

Ted Interview

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What's hopeful about what we see here is the building of relationships, not only on the reservation with the entities that are here, housing, partnership for housing, the different entities that are attached to the tribe, and those that come into the reservation to see the need for a change. South Dakota extension, South Dakota State University, other groups that recognized needs, because this is a man-made disaster. If the reservations were a mistake, we'd have fixed them by now. A quote from one of our very prominent Indian holy men of the past. So there's much to do here, much to learn here, as everybody who comes to the reservation can contest, can feel. I guess that's why we're here, to do what we need to do. (04:08-05:08)

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00:32 **Kevin:** So [Pine Ridge](#), how was it that you came to Pine Ridge? What brought you here?

Ted: So many people, when they come to Pine Ridge, they're coming as volunteers, not knowing what they're getting into, so to speak. And that's what happened to myself and my wife, Kristen. We sat on these picnic tables, and they mean a lot because there are so many people who have spent time on these picnic tables listening. And that's one of the main things that you should do when you come to the reservation is listen. Listen to the people, listen to the land, because there's much to learn from our native brothers and sisters. And that's how our journey started. That's how my journey started, my wife Kristen and myself. And that's where it started. That was back in 2003. It seems like we've never left. And running the [Re-Member Organization](#) was not on my radar at the time, but here I am, running an organization that has been here for the past 20 years. And this is our 20th year and we're celebrating from open to close and looking forward to what can be done in the future.

Kevin: So tell us about, Re-Member.

01:43 **Ted:** Well Re-Member is an organization that enhances the quality of life for the people who've been marginalized by society for a long, long time. We promote an educational process here about the true indigenous history of this land, which is important to know. We talk about treaties. We talk about the laws that were made to control a certain population. That was the indigenous people of America as the Western Europeans of Caucasian descent came across and did what was done as creating a new country. So Re-Member takes its name from an ancient definition to put that which is broken back together, and an understanding of what was here before and what is to be learned now. And Re-Member promotes that learning activity out here. Re-Member volunteers just don't come here to bang boards and feel good about themselves. The educational component is so, so important. Along with what we do is wheelchair ramps, decks and steps, skirting, roofing, because the housing

conditions on this reservation aren't the best. So it's a great educational venue. It's a great learning experience for people, including myself and all who come to the reservation. It's the poorest of the poor, usually on the bottom scale. Of all the counties in the United States of America, we're last, bottom of the heap. But there is hope out here. There are things that are happening that are going to lift the people up here, and also lift the people's spirits who come here to learn about indigenous people, about the tribes of our land. Because some are doing better than others.

Kevin: I love that word, 'hope'. As you look to the future and think about Pine Ridge, or America, or earth, or however you want to think about it. What makes you hopeful? What is it that makes you hopeful that you see or feel?

Ted: What's hopeful about what we see here is the building of relationships, not only on the reservation with the entities that are here, housing, partnership for housing, the different entities that are attached to the tribe, and those that come into the reservation to see the need for a change. South Dakota extension, South Dakota State University, other groups that recognized needs, because this is a man-made disaster. If the reservations were a mistake, we'd have fixed them by now. A quote from one of our very prominent Indian holy men of the past. So there's much to do here, much to learn here, as everybody who comes to the reservation can contest, can feel. I guess that's why we're here, to do what we need to do.

Kevin: How many volunteers come here annually, and where do they come from? How would you describe that?

05:17 **Ted:** The number of volunteers that Re-Members handles on an annual basis averages about 1,100 per year. And our season starts with early March and ends in mid-October. We start with college spring break alternative. Instead of going to other places, they come here, they learn about social justice issues, and they connect. And that's the nice thing we like to see our young people do is connect. What can they do to change the things that have been done in the past? Church groups, organizations from all over the United States - and a matter of fact from all over the world - six of the seven continents have come here to Re-Member over the years. We've just missed the coldest one. Not sure if that's the one in the north or the south, but we've got people from all corners of the world.

Kevin: And when the volunteers that come here go out into the community to do work, could you just talk about the type of work they typically do?

Ted: They get hands on connection with the people here, the opportunity to build those relationships with the people that we serve. The decks and steps, the skirting of trailers, we average about 50 to 60 trailers per year on an average. Our bunk bed program is probably one of the most life-changing experiences because it gets you into the homes of the people who we serve. Our group that just left were just totally taken aback on some of the conditions that they saw, good and bad. Some of the reactions from the young children who were getting a bed for the first time, or a young teenager, or an adult getting a bed back because they've given it to their child. And we have done over the past 20 years, close to 6,000 bunk beds. And if you do the math, that's about 12,000 mattresses and a lot of wood. And a lot of building of those particular things that we put in the houses, a lot of roofing we've done over the years, wheelchair ramps. A lot of people need wheelchair ramps just to get in and out of their homes because of the ravages of diabetes and what it's done to their bodies. So there's a lot of people who are wheelchair bound. Those are the people who really need the help here. So that's what we do.

Interviewer: Can I interject really quick? Could you just explain to Kevin the bunk bed program at a high level so that people know exactly you do with the bunkbed program?

Ted: Sure. Our bunkbed program, that is probably our benchmark activity that we do on the reservation, serves and fills that need. Because people don't have beds out here, the basic of a bed. And we've been doing it for a long, long time. The bunk beds are for kids, are for young adults, are for elders. Especially the kids that when they feel and touch the new sheet, the pillow, the blanket, they really connect with that. They're taking ownership of it because it's been given to them. And it's life-changing at both ends.

What our volunteers see and the transformation when we put a book on there, and that connection between the volunteer and the young child who is getting a bed for the first time, it's magic. It's really great to see what happens. That relationship starts to build. And when our volunteers report back at the end of the week and they talk about the bunk building process, it really touches them from the inside out. So that's our bunk bed program.

Kevin: Love it. So, one other thing I really love about your organization is how you have brought Lakota traditional values into the culture of Re-Member. Could you just talk a bit about what those core traditional values are and what they mean to you?

Ted: Well, there's a learning experience, that a lot of people from off the reservation had no clue that existed the values that are the Lakota way. And there are words around this building that you're in right now that showcase those words, the perseverance, the humility, the truth, the honor, the sacrifice, the love, the respect, the humility, that are really important to have in your life. The understanding of what had happened to our indigenous people on this land and how we can heal, and how both sides can heal and come together with a better understanding that we can make a better world. And it starts right here.

Kevin: Could you pick one of the values and talk about it for a minute?

Ted: Well, humility. Being humbled and the educational part that this program serves for our volunteers who come. And we ask them to take that story, to take that message that they've received here from our speakers. Because when our speakers come to talk on a nightly basis, they're talking about their lives. They're talking about their ancestors, what had happened. They're talking about their Lifeways, they're talking about the spirituality, things that, that we took away from them at one time that are coming back, their language, their children, the sacred ones

So many benefit from this exchange of relationship building, not only from off the reservation, but on the reservation. Because when Re-Member came here, they were looking at it as just like another organization going to change things and going to tell them what to do. But we don't do that. We come here and we listen, and that's the best thing volunteers can do is come to just listen on the reservation.

Interviewer: May I interject? Ted, could you talk about - and you can choose any of these values - but if you were to take some of these values, these are the Lakota ways, if you were to take those and what does the world need, society outside the reservation, what sort of these values would the whole society most benefit from? Are there a few that come to your mind that would help us just kind of understand each other better? Produce a better society based on some of these core ways.

Ted: There's so many of them. The words that really have meaning to a lot of our volunteers, are truth, are honor, sacrifice. There are so many native Americans, not only on this reservation, but have sacrificed so much. They are the survivors of the indigenous people who were here thousands of years before the country was founded. So those are the words that are really important to understand. Perseverance. How do we get to the next day, the next month, the next season? They are fantastic words to live by. And that's what Re-Member volunteers can take with them and spread around in

their own communities. Because we look at Re-Member as a training ground for what they can take home. Because we changed lives here, we're in the business of changing lives. And we didn't realize that because we have changed so many lives over the course of the years, and people who have come to this reservation such as yourself have found that to be true. We are changed from the inside.

13:38 **Kevin:** So what's it take? So this organization has had a big impact here, has created change here, has added value here in a place where all of those things are not easy to do. What would you say from a leadership standpoint is the key or are the keys to making a difference here? What goes into that? What's critical to being able to make a difference here in terms of how you go about it?

Ted: The 'how' you go about to change anything in a place like this is first learn from the people who are here. And from all the people who are, not just a few. I think that's a start. And what we have to come to grips with, the building of relationships, what works here, what doesn't work here, what needs to be changed. And there are groups, both on the reservation and off the reservations have, who have come together and started to see what can work here. And that's what Re-Member is building toward.

[00:12:55] **Kevin:** The phrase, I never can say it right. You know the phrase. Could you just say that phrase and then describe what its meaning is?

Ted: "Mitakuye Oyasin" has always been a phrase that has resonated with people once they learn the definition behind it, once they break down all those barriers of race. Because so many of my Lakota friends have said, "Ted, there's only one race that we have to worry about." It's not about the colors, the black man, the white man, the red man, it's about the human race that we're all a part of. And we have to think that way because we are all on this blue marble together, everything started here by the creator, and that's what we're dealing with. So "Mitakuye Oyasin" means, "we are all related."

Kevin: I love that. Just as an aside, in my next book I call it "The Tribe of the Blue Planet."

Ted: Ooh, I like that, the tribe of the blue planet.

16:07 **Kevin:** Okay. So this is what I'm going to ask you next. I almost don't even want to, because what you're doing is, so this is more just for me to you, and you know how I feel this way. But I want to say it again, what you're doing here is so much bigger and powerful and valuable than the little, tiny things I've done. So I'm going to ask you.

Ted: They all add up to great things.

Kevin: Yeah. But I just want to say that before I ask you a couple of questions about me and my book and some things like that. So having said that, and then when I do ask you those questions, now you've got to pretend it's not me. So you wouldn't say, "Something you've done..." you'll pretend you're talking to one of them.

So, I was just thinking about how we first met and the house, I think all the cabinets. Didn't you on the house we did for Pinky, where we donated the materials?

Ted: We did a lot of work on that. Yeah. Yeah. We did a roof. We did the siding. We did the painting, the house, the deck.

Kevin: Yeah. So maybe could you just talk, maybe describe that project and focus on talking about how you first would have met Kevin and the role that Kevin and Hancock Lumber played in that house?

Ted: Some of the entities that come to the reservation bring great gifts, and Kevin Hancock and [Hancock Lumber](#) was just one of those entities that came, that found their way here. Don't know how they find their way here, but these are the success stories that come into play. Drop a bunch of lumber on a build site, and we're going to build a house in a couple of weeks. I'm going, "Wow, great idea", but it happened. And those are the things that really trigger other things, and other entities from off the reservation come in and say, there is a feature function and a benefit for all of this. And our housing problem on the Pine Ridge reservation is just that, we need 3,000 houses to eliminate the overcrowding of families in all the houses that we have. We have three generations living in single family dwellings, and that's one of the hardest things for the people here on the Pine Ridge reservation to deal with. So that was a blessing that happened. And we did the roof, and the cabinets, and painted the outside. And when it was done, the ceremony and the ribbon cutting, it was a success story that we hope continues on this reservation for a long, long time.

Kevin: That was great. That's awesome. You know Kevin a bit and his book *Bei*, just right off the top of your head or from the heart, if someone said what's Kevin about, or what's his story about, or what's he writing about, or what kind of message is he trying to share, what comes to mind, if anything?

Ted: Kevin's book was kind of like a great read for me. Because as I turned the page and went to the next, the people that Kevin met I've met, the places that Kevin has been, I've been. It's been done, in a good way. And the people who will come and experience that, they could write books because it comes from here. What Kevin experienced, I've experienced over the years, and what many volunteers that come to this reservation experiences. That Kevin has the gift to write these things down and put in the print, and so it's like a life story that many people should actually read and dive into and be a part of and write their own books. It's a great read.

Interviewer: Could you also talk about some of the things, and this could come from reading this book or just knowing Kevin for the time that you've known him, tell me some of the experiences he's had and what you think some of those, some of these values or experiences he may have taken back with him to his own home, something that you might've learned here that you noticed.

Ted: A lot of the things that we've learned here, including Kevin, again are written on these walls. But I think what the reservation does to the majority of us is bring those things out, helps us recognize humility, truth, honor, justice. And it's a great life changing experience. And if somebody can turn that into a book and let other people read that experience, I think it's one of the greatest things that Kevin has done in his life. He's got a great company up there in Maine and things like that. And obviously people enjoy it, and they enjoy working there. And that's a good thing. But to bring that attitude, to bring that power, that gift of love for other people back to the reservation and show that there are people who really care as well.

Kevin: I think we've got great stuff. Like everything you said was unreal. I knew it would be.

Interviewer: A really simple one. Can you just introduce your name, who you are, where you work, and how long you've been in this area and involved with Re-Member?