta

They put me to work. And so one of the things that really struck me waiting tables on counsel day, you have to remember Reeta. I grew up at a time when we had an Indian agent, what we call an Indian agent. Our people were known as Indians in those times under the Indian Act then and survives today.

00:05:02:18 - 00:05:44:24

Roberta

But we had an Indian agent who made the decisions, approved decisions in our community. And I would wait on counsel day. In would come our counsellors, elected locally from the community. All all, First Nations people and the non-First Nations Indian agent who smoked a very big cigar and really lorded over them. It was obvious to me, and I was so impacted by that that I thought.

00:05:45:01 - 00:06:17:18

Roberta

I need to do something to change this. This is not right. We are the founders of democracy in the western world. The hordein of Shawnee people, we are... It's been recorded in history. And here we are sitting subject to someone else making decisions for us. People came into our community to be the doctors to be, to take on all these positions of authority.

00:06:17:18 - 00:06:37:00

Roberta

When we had traditional healers, when we had our own systems of governance. And I was, even as a kid, grade seven, grade eight, I thought, this is not this is not acceptable. Whatever I do, I'm going to figure out a way to change this.

00:06:37:02 - 00:06:43:03

Reeta

Amazing! What were the conversations like at home about what you all were experiencing.

00:06:43:05 - 00:07:16:24

Roberta

Oh, so you what you'd expect. Sports, right? Music. My father was a jazz musician. He actually has the distinction of being the first North American native to write and record a jazz song, while in the 30s called Any Time, Any Place, anywhere. He was in the special services in the US. Armed forces. He was a visionary.

00:07:17:01 - 00:07:38:05

Roberta

He always had a dream. Not, not. They didn't all work out, but he really set his sights on on different ideas that were out of the norm. My mother was a nurse by training non-native.

00:07:38:07 - 00:07:40:03

Reeta

Second generation. Irish?

00:07:40:05 - 00:08:08:19

Roberta

Yes. Irish. English came to the community to nurse in our local. We had a hospital in those days. Fell in love with my father. Married him. Excommunicated from her family as a result. This was not a popular thing to do in in those days. And so as a result, growing up I didn't learn a lot about my mother's family.

00:08:08:21 - 00:08:34:09

Roberta

It was many years later, actually, when I got married. When they all came and my mother said invite. You know, she was one of many as well. Invite all of them. And I said, why, they're not going to come. They did. So, things repaired later. But growing up, I didn't know. Now, she was a hard worker.

00:08:34:11 - 00:08:41:21

Roberta

She was determined. She was,

00:08:41:23 - 00:09:11:14

Roberta

Had unconditional love for her children, had respect for our community, and lived to the age of 93 at Six Nations. My father died at 48. Then not only had she married a mohawk, she then married a Seneca and had two more kids. Wow. So? So she was committed to the community. But there's so much I can tell you about growing up.

00:09:11:14 - 00:09:13:04

Roberta

But that's just a little taste.

00:09:13:10 - 00:09:21:17

Reeta

But it sounds like two remarkable parents. and exceptional, independent minded and very clear about how they wanted to lead their lives

00:09:21:17 - 00:09:48:00

Roberta

and very committed to our community. Very strongly committed to the community, which was important. That's one of our values. Is we have a responsibility to the collective, to the well-being of the collective. And I grew up with high expectations, which were unspoken.

00:09:48:02 - 00:09:49:02

Reeta

Unspoken.

00:09:49:02 - 00:10:17:24

Roberta

Unspoken. They didn't have to be spoken. They were, you see, our people believed that the creator gives each of us something we call instructions. And some people call them toolkit. So, in there you have, you know, what are you are you a good communicator? Are you a leader? Are you, funny? Are you? Can you dance? Can you paint?

00:10:18:00 - 00:10:48:09

Roberta

What can you do? And your job is to figure out what those instructions are. And then you have to honour them. But you honour them for not only to be true to yourself, but for your family, your community and society at large. That's your job. That's an obligation. That's not an option, for us. And so that has stuck with me my whole life.

00:10:48:09 - 00:10:51:03

Roberta

So high expectations for sure.

00:10:51:05 - 00:11:12:13

Reeta

So are we going to get into that toolkit to your set of instructions then? So how did you set off to actually begin to figure out who you were? You have the sense of purpose and expectation to honour and to protect and to support your community. But was education the pathway.

00:11:12:15 - 00:11:50:17

Roberta

In fact education was racist in those days, right? Yeah. Our we didn't see ourselves in the textbooks. And I went to school on reserve from, up until grade eight, and then we were bused off reserve to seven different high schools. Seven quite deliberate, in my opinion, to split us up and integrate us. And so, the racism was quite palpable at the high school level on both sides.

00:11:50:19 - 00:12:19:15

Roberta

And I didn't I was fortunate when I was in early grades to have, teacher by the name of Jamison. No relation. And she said very she told us this is what now I have to tell you. Now, let me tell you the truth. And so, you know, Columbus discovered America. Well, no, no. That's not what happened.

00:12:19:17 - 00:12:54:14

Roberta

And but she stayed true to what the curriculum that, you know, in those days, the Department of Indian Affairs required. And but she also said this is the this is the truth. So critical thinking. I learned critical thinking in those. And I learned more about the richness of our own history as well. So I think your identity is formed by learning about who your people are and then dealing with challenges to that.

00:12:54:16 - 00:13:26:06

Roberta

I didn't look like the stereotypical Mohawk. So, you know, I was challenged for that. So when your your identity is challenged, you strengthen your identity. Yeah. And so I was 17 when I went off to McGill. Just a kid. Whatever possessed me. You know, my, my sister drove me down there and dropped me off and drove away and left.

00:13:26:07 - 00:13:34:03

Roberta

And there I was, but I, I know those days I wanted to be a doctor, so I set out.

00:13:34:05 - 00:13:42:18

Reeta

So tell us about your first few early years at McGill. Making friends, encountering people from all over Canada, perhaps all over the world.

00:13:42:20 - 00:13:43:15

Roberta

Oh, all over the.

00:13:43:15 - 00:13:45:03

Reeta

All over the world. Yeah.

00:13:45:03 - 00:13:59:14

Roberta

Yeah. I was placed by, Department of Indian Affairs bureaucrat in a residence for, women, and we used to call it the Virgin Palace.

00:13:59:16 - 00:14:02:02

Reeta

Oh, okay. Let's not go down there, too far, let's stop there. Okay...

00:14:02:03 - 00:14:16:15

Roberta

Very strict place. So, you couldn't do anything. You couldn't. I lasted there about. Not quite three months.

00:14:16:17 - 00:14:19:09

Reeta

What do you mean? But what happened?

00:14:19:11 - 00:14:23:13

Roberta

I met three other native students.

00:14:23:16 - 00:14:24:14

Reeta

Okay.

00:14:24:16 - 00:14:59:14

Roberta

All Ojibwe from Manitoulin Island. And the three of us decided if we're going to stick together. If we're going to survive this, we need to stick together. I did meet people from all over. I also met young women. My first day in residence who came and looked through my closet and through my drawers, and to see, I guess, who I was, what I had and talk about violated.

00:14:59:16 - 00:15:30:01

Roberta

I thought, this is not the place for me. And so we, the, the four of us got together and moved out and rented two apartments. And, and so for the first two years I was there downtown. The third year I had had enough of downtown Montreal. And I moved out there, to Kahnawake a mohawk community, because I wanted to be with my own people.

00:15:30:03 - 00:16:05:04

Roberta

And then I commuted in. So, those years were, well, I also got involved. I was there one month when the FLQ crisis happened. Tanks were rolling down the streets. I was like, where am I? Laporte kidnaping. It was a crazy time in Montreal. Tanks called out against. Our own people. Yeah. The only other time was Oka a few years later.

00:16:05:06 - 00:16:42:04

Roberta

Some years later. So it was, it was quite a challenging time and on many levels. The premier at the time, Bourassa had a brilliant idea for hydroelectric power. Decided they were going to build the dam in James Bay and flat out the Cree people who make their home along in James Bay and quite, I mean, so cavalier that this is what we could do, could be done.

00:16:42:06 - 00:16:52:07

Roberta

So, a lot of students then we got together and thought, what could we do? So, I became a protester. Then, and in this evening.

00:16:52:09 - 00:16:57:07

Reeta

I think its trying to listen to your instructions, Yeah. Trying to come to your instructions.

00:16:57:09 - 00:17:16:24

Roberta

In the evening news. My family back home saw me marching down the street of Montreal with a sign that said BOURASSA, strategically placed. And I learned, though.

00:17:17:01 - 00:17:55:03

Roberta

It was the first time elders, I believe, in Canada, gave evidence in a court people in shaping the future and in dealing with their rights. And I thought. I need our people need those skills. If this is how we're going to create change, take our place better, have some legal skills.

00:17:55:05 - 00:17:56:12

Roberta

So, I applied law school.

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Reeta

So you switched to law. And what was the experience like in law school? Did you meet interesting people there who also held similar beliefs about justice?

00:18:08:07 - 00:18:43:15

Roberta

Justice? Yes. I mean, I met people who I are really associated with. People maybe from the Maritimes, people who were felt a bit marginalized, like myself. We were not very many women. It was a pretty homogeneous group. And there I was obliged to learn. You know, the Queen owned all the land. Parliament was supreme. Of course. Anybody any Mohawk knows that's not true.

00:18:43:17 - 00:18:56:02

Roberta

So, I had to figure out. How was I going to hold my nose and get through that?

00:18:56:04 - 00:19:15:21

Roberta

And I went home every weekend. I was in London. University of Western Ontario. It's about an hour and a bit from my house. If I hadn't been able to go home every weekend, I would not have survived it because it was such a. Talk about culture shock

00:19:15:21 - 00:19:18:04

Reeta

But deeply conflictual.

00:19:18:06 - 00:19:43:13

Roberta

Yeah. And I would talk about treaties and rights and people. It's now remember read this is before Canada had its own constitution that recognized at long last our rights. So, this is before all that happened. So, what I was talking about was just didn't land with the rest of the people in law school.

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Reeta

And yet you finished?

00:19:45:07 - 00:19:46:23

Roberta

Well, I was determined. Yeah, I.

00:19:46:23 - 00:19:56:21

Reeta

Yea! You finished? And you're the first First Nations woman to graduate from law school. How did the community receive this?

00:19:56:21 - 00:20:22:10

Roberta

Well, I think they thought it was important that we had these skills. But, you know, I am. Trust me, I am no Einstein. It's not because I'm brilliant that I. This happened. In Canada, for many years, if you wanted to get a post-secondary degree. You had to sign away your rights.

00:20:22:12 - 00:20:23:18

Reeta

What do you mean? It's signed to where you were, rights.

00:20:23:19 - 00:20:48:20

Roberta

I mean, sign on the dotted line that I am no longer an Indian, a status Indian. And you received a sum of money like, I don't know, one of my cousins did it before she married a non-native fellow, which was going to lose her status anyway. It was like 100 bucks or something, but you had to give that up.

00:20:48:22 - 00:21:20:02

Roberta

So surprised that it took that long. So when I say, you know, this is a major achievement, I say it's a sign of how long it took. Canada to really accept and allow our people to obtain post-secondary degrees. Now, I'm proud to say we are in the thousands of individuals in the country and we are judges, and now we are on the Supreme Court.

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Reeta

Indeed. So, you go on from that moment that that encounter, and you find yourself at some point in time as the first female ombudsman in Ontario. And I imagine you you saw a lot into people's lives into great difficulties, perhaps things faced women have faced. But what was that like in terms of having to preside over a set of facts when you knew at the end of those facts who lives and people and families?

00:21:58:23 - 00:22:08:02

Roberta

What a privilege it was to take that role on. I was,

00:22:08:04 - 00:22:56:15

Roberta

Quite young when I took it on and I again, I felt there are so many people out there who are impacted by government decisions. That's the role of the ombudsman to look at complaints from people who feel they've been, excuse me, treated unfairly and I could identify with that. And I knew there were many people beyond our own communities who had suffered women, racialized groups, poor, inmates, you know, so many.

00:22:56:17 - 00:23:32:07

Roberta

We had 10,000 complaints a year. And I thought I might bring some insight to that. The first thing I did was make sure that we were accessible to everybody, not just the people who could find their way to downtown Toronto, which is where we were. So, I had offices, and people sometimes worked out of their cars all over the province.

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Roberta

So, accessibility with a capital A, I used to say to staff, drove them wild was a priority for me. And creating positive change. To bring a just resolution. So, I did that for ten years. I was also very active around the world in that role because I could see other countries. Nelson Mandela had just been elected.

00:24:04:24 - 00:24:06:06

Reeta

Yes.

00:24:06:08 - 00:24:53:17

Roberta

Maybe. Was there 20 months when I was asked to go to Pretoria, Joburg and then Pretoria. They were creating the public Protector. Selby Blackwell was the first. And so, I was there sharing what we knew about this business, this this office. And I also went to Uganda. I went to Hong Kong. Taiwan. South America, Argentina, different places that were reemerging in many areas reemerging democracies reclaiming their own institutional control.

00:24:53:20 - 00:25:02:00

Roberta

Yes. And of course, that was music to my ears. And, so that was a that was a fascinating time.

00:25:02:02 - 00:25:28:14

Reeta

You mentioned a moment about being accessible, and ensuring that the office, the ear of the Ombudsman, was present. This is all in the pursuit of seeking justice. But what does it take to have justice? What does it take to have justice? Does it mean that one side wins? Well, the loses there.

00:25:28:16 - 00:25:42:10

Roberta

I mean, I've never been a practicing lawyer. I've never aspired to it. Be in the courtroom and so on. Even though I was heavily influenced, early on by that court case.

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Reeta

Yes.

00:25:43:20 - 00:26:16:21

Roberta

I don't think there's value in or as much value. Sometimes that's what you need. Winner and loser being declared. Lately, our people in Canada have made great strides in the court system, which is push the policy, system and governments to come to the table and

corporations. But I thought if we're going to build lasting solutions, you need to resolve conflicts in the interest of everyone.

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Roberta

And so the job I, as I saw it then and I was a mediator for a number of years as well, but I saw the job of ombudsman as, conflict resolver. If someone's complaining about maybe they're not getting their family support payments, or the Human Rights Commission did not investigate their complaint properly and they were treated badly by government, or I'm an inmate in a provincial facility and I'm not allowed access to religious practices.

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Roberta

How can you find a solution that will satisfy that complaint, but improve the process overall and prevent things from happening in the future that are unfair? That I think is those that approach produces lasting solutions. Winner and loser. You still have to go back to the table and figure out how we're going to live together. Yes. But I found that position to be quite a unique one and a privileged one. Really?

00:27:30:15 - 00:27:46:00

Reeta

How do you prepare people to come forward, come to engage and come to find ways that, they can be lasting solution and a sense of justice and a sense that wrongs have been put right.

00:27:46:02 - 00:28:19:04

Roberta

They have to believe. They have to believe in the institution. They have to believe in the process. We dealt with some victims of torture from other countries. Who came to Canada. And I found you couldn't just say, oh, well, we're open for business. Come on over here. They said complain against the government. What? That's what I'm fleeing from in my home country.

00:28:19:06 - 00:29:00:07

Roberta

And so, we knew that we had to create a special approach to dealing with people in that circumstance, just as we had to create special approaches for my own people. Maybe living in remote communities, flying only. And role models are essential in that. Showing cases where success was achieved is essential. Demonstrating the outcome. Going to the people, being there physically, meeting with people.

00:29:00:09 - 00:29:06:23

Roberta

They sound simple. They're vital. They're profound. Profound. They're important. Yeah.

00:29:07:00 - 00:29:13:03

Reeta

Yeah. So profound in terms of not only building that kind of credibility, but also trust.

00:29:13:05 - 00:29:15:20

Roberta

And you've you deliver and trust.

00:29:15:22 - 00:29:17:12

Reeta

Go so far.

00:29:17:14 - 00:29:35:06

Roberta

And trust is really hard to build, but it can be lost in a nanosecond. I know that again from our own people's dealings over the years. You trust your trust your trust and.

00:29:35:08 - 00:29:36:00

Reeta

And you don't.

00:29:36:05 - 00:29:40:03

Roberta

And you don't. And so then it starts again.

00:29:40:05 - 00:29:57:11

Reeta

Speaking about trust and the trust of your people. Here you are. I think the first woman to be elected chief of the Six Nations of the Grand River. What was that process? How were you called into that?.

00:29:57:11 - 00:29:58:11

Roberta

Oh, no. You're. That's a Long story.

00:29:58:11 - 00:30:00:11

Reeta

That's Okay, we've got time. I want to hear it.

00:30:00:13 - 00:30:32:21

Roberta

So long story. Well, I had been the ombudsman had stepped to. I'd finish my term. I was mediator, and I was, as always, living at Six Nations. And our people had. We have two systems that coexist at Six Nations. The traditional form of government. And the elected form of government under the Indian Act.

00:30:32:23 - 00:30:34:21

Reeta

What is the traditional form of government?

00:30:34:22 - 00:31:10:15

Roberta

It's the Confederacy. Okay. It's the 52 chiefs. It's the the the age-old traditional form. It is not hereditary. People think it's you're born into this like, you know, royalty. No. It has its own system which has beautiful practices of consensus building. Women have a voice. Women are the conscience. Women select the chiefs. Children have a voice.

00:31:10:17 - 00:31:19:22

Roberta

So, these ideas that we're coming up with globally about children's rights and women. Right. These were if you look at this forever.

00:31:19:24 - 00:31:21:10

Reeta

This existed for centuries.

00:31:21:10 - 00:31:56:08

Roberta

So, the elected system runs all of the services in the community deals with the external community as well. And they coexist sometimes with a lot of tension, sometimes not. Because the Indian Act system was something imposed on our people from outside. So, I told you, it's a long story

Reeta

keep going. You are doing just fine

00:31:56:10 - 00:32:30:13

Roberta

In in about 2001. We had a mess in our community. There was a fundamental lack of accountability. And amongst with the complaints were about the elected system not doing a good job. Money was being mismanaged. A forensic audit was required. It was not a good picture. They were falling prey to external people who were exploiting the lack of capacity and expertise.

00:32:30:15 - 00:32:52:03

Roberta

And so, people's there was a group came to me and said, okay, you're a lawyer, you've been the ombudsman, now you have to run for chief. I said, I don't want to be chief. I don't want to run. And in our community, culturally, when you're asked to take leadership, you're expected to decline the first time. So, this was not a big surprise.

00:32:52:05 - 00:33:18:05

Roberta

The second time they came, I said, no, really, I don't want to do this. And then the third time they came and when you come, you're asked a third time to do something. You have to say yes. And my own family went from saying, are you out of your mind to saying, you have to do this. And so, I did.

00:33:18:07 - 00:33:48:13

Roberta

I said, okay, read my lips. One term to to put things right. Get back to proper accountability. But I'll only run if you give me a mandate and I'll change. So they turned over nine of 12 councilors and the chief. And I said okay, we've got our mandate. And we, we went to create, we had to do a forensic audit.

00:33:48:14 - 00:34:41:15

Roberta

We had to really reorganize a lot of things, really restore accountability. Accountability to the people, not to the government who might be funding you, not to this department or that minister or this business leader externally who was trying to exploit us. But to your own people. That's the job. And so, one of the I talked earlier about the Indian agent in our

council chambers, the Indian agent used to sit on a platform above all of above everybody and down below sat the council facing the Indian agent waiting for kind of, you know, word from on high.

00:34:41:17 - 00:35:02:15

Roberta

At the back sat the people. So, one of the first things I did was I said, we're getting rid of that platform. And they said, but it's made of cement. How are we going to do that? I said, I don't know. Get a jackhammer or whatever you going to do. Get rid of that. So, we did. We levelled that.

00:35:02:15 - 00:35:37:04

Roberta

We said we are going to sit on the level with our council and turn that councillor around, and we're going to face the people. And it was a small room. So, in order to have enough people get in there, we had to create steps so that they sat above us. And I said that the the kind of the mental psychological shift that that creates in people.

00:35:37:06 - 00:35:38:04

Roberta

You know, who you in?

00:35:38:05 - 00:35:55:17

Reeta

Oh, absolutely. So, when you think about reform governance, that's a quite a visual in terms of that. What were the other tough conversations you had to have or that you encountered when you took on this role? Because clearly this is all about change, a fresh mandate.

00:35:55:20 - 00:36:29:13

Roberta

Oh, dear. Well, there were people who were very upset with the change. There were. Yeah. It wasn't nice. There were people who really took a toll on my personal family. There were, because I upset some apple carts. There were people who were doing well under the old system, which was rife with. You know, who knows where the the checks went and so on.

00:36:29:13 - 00:37:06:16

Roberta

And they didn't like the fact that all of a sudden there were systems and rules and procedures and and so on. So locally, it was tough for a time, you know. But that also shows you, I mean, I think it's about living with the legacy of colonialism, too, is we and we were committed to this as a council, nurturing a system of empowerment.

00:37:06:18 - 00:37:42:14

Roberta

We are not at the mercy of somebody else. I can tell you one of the things and government often was not very happy either. I remember they sent me this, this, agreement and contribution agreement for health services. And we had 170 people working for health departments. And they so you have to sign this annual contribution agreement, and they put it in front of me and of course, lawyer in me.

00:37:42:14 - 00:38:10:23

Roberta

I read it. I read every page. And they wanted us to give up our intellectual properties. Wow. Our rights to our our system of nutrition. We had developed different things in the community and they said I was giving up our intellectual. I said, I'm not signing this. I'm sorry. Our intellectual property of today is our land of yesterday.

00:38:11:00 - 00:38:27:22

Roberta

So think about that. Right. I'm not doing this. And there was a huge uproar amongst a lot of my people, even some of my councilors who said but you have to we won't get paid. We won't get. How are we going to function. I said we're going to function.

00:38:27:24 - 00:38:30:01

Reeta

Oh, we're not giving this up.

00:38:30:03 - 00:39:15:19

Roberta

And so they they said, no, we have to sign it. I said, okay, I'll sign it. I'll accept this. I'll initial it. We'll send it back to Ottawa. So then it came back, of course, back and forth. Long story short. They they said fine, you don't have to because I said I'm not. Oh. What in what universe would we give up our intellectual property to our own ways of knowing, our knowledge about how to feed our people, how to look after our people, how to care for our own why and what by what route of us is that fair?

00:39:15:21 - 00:39:48:19

Roberta

Does that make sense? And so. But the sense what I'm reason I'm telling you the story is we set about reminding our own selves about the power we had at to run our own affairs. You just have to do it. You just have to take leadership. You just have to have the courage to do the best thing for your people.

00:39:48:21 - 00:40:19:20

Roberta

And guess what? It'll be the best thing for others around you as well. And I've spent most the latter part of my life working on changing things. I've always felt that to be more just for our people will benefit Canadians. I mean, we know that education is a huge challenge. And if we were to close that gap, which is still too large, guess what?

00:40:19:20 - 00:40:26:11

Roberta

Canada would be much better off to \$265 billion GDP.

00:40:26:11 - 00:40:27:06

Reeta

Absolutely.

00:40:27:06 - 00:41:27:04

Roberta

Contributions. So, it's not about rights rates, rights, justice. It's all about self-interest as well. It's in all of our interests. And that's back to mediation, creating solutions, shaping a future where we all benefit. That's what I've spent my life doing, I think. I think everybody has a role to play. And so I spent a lot of time meeting with CEOs right across the country, government ministers and so on, to engage all of us in this initiative to invest in the future of Canada by investing in Canada's fastest growing demographic group, First Nations in you and me, to youth.

00:41:27:06 - 00:41:35:13

Roberta

And that was was I did that. I can't believe I did that. I must be really old now. I did that for 16 years.

00:41:35:13 - 00:41:45:02

Reeta

Oh, you did a tremendous job. What was the reception when you started to speak in terms of investing in the future of the country?

00:41:45:04 - 00:41:48:08

Roberta

Well, I think a lot of minds got changed.

00:41:48:10 - 00:41:48:22

Reeta

Yes.

00:41:49:00 - 00:42:25:05

Roberta

Because, I've found over my life that people are more inclined to do things when they see it will be in their interest to do them. And I knew that this would be in their interest. And so, it's about articulating that, it's about talking directly to understanding what is it that you and again, a good mediator understands the positions that are coming to the table.

00:42:25:05 - 00:43:00:19

Roberta

And what is it that you're after? Well, we're all after a country where people have wellbeing. Education is primary, but what many people in Canada didn't and don't know is our young people are not graduating. Nine out of ten Canadian kids can graduate from high school. The numbers are as low as four out of ten in many of our communities.

00:43:00:21 - 00:43:33:14

Roberta

How are we going to change the picture. What's it going to mean for the country. If we flip that around, just think the prosperity as a country from our communities who still don't have water, they can drink, who still live in housing conditions that I often say if somebody landed from Mars and looked around here in Canada and looked at the state of the indigenous communities.

00:43:33:16 - 00:44:09:17

Roberta

Would they believe there was a commitment to sustainability in those communities? No, they would not. Because the infrastructure is lacking, you know, and basic things like housing, water and so on. Education, health care, all of those things remain a challenge, for our communities. But the key to changing that is not some benevolence, it is our own people.

00:44:09:19 - 00:44:15:21

Roberta

It is the young people who need.

00:44:15:23 - 00:44:58:15

Roberta

Space, support, role models, mentoring, teachers, educators. As you know. I'm very big on having our own people at the front of the classroom and knowing if you have a one educator who is indigenous to the front of your classroom, you can see what you can be. But they also influence class of 30,40, 30, 40. Families are influenced. The change, the opportunity, the potential is just incredible.

00:44:58:17 - 00:45:10:14

Reeta

Now there's clearly a multiplier effect that's exponential in terms of change and the, you know, human condition, dignity of people, sense sense of justice.

00:45:10:16 - 00:45:14:10

Roberta

But they have to be things that, yes, relate.

00:45:14:12 - 00:45:15:11

Reeta

Absolutely.

00:45:15:12 - 00:45:50:12

Roberta

I mean, the days of, you know, that I the days of the curriculum that I learned about should be long gone. And now I'm really hoping pushing that we will support more integration of

indigenous ways, of knowing. I mean, not only in I think it's an obvious thing in things like geography and history, but it should be obvious in science, it should be obvious in math, it should be.

00:45:50:14 - 00:45:51:07

Roberta

I mean.

00:45:51:09 - 00:45:58:22

Reeta

It should be obvious everywhere in healthcare, in how we heal the planet and address issues of climate change, manage our lands.

00:45:58:23 - 00:45:59:19

Roberta

Absolutely.

00:45:59:19 - 00:46:00:22

Reeta

That should be in everything.

00:46:00:24 - 00:46:41:24

Roberta

This is and and I'm glad I'm delighted to see what's happening after the Truth and Reconciliation report. That laid out a roadmap for change to bring reconciliation to the relationship between indigenous peoples and other Canadians, that people have picked up those calls to action and are starting to implement them and create meaningful opportunities. Underline meaningful for our people

00:46:42:01 - 00:47:10:24

Roberta

To take our place in shaping the country's future, whether it's in developing resources which many of our communities are playing leadership roles in these areas, others are not. They've decided for themselves. They want another path. That's okay. That's what shape in your own future is about. About and but talk about the expertise that can be brought to the table.

00:47:10:24 - 00:47:20:13

Roberta

And I'm thrilled that a lot of corporations are seeing that are developing reconciliation action plans.

00:47:20:15 - 00:47:53:10

Reeta

The path to reconciliation though starts, I think, with individuals really understanding and situating themselves either in a location or in history at a moment in history and understanding what their instructions are. Can you just share a bit more about what else we know as leaders today? What else other people listening can do to bring us closer into reconciliation?

00:47:53:12 - 00:48:20:04

Reeta

And I think this message applies not just about what's happening in Canada, but in many parts of the world where there has been pain, there has been injustice, there have been wrongs. And yet they too want to believe that there are people with a future and reconciliation has to be at the heart of moving forward together.

00:48:20:05 - 00:48:52:17

Roberta

I think to do that. That is so true. And the words of the chief, the head commissioner for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission said there's four As, awareness, so people need to know what our shared history is. The good, the bad and the ugly. We share a history we have, but we don't want to get stuck there, because we don't want people to feel guilt and paralysis and can't move forward.

00:48:52:17 - 00:49:27:11

Roberta

We want them to move on to acknowledgment of that history. We then want them to take responsibility. And the third is apology. The fourth A is action. And so, moving through those As is a very important process. So I've talked about what some of the companies are doing. But as an individual okay maybe you're a parent. Maybe you're a grandparent.

00:49:27:13 - 00:49:55:19

Roberta

Ask what are your children learning about in school. What are they hearing? Is the history of the country that you live in? Is it a balanced view? Where are the indigenous people in this history? Where is the shared acknowledgment of maybe some of the historical mistakes we've made, and where is the opportunity to change? So, start awareness.

00:49:55:21 - 00:50:10:21

Roberta

Ask questions. Don't just accept and leave it to somebody else to figure it out. I think that taking personal responsibility for the collective is critical.

00:50:10:23 - 00:50:21:24

Reeta

Roberta, when you think about your life and I know you are grandmother proud, grandmother, you were telling me that your granddaughter just won an award or was being awarded for her, her film that she has made. Working in film, it must be a proud moment. When you think back to either your 16-year-old self or if your words I mean to your granddaughter and her friends, what's the message about what it takes to lead a meaningful life, to be in service to others, once you discern from your instructions, the gifts that you have been given and go for. Deploy them?

00:50:57:09 - 00:51:40:07

Roberta

I'm going to draw on. When I was at inspire, we asked students we supported 90% of the students we supported financially, graduated. We asked them what was one of the key success factors. And it is it is. It is my own belief. But it's amazing what they said. Strong sense of identity. You have to know who you are.

00:51:40:09 - 00:52:16:06

Roberta

And know. And that comes from inside. And listening to your own. To people around you. It comes from knowing your history. A strong sense of identity. You can do whatever because you will then have courage. You will then have determination. You'll know your instructions. You'll.

00:52:16:08 - 00:52:41:02

Roberta

And I think also surround yourself with positive energy. I always say when I talk to young people, you know, you know how many choices you make every day. I know when you're young, you think, oh, I have. No, I can't make any choices. This is all just put upon me. I just do what I'm told and the world is mapped out.

00:52:41:03 - 00:53:02:14

Roberta

No, that's not true. You choose every day what you're going to wear, who you're going to sit with, what you're going to do on the weekend, where you're going to spend your time, who you're going to talk to, who you're not going to talk to. Many, many, many, many choices are made every day on them, on those choices.

00:53:02:16 - 00:53:32:14

Roberta

And surround yourself with people that make you feel good. Know how. What you have to do to feed your soul. Our people believe every day and start the day in gratitude. And nurture that throughout the day. Whatever you do you don't I mean you don't have to be a famous anybody. You can. You all have talents.

00:53:32:16 - 00:53:58:09

Roberta

Just nurture those talents and that will bring you great joy. And I hope you'll put them to the use of your community and people around the world. I think that that is one of the most fulfilling things. But it starts with, know who you are. Take the time to know who you are first.

00:53:58:11 - 00:54:11:00

Reeta

It's powerful. Thank you. Thank you. It's such a pleasure to see you and getting to know you. Through this conversation is just remarkable. Thank you. Thank you so much for being on this podcast.

00:54:11:02 - 00:54:19:24

Roberta

Thank you. And thank you for the work you do, Reeta, every day. Thank you. Changing the world for the better.

00:54:20:01 - 00:54:52:02

Reeta

Thank you.

Roberta Jamison's journey is a testament to a lifetime of breaking new ground, advocating for justice and equality, and transcending boundary. Her legacy continues to inspire and lead with a vision for more equitable and inclusive world. Thank you for joining us on Transcending Boundaries. I hope this conversation sparked a new idea or inspired you to reflect on your own leadership journey and the values that guide you.

00:54:52:04 - 00:55:05:02

Reeta

If you enjoyed today's episode, please subscribe, leave us a review and share our show with others. Until next time, keep leading with purpose and with courage.