Chef David Wolfman remembers sitting at the kitchen table as a boy, gathering with his family over plates of wind-dried salmon and bannock. 

A member of the Xaxlīp First Nation in British Columbia, Wolfman’s mother left the reserve for Toronto, settling in Regent Park. Indigenous food in the city was scarce, but she fed him stories about wild berries that grew outside her cabin, and feasts of candied and smoked salmon that marked celebrations. It wasn’t until he was in his twenties, visiting his mother’s reserve, that he understood. “The stories and the food are inseparable,” he told us.

Wolfman started a path of personal, cultural and culinary discovery. He spoke with Indigenous people on reserves and in cities across the country, learning from Mohawk, Cree and Inuit elders. He took in the traditions and food, discovering new ways to recreate old recipes and reconnecting with his heritage.

Take salmon. It’s not just a stubborn fish that swims against the current—it’s a reminder of the cricket song that marks the salmon run, the generations-old techniques for drying the catch, and the way fisherman share their bounty as a sign of their connection to the land, leaving the entrails in the woods for other animals to eat. For his people, food is more than nourishment; it’s spiritual.

There’s a new cadre of Indigenous chefs who are part historian, part cultural ambassador. Piecing together recipes long passed down orally, Wolfman helps people find a sense of history and identity through food.

For many experiencing the residual effects of residential schools, food provides a link to a culture they didn’t even know they were missing.

Three branches of Jesse Thistle’s Metis-Cree family endured the violence of land grabs and colonization, passing down the trauma through generations. In the aftermath, Thistle was raised by his grandparents but alienated from his culture. Now a Trudeau Scholar and leading voice on intergenerational trauma, part of his journey to reconnect with his heritage has been through food.

“Rediscovering our food is a return to fundamentals, to our relationship with the land and our history,” he says.

As Indigenous fare finds a place among the Mexican taquerias and Vietnamese pho joints in cities from coast to coast, it’s leading to new conversations and cultural understandings. “As a tool of reconciliation, food can teach people about our history,” Thistle adds.

Breaking bread together might seem like a small thing, but it’s something.

The next time you’re out for a meal, look for an Indigenous restaurant. We promise you more than good eats—one of Wolfman’s most popular dishes pairs grilled venison with birch syrup, brown rice and toasted pine nuts. Exploring Indigenous cuisine, the stories and culture, offers non-Indigenous Canadians a way in. Traditional cooking could be an entry point to the complex and difficult project of reconciliation, one that leaves many wondering where to start.

There are some honest and difficult conversations ahead on our path to reconciliation. Maybe those conversations are best served with food.