

Stories Break Through Social Innovation Lingo at SIX

Eli Enns absorbs the power of story at social innovation global gathering

It was the lunch hour of day 1 at [SIX 2014 — the Social Innovation Exchange Global Gathering](#) in Vancouver held May 27-29. By this point, participants from around the world had already received an assortment of welcomes — to Canada, to B.C., to [Musqueam](#) land, to the SIX Global Gathering. [Eli Enns](#) took a different approach.

The political scientist and community developer admittedly entered the social innovation gathering with some apprehension. One he developed around new terminology that emerges in professional fields to describe the same thing in a different way. He had heard quite a bit emerging in social innovation circles in Vancouver.

But it wasn't long before Eli's apprehension was dispelled, through conversations that brought the innovation concepts down to the fundamental questions of improving society. This was most profoundly accomplished through sharing stories.

When Eli stood up to share his own moments of inspiration with the group at SIX, he was still reeling in emotion from the story that was just shared by David Roche, an inspirational humorist and motivational speaker, about how he came to draw strength from the facial disfigurement he was born with.

Adding to the many welcomes already given to the group, Eli said: "welcome to an imaginary land called Kanata" (the Iroquoian word where "Canada" comes from, meaning village).

As a person from mixed settler European and indigenous ancestry, Eli weaved the

larger historical story of the land that came to be known as Canada into his own personal narrative.

Eli's mother was born into an immigrant family from the Netherlands and other parts of Europe. She grew up working on a farm in southwest Manitoba and became part of the "flower child movement" in the 70s.

The hippie generation stood in solidarity with the [Nuu-chah-nulth](#) indigenous peoples against the devastating effects that conventional logging was having to the ancient cedar rainforest on the West Coast.

The two groups, which Eli is a product of, along with other indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, needed each other and supported one another. The Aboriginal groups needed the popular culture and solidarity of the flower child and other movements, and the non-indigenous groups needed the Aboriginal land claim argument for the blockades they engaged in to be effective.

At SIX, Eli connected his personal narrative to the connections that indigenous peoples and settlers formed historically, before the formation of Canada, to live respectfully with each other and to be stewards of the land, preserving natural resources for future generations.

"I feel a deep sense of connection to that story," Eli says. "I was able to weave it into my own personal story and provide people with insights into the opportunity we have as a country to be leaders in sustainable development through international relationship building."

Eli went into SIX hoping to share the story of the land that came to be known as Canada and he came out with a profound reminder about the power of stories — how they can connect people deeply, enable them to internalize information on the spot, and ground people in an emotional language that anyone can speak.

A version of this article was originally written for the [Urban Matters news service](#). This repost, for which we received permission, follows the style guidelines of the original post. To learn more about generative newsroom options for your organization or community, please contact [peter\(at\)axiomnews.ca](mailto:peter(at)axiomnews.ca).