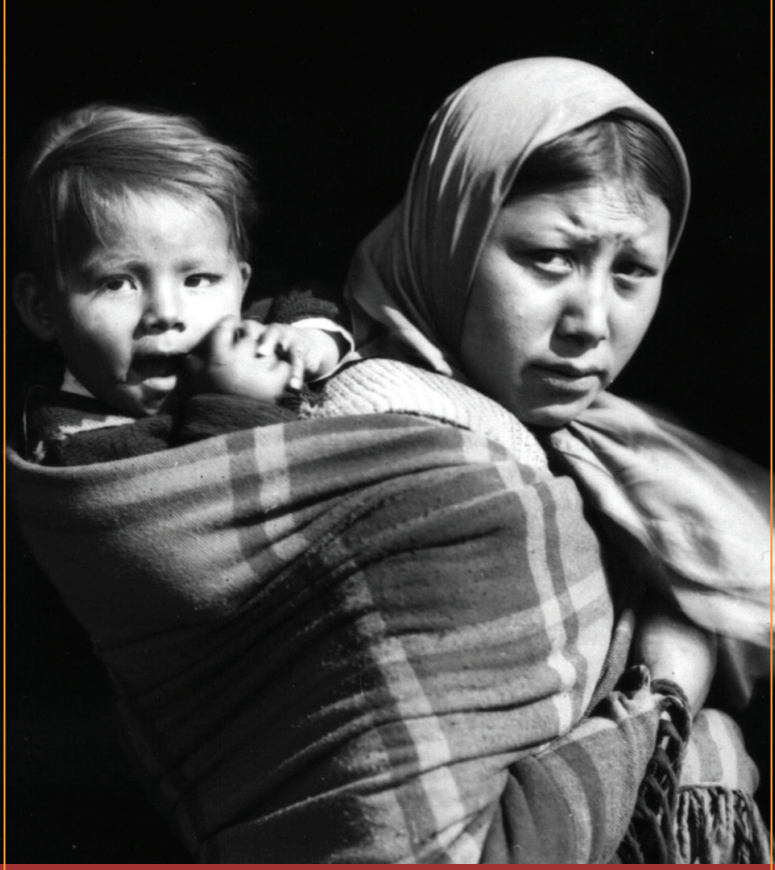


OUR WORK, OUR INDIGENOUS VOICES

First Nations and Métis Workers Talk About Their Work and Life in Alberta

Based on interviews conducted for the Alberta Labour History Institute by

Trevor Stace
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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that the Alberta Labour History Institute exists on the ancestral territory of many Indigenous peoples who make up Treaties Six, Seven, and Eight. We pay respects to their elders past and present and take a moment to consider the many legacies of displacement, dispossession, violence, and settlement, but also resistance that have occurred in the past and continue today. We also acknowledge this as the traditional homeland of the Métis people.

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First Nations and Métis Workers Talk About Their Work and Life in Alberta

by Cheryl Croucher



ALHI

Published by the Alberta Labour History Institute





WA-PA-SU was a Cree trader and guide who in 1719 gave a bundle of bitumen sand to Henry Kelsey, an English explorer and manager of York Factory on Hudson Bay. Yet the man history applauds for discovering Alberta's oil sands is Peter Pond, an American fur trader who was travelling in the northwest in 1778, when he found tar "oozing from black-stained banks" at the confluence of the Athabasca and Clearwater rivers. The Indigenous people had developed many uses for this bitumen: e.g., waterproofing canoes and baskets, or adhesive to glue spearheads to shafts or set broken bones. Its smoke repelled insects and the soot was used as dye, as well as a medicine to treat skin problems. In the 1800's, Europeans discovered that bitumen would make asphalt for road construction and when scientist Karl Clark patented the revolutionary hot water method to separate oil from the tar sands, the groundwork was laid for what became Alberta's economic engine for the 21st century.

ASANI is an Indigenous trio of Debbie Houle, Sarah Pocklington and Sherryl Sewepagaham that has delighted audiences across North America with songs that speak to their heritage. On the River, a live performance and video ballad the group created with Edmonton songwriter Maria Dunn and videographer Don Bouzek, tells the story of the Cree, Dene, and Métis of the Fort McKay First Nation who are coping with the down-stream effects of tar sands development on the Athabasca River. It weaves together original music by Asani and Dunn with historical and contemporary video interviews, focussing on the life of former Chief Dorothy McDonald-Hyde, the environmental and Indigenous rights champion who fought to protect the river and her community.

MEMORIES OF A TRADITIONAL HERITAGE

"We have to take a worldview look at what work means and what labour means. From an Indigenous perspective, I would say work is something that you do with and for other people, such as setting up a camp, hunting, and providing meat and provisions for your family and community. We don't see that as work and labour in what is now the contemporary definition of those two terms, but it's something that is "giving." Not only do you give your sweat and toil and tears for something, but you also give your heart. So, a part of you is a part of what you create. So, work in that perspective becomes a different way of seeing that relationship."

– Lewis Cardinal



What follows is a story of relationships, outdated ethnocentric views, and hard-fought struggles by Indigenous people to gain justice and respect as fully contributing members of Alberta society. While there is often a tendency to refer to labour in general terms, the actual experience of a worker who deals with conditions of life inside and outside the workplace is unique and personal. Each of the stories about the life of an indigenous worker recorded in this book is, in its own way, a lesson in the recognition, reckoning, and reconciliation that is past due for indigenous workers who do their best to earn a living in a society where historical patterns of denial and marginalization persist in one form or another.

This publication is part of a larger Indigenous labour project in which First Nations and Métis people were interviewed by the Alberta Labour History Institute about their life and work. They told their own people as well as other Albertans that, despite the prejudices and injustices they have faced, the indigenous people have not been marginal to the building of Alberta. Indeed, they have been involved in every aspect of Alberta's economy, but their work is often ignored because of stereotypes which suggest that they have had little to do with the building of this province. In fact, hundreds

of Indigenous men and women worked at construction jobs at Bechtel building the Suncor plant in Fort McMurray, while Indigenous ironworkers formed entirely separate crews of their own to build Edmonton's CN Tower, as well as other high-rise buildings in the city. Indigenous river pilots continued to be the major operators of boats carrying people and goods into, out of and within northern Alberta. Other Indigenous people became ranchers, farmers, tradespeople, scholars, nurses, social workers, teachers, civil servants, artists, lawyers, owners of small businesses of all kinds, managers on and off reserves, operators and staff of Native friendship centres, counsellors, firefighters, loggers, tourism operators, writers, editors, musicians, dancers, youth workers, workers with seniors, journalists, and court reporters, amongst other occupations.

A famous philosopher once observed that history "weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living." The memories and lessons from previous generations that are ingrained in the minds of today's Indigenous people invariably became part of the stories they told about life and work in a society which is, in many ways, at odds with a heritage that has been passed on to them through the generations. The work that their Indigenous ancestors did before Europeans arrived in the territory now Alberta was organized on an egalitarian basis. It was based in a belief that the Creator provided everything that was needed to sustain themselves. Everyone had a part in reaping the bounty of nature in a way that respected the natural environment and everything in it. It was a concept of 'work' and a way of life that was turned upside down by the European colonizers, as historian Alvin Finkel points out.

European fur traders found much to admire in First Nations societies and that the fur trade represented a partnership, though not always an equal one, of Natives and Europeans. In contrast, the settlement period, though superficially a negotiated partnership, was for the most part simply an example of European imperialism that resulted in the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples and the attempted erasure of their cultures, which had evolved over millennia.

The First Nations occupied the territory on which our province now exists since at least the last ice age, some 12,000 years ago, during which they adapted to a changing and often harsh environment. The technologies they developed over time in their survival for survival were supported by a cohesive social system based on cooperation, respect, and an exceptional relationship to the environment that sustained them. Their economies involved trade throughout the Americas, and their traditional knowledge and expertise enabled the survival of the early Europeans and the success of the fur trade.

When historians and archeologists refer to the time before the arrival of Europeans as the era of pre-contact, they reveal an ethnocentric point-of-view which suggests that any time before contact was irrelevant. It allowed a dichotomy to develop which portrayed Indigenous people as primitive and Europeans as civilized, and therefore superior. It is a dichotomy that has survived to this day, and which many of the interviewees found expressed in slights and mild racist slurs encountered at work and other social settings. As Finkel notes:



'Country Wives' was the name given to Indigenous women who were taken as spouses by the factors, traders, voyageurs and others usually associated with the large fur trading companies. Besides serving as wives and mothers, they provided invaluable labour, applying their traditional knowledge of the land and performing the physical tasks that made it possible for these men to

The view that Native societies in the Americas were less advanced technologically than European societies was based largely on the superiority of European weapons and on the 'logic' of conquerors that those whom they are conquering are inferiors. That view was reinforced in the Americas by the conquerors' destruction of many Native societies and the burying of the Natives' achievements.



survive in the hinterland. When settlements like Fort Edmonton grew and became more comfortable, hundreds were abandoned when the European wives consented to join their men. Many were 'given' to other men, while others were left to eke out an existence with their offspring on the margins of the trading posts and growing towns.

In his book *In the Shadow of Our Ancestors: The Inventions and Genius of the First Peoples,* Edmonton author Wayne Arthurson highlights a number of forgotten or overlooked achievements of Indigenous people. Examples include the invention of canoes and kayaks for transport. During WWII, Canadian and American military employed Cree and Navajo code talkers to outsmart the enemy. In South America, the Andean people invented techniques using stone to construct earthquake proof structures and flood-proof roads.

In several ways, the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, a UNESCO World Heritage Site north of Ft. McLeod, Alberta reveals much about the ingenuity of Indigenous innovation, at the same time as it illustrates the traditional philosophy of working together for the common good. In 2008, the Alberta Labour History Institute interviewed Stanley Knowlton, a member of the Blackfoot First Nation and head interpreter at the buffalo jump, who explained:

In these societies that were very well organized, the men and women had their duties. Out of the population that would've existed 200 years ago, everybody specialized in certain components of the economy…Here we can see some of the approximately three hundred items that came from the buffalo. Everything from hide to bones, horns, right down to the marrow, all formed a specific part in a more complex part of the economy.

Head-Smashed-In was used by the Plains tribes for around six thousand years during a period when the buffalo population was about forty to sixty million. After the fall rut, the male buffalo went off on their own and the females and juveniles herded together for the migration south. They moved into gathering basins leftover from the ice age.

It was from that point that the buffalo runners came in. Buffalo runners were a very specialized group of people. The job that they had was probably one of the most dangerous because it involved getting right up close to the buffalo. In many cases, the people that were involved did not survive. Young boys were trained from a very young age and only a very few were selected to be involved in the running of the buffalo. The idea was to lead the buffalo down to the jump. That was accomplished by mimicking a buffalo calf…The dominant female of the herd would try and put the herd between the calf and the buffalo runners that were wearing wolf robes… So the person who had disguised himself as a calf would slowly walk down towards the cliff and that would draw the herd down towards the cliff. Once they reached the critical point within sight of the cliff itself, the person would have another hide with him, which is a coyote robe. As a coyote does not represent a threat to the buffalo, the person would exit from

underneath the calf robe with his coyote robe and make his way out of the path of the buffalo. That was the signal for everybody else to get ready. Once the dominant female came up to smell the calf, that was a signal for everybody to jump up. At that point that's where they would panic the herd and stampede them towards the cliff…The momentum of the herd would simply take the animals over the precipice. That was basically how the jump worked.

The women came in to process the animals. Stanley Knowlton described a successful harvest as one where about three hundred animals jumped over the precipice to their deaths.

They were selective in the type of animals they were going after. Once the animals were driven over, the job really set in where they had to take the animals and skin them and process them; they had about five hours to do this. Anything that was damaged was left there…During the night wolves and coyotes and foxes and even eagles would come over and gorge themselves…The next day when the hunters would return, they would find even bears that were so big they couldn't run away…That's how they would get the other furs that they needed.

The meat of three hundred buffalo might seem like a lot; Stanley Knowlton calculated it would produce about 90,000 pounds of dried meat. However, when it was shared with a population of about 40,000, the portions worked out to about two pounds each for the winter. So, the tribes would still have to supplement their winter food supply with more hunting.

Europeans had been colonizing the eastern regions of the continent since the late 1500's, but many people trace back the colonial history of Alberta to the mid-eighteenth century. 1754 was when Hudson Bay Company explorer Anthony Henday ventured as far upstream as Red Deer. Other European fur traders followed, pushing west and north into the territories of the Dene and Cree. In 1795, the HBC built the first Fort Edmonton on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River, and in 1821, it absorbed the rival upstart North West Company.

Indigenous people were at first excluded from new economy and labour market imported by the Europeans. While the fur trade boomed, however, they were indispensable. In his contribution to this project, Lewis Cardinal, Indigenous educator and community organizer, shared a perspective on the shared relationship during the early days of the trade when European traders depended on Indigenous guides, many of them in the emerging Métis nations, to travel the rivers and trade for beaver pelts to send across the Atlantic Ocean.



Sacred Sites Alberta is home to hundreds of sacred sites, places that carry the living knowledge of the Indigenous peoples who called the land home for millennia. In addition to preserving locations where spiritual and traditional ceremonies were carried out, these also tell a story about Indigenous labour.

Head-Smashed-in-Buffalo-Jump in southern Alberta preserves the story of the buffalo, a major food staple for the Blackfoot people until the near-extermination of the herd in 1881, a deliberate policy by European colonizers that led to mass starvation and forced dependence of a previously self-sustaining people and the intimate relationship they had with the earth.

Canada could not have been born without the sweat, toil, tears and commitment]of Indigenous people bringing them out here, helping them build their forts, creating provisions, tilling fields, and all this sort of work, to create a relationship that was mutually beneficial.

Lewis Cardinal reiterates the most Canadians do not know about the many connections shared with Indigenous people, or how these have formed a basis for our modern life and economy.

All major cities in Canada were born from Indigenous gathering places, and it only makes sense. If you're a trader and you have wares to sell, you have to bring them to where the people are. Edmonton is an ancient gathering place going back 12,000 years. So, when the forts were built where they were in Rossdale Flats, it's because that's where the people were. You went to the place where people were trading. Along the way, as Edmonton grew and the forts grew, the land trails became very important because the river



kihcihkaw askî-Sacred Land, located in Edmonton's Whitemud Park, is operated by the Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre as a natural setting for individuals, groups, and communities to host ceremonies, sweat lodges and facilitate intergenerational learning. For many centuries, this was a ceremonial site where medicines could be harvested for healing purposes, including the Ochre found in the banks of nearby Whitemud Creek, which was used in spiritual and traditional ceremonies.

itself was a major throughway. But the trails then became what are now like Stony Plain Road, Fort Saskatchewan Trail, St. Albert Trail. These are all old Indigenous trading routes. So they were just capitalized upon, because it only made sense. These were the quickest ways to get to places and the safest ways to get to places.

The fur trade and the later transition to imported agricultural practices not only changed the type of work that was done. It changed the relationship of the Indigenous survivors to their natural environment, taking them from a ceremonial and subsistence relationship in which the bounty of the earth was harvested respectfully and as needed to one that viewed the riches of the earth as commodities to be exploited. Beaver and buffalo that were once harvested for the 'use-value' of their whole bodies where now slaughtered for the 'exchange value' of their hides, with the result that they and the way of life they supported were soon depleted.

From the beginning, the so-called 'partnership' in which the Indigenous workers served as intermediaries and transport workers was a system organized on strict hierarchical lines with race barriers that placed the hardworking First Nations and Métis at the bottom. This all ended, when the fur trade wound down, and the focus of the economic masters in Central Canada and other faraway places changed to new 'frontier industries,' agriculture, railway construction and other infrastructural components of an economy based on rapid development of a profitable hinterland. The labour power of most of the First Nations and Métis would no longer be needed; in fact, they and their land claims were regarded as impediments to development.

Many of the Métis and English-speaking mixed bloods who provided the labour that was indispensable to the fur trade had turned to farming on traditional lots along the Red River, and later, on river lots facing the North Saskatchewan River and Lac la Biche. When these rights were threatened, resistance events led to the Red River Rebellion, and fourteen years later, to the Northwest Rebellion of 1885 which involved areas of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

The sale by the Hudson Bay Company of the vast holdings known as Rupert's Land to the Canadian government in 1870 opened the door to massive colonial settlement of the prairie lands, a change which required the displacement of Indigenous people. The First Nations and Métis would not see a cent of the 1.5 million dollars paid to the HBC, and instead of being allotted a portion of the millions of acres of land the HBC retained, they found themselves squeezed out of the land they had begun to farm.

This led to the negotiation of Treaties between 1871 and 1877 which established rights and ongoing obligations for shared territory, resources, health and education. There are five major Treaties which cover most of Alberta. Treaty 4 was signed in 1874 in southeast Alberta involving the Cree, Nakoda and Anishnabe people. Treaty 6 was signed in 1876 with Cree, Nakoda and Anishnabe people through Central Alberta and Saskatchewan. Treaty 7 was negotiated with people living south of the Red Deer River, including the Blackfoot Confederacy Sarcee and Nakoda. Treaty 8 was signed in 1899 with the Cree, Dene and Dane-zaa people of Northern Alberta, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories. Finally, Treaty 10 was signed in 1906 with Indigenous people living in east-central Alberta and Saskatchewan.

The treaties between First Nations and the Crown relegated the First Nations to reserves that were often on land not considered as having agricultural potential; 10 acres for each family, as opposed to the

160 acres claimed by the colonial settlers who displaced them. They were supposed to signify a final surrender of ancestral lands and a way of life through agreements that were administered through a combination of duplicity and misrepresentation. Surrender of land, however, meant little to the Indigenous people who saw the Creator as the only owner of the land, with whom they contracted to make use of the territory they were granted.

The Canadian *Indian Act* was enacted in 1876 with a clear intention to control and assimilate the First Nations through a number of provisions, all of which add to the memories weighing on the minds of today's Indigenous people. The Act empowered the government to dictate First Nations statutes, band membership, and reserve management, and as Treaties were signed, thousands of First Nations were moved onto reserves, often far away from their traditional territories and on land of poor quality. A 'passbook' system, furthermore, prohibited them from leaving these reserves without permission, discouraging assembly in large numbers. In 1883 Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald put forward the creation of a residential school system for First Nations children in the Canadian West and Sir Hector Langevin, Secretary of State for the Provinces, multiplied the pain these caused by insisting that First Nations children should be separated from their families in order educate and civilize them. In essence, his intention was to "kill the Indian in the child". The memories left on the minds of many of the interviewees were so painful that they could not even discuss them. However, Trevor Stace, who assisted survivors of these schools, was able to open a small window on them.

Under the new colonial regime, Alberta would become home to eight self-governing Métis settlements established under the *Métis Betterment Act* of the 1930's, and confirmed through subsequent legislation in the 1990's. These settlements are located at Buffalo Lake, East Prairie, Elizabeth, Fishing Lake, Gift Lake, Kikino, Paddle Prairie and Peavine. The forerunners of today's Métis also settled in the St. Albert area in the 1800's when Father Lacombe encouraged them to move from Lac Ste Anne. Many of these people trace their ancestry back to the Hudson's Bay Company's Red River Settlement in Manitoba. Lewis Cardinal explains the origins of many of Alberta's Métis through the working relationships of the fur trade.

Labour and that work that was put into it, again, was supporting the relationship, the kinship ties between the settlers and the Indigenous people. Within that trade network, many settlers married into Indigenous nations. That's why as much as up to forty percent of Canadians have an Indigenous person in their family tree. They needed those relationships to have the resources accessible to do the trade and the business that was



The St. Mary's Residential School (1898 – 1988) located between Cardston and Standoff was one of hundreds funded by the federal government and operated by the Catholic, United and Anglican churches in a system overseen by Edmonton' Frank Oliver who served as Minister of the Interior and Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs from 1905 to 1911. *PAA PR1973.0248a.92.0004*



Karen Three Persons, who grew up in the nearby Kainai Nation, survived her years at the school to become a highly-respected nurse, serving in the segregated federal Blood Indian Hospital for Indigenous patients and the Cardston Municipal Hospital, where she specialized in different areas of nursing care, including homecare and traditional care for elders. A proud member of the United Nurses of Alberta, she served for years as president of her Local.

required to build what became Fort Edmonton, what became the City of Edmonton, what became the Province of Alberta, and what became this great country that we call Canada.

It would be another century before the rights of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada were recognized by an amendment to the Constitution Act in 1982. In 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized in Parliament to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people for the harm caused by the residential school system. Finally, on December 15, 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its final Report with 94 Calls to Action that would heal the relationship between Canadians and the country's Indigenous people.

Linda Robinson, First Nations, worked for four decades as financial administrator for the Alberta Federation of Labour during which she served on the executive of the Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union local 458. She was involved with the Human Rights and International Solidarity Committee of the Federation, which promoted relationships between organized labour and the aboriginal community. In an interview with ALHI, she expressed deep disappointment at the failure of government and civil society to address issues facing Indigenous workers and their communities. However, she offered one major message of hope:

My hope is in the youth. Right now, we have the highest percentage of educated youth ever. They're not just educated in western institutions; they're educated in our culture. They're the hope, they're the future. I look at Idle No More and I see all these young people out there talking, addressing the issues. They know what it's all about and they're really well prepared and they know the direction they want to go. ... I talk to kids and I tell them the ancestors when they signed the treaties, they made education number one. You look in all the treaties across Canada and education is the number one thing. They knew, for all the backward type of people we were supposed to be back then, they knew that if we didn't have an education, we wouldn't be able to survive in this country. So, I tell the kids, honour our ancestors by staying in school and getting that education, because that's what you need and that's how we're going to get change. I see this group of young people that's coming along now – they're our hope and they're our future, and they're going to make changes.

A complete transcript of interview with Stanley Knowlton can be seen on the Alberta Labour History Institute website at albertalabourhistory.org/indigenous-labour-history-project/**stanley-knowlton**.

The interview with Linda Robinson can be seen at albertalabourhistory.org/indigenous-labour-history-project/**linda-robinson**



LEWIS CARDINAL

Métis Community Leader and Indigenous Rights Activist

> *"Another lesson that my grandparents taught me is that we have to think seven generations ahead. You're not thinking about yourself, but you're thinking about the next generation and what you're going to leave behind to make their world a little bit better."*

Lewis Cardinal was born in the early 1960's at Sucker Creek First Nation near Lesser Slave Lake in northeastern Alberta. His Cree name is Blue Sky, which could not be more fitting for a man who has become such an inspirational teacher and orator with an expansive world view and no shortage of ideas. He has dined with the late Queen Elizabeth II and accompanied the Dalai Lama on his trip to Canada. Among his many honours is the 2007 Indspire Award for Public Service.

Lewis sense of leadership goes back generations to the signing of the Treaties in the late 1800's.

Treaty 8 was created by my second great grandfather and his brother and their brothers. They negotiated Treaty 8 and signed it in 1899 at Willow Point at Sucker Creek on the very west shore of the Lesser Slave Lake. Treaty 6 was signed by several of my relatives as well. The whole thing about treaties and treaty relationship is really central to a lot of the identity of who I am.

Lewis is equally proud of his Métis heritage.

My grandmother was Métis, born at Lac Ste. Anne, not far from the city here. Her ancestors originally came from county Sligo in Ireland in 1812, and they worked in all of the forts from Ft. Garry in what is now Manitoba, all the way here to Fort Edmonton until it closed in 1915. So that Métis part of that history really also defines sharply the work ethic, the commitment to family, the commitment to community.

Most people have no idea about the legal restrictions imposed on First Nations to facilitate colonial settlement. For example, they did not have the right to a lawyer until 1951 or the right to vote in federal elections until 1961. They had to get permission to leave the reserve to work or hunt, and they had to get permission from an Indian Agent to sell any of their agricultural produce, a request that was often denied to the benefit of white farmers.

Lewis recognized his father as a trailblazer. He was one of the first men to leave his reserve to go work without first seeking permission. He took employment in mines and lumber mills across northern Alberta and British Columbia, and eventually found politics. Lewis was nine years old in 1970 when his father became vice-president of the Indian Association of Alberta and the family moved to Edmonton. Both his father and grandfather were heavily involved in Indigenous politics.

So, I grew up during the heyday of the Indian movement from 1968 to 1974. I was very fortunate to be in the eye of the hurricane, as I like to call it, because so much social change was happening at the same time. But the consistency of supporting the community, the consistency of building relationships, was always key to everything that they did. It was easy for me to be inspired by that sense of greatness – the greatness to commitment, the greatness to the power of relationship.

Lewis was hired for his first job at Edmonton's Hotel Macdonald when he was only fourteen; management thought he was much older. He found he had to work twice as hard as others to counter the racist stereotype that Indigenous people are lazy and unreliable. He proved them wrong; in fact, he excelled. He went on to other jobs in labour and construction, just as his father had, before deciding to attend university. Choosing education as his field of study, he completed three undergraduate degrees before

completing a PhD program at the University of Alberta researching Indigenous people's education.

I started supporting the community working with students, and then through that, the community recognized my abilities to get things done. They started to ask me to do things. So that's how I started getting involved in community advocacy. Fairly soon then the local Elders came to me and they said, we want you to run for office.

Lewis did just that, running for city council, then for Parliament, coming in a respectable second in both cases. He was teaching and raising his family at the same time, and believed it was time to shift his focus to the next generation of leaders.

I think when I define myself it would be I'm a community advocate but I'm also a community capacity developer, helping build social infrastructure for our people in the cities. Edmonton has the second largest urban Indigenous population in Canada but also it has the largest population in the way that over 130,000 Indigenous people utilize the City of Edmonton on a daily basis.

Recent demographics indicate that over seventy percent of Indigenous people no longer live in traditional communities, on the First Nations reserves or in Métis settlements. They have moved to urban centres for employment opportunities and a better life for their families. There are more than sixty distinct Indigenous nations in Canada and all are represented in Edmonton. Yet, unlike other cultural and religious groups, Indigenous people are the only ones who have to leave the city to practice their sacred ceremonies. This provided the inspiration for a project on which Lewis and a group of Elders worked for almost two decades and came to fruition in 2023. Known as kihciy askiy, 'Sacred Land,' it was the result of a partnership with the City of Edmonton in which several hectares of land in Edmonton's river valley along a bend of the Whitemud Creek were set aside for the Indigenous people, restoring what was once a traditional place for eons of generations to gather for ceremony and trade. Lewis explains:

There are over 60 different Indigenous nations in Canada, and every single one of them are represented here in the city of Edmonton. So kihciy askiy then becomes a site where each of those traditional knowledge keepers can come and transfer their knowledge to their own people in their own way. While this is predominantly Cree territory, we also recognize that our relatives from across Canada also have need to access their culture and their history. So now a young person can take a bus from downtown with a towel wrapped under their arm and come down here to have a sweat lodge

with their elder. We can have space for Indigenous children and families to learn about their history, their identity, and who they really are and what opportunities may lie ahead for them in the future. Kihciy askiy is a place of prayer, a place a connection: 8 connecting to your ancestors, connecting to Mother Earth, connecting to the history of your people, connecting to your family, and connecting to your identity. That's so important to develop contributing and participating citizens to work in a good way to become who they are and to contribute to the broader society. That's why kihciy askiy then becomes important. It also becomes important as a place of teaching for non-Indigenous people. They can also come down....

So now a young person can take a bus from downtown with a towel wrapped under their arm and come down here to have a sweat lodge with their Elder... kihciy askiy is a place of prayer, a place of connection: connecting to your ancestors, connecting to Mother Earth, connecting to the history of your people, connecting to your family, and connecting to your identity.

The natural setting in the heavily-treed location gives his people, and the young in particular, a chance to re-establish the intimate relationship with nature that is so central to their culture. Lewis notes that archeologists have discovered numerous artifacts at the *kihciy askiy* site, a place known for its deposits of white mud used in rites of passage and other ceremonies - hence the name Whitemud Creek. The Cree also mined ochre from a nearby deposit in the river bank which they mixed with fat and berries for use in their ceremonies. He believes the reclaiming the Sacred Land provides an important opportunity for non-Indigenous citizens to learn about our shared history as a means to finding common ground to break down the barriers of racism and discrimination.

A lot of people don't realize just how much Indigenous people have put into the creation of the City of Edmonton and this province. A lot of people don't know how many Métis helped build bridges and towers, the CN Tower for example, was built by Métis ironworkers… And I think the more that we understand those contributions, the better we can really respect each other.

What about the early days of discovery and the fur trade? Lewis explains:

Canada could not have been born without the sweat, toil, and tears and commitment of Indigenous people bringing them out here, helping them build their forts, creating provisions, tilling fields, and all this sort of work, to create a relationship that was mutually beneficial.

A complete transcript of this interview is available on the Alberta Labour History Institute website at albertalabourhistory.org/**lewis-cardinal**



MURIEL STANLEY VENNE

Métis Community Leader and Indigenous Rights Activist

> *"I knew that one of the most important things you can do for people is to let them know that they matter and that they have rights."*

Muriel Stanley Venne was a petite, elegant, and visionary Métis woman, known for the signature Stetson she often wore. She passed away on December 17, 2024, but if there ever was a person who left the world a much better place for her existence, it was Muriel. Every moment of her adult life was dedicated to addressing inequality and human rights for Indigenous people, especially Indigenous women. The list of accomplishments and the awards she received over her eighty-seven years on earth is simply astounding. To highlight just a few: In 2005, she became the first Métis person inducted into the Order of Canada. In 2010, she received a Distinguished Citizen Honorary Bachelor of Arts Degree from MacEwan University. In 2017, the Alberta Government named a provincial building after her.

Muriel came from humble beginnings. Born Muriel Esther Kopp at Lamont in 1937, she and her twin brother were the eldest of ten children in a Métis farming family. The villages of Andrew and Whitford east of Edmonton were named after her uncle, and many of her neighbours in east central Alberta were Ukrainian settlers. Soon after her family moved to Edmonton in the early 1950's, fifteen-year-old Muriel contracted tuberculosis and spent an entire year in treatment at the Aberhart Memorial Sanitorium in Edmonton, about which she said:

"*That experience was very difficult because it was bed rest. After three months of not getting out of bed, I was given fifteen minutes to sit on a chair. When I stepped out, I fell to the floor because, of course, your leg muscles atrophy and you have nothing to stand on. But that was the cure. I tried to run away once, but I chickened out. I left something in the door so I could get back in. I had nowhere to run anyhow.*

Once home, Muriel was still too weak to return to school, so she took care of her siblings while both her parents worked to pay the bills. This period was devastating to her sense of ambition. She had passed her Grade Nine departmental exams, but missed the chance to prove herself in high school.

It was probably the worst time in my life, when I thought that I was going to lose track of getting anywhere in life. I was just going to watch kids.

Muriel married at seventeen and in quick succession, became mother to four children. It was not until later in life that she spoke openly about the abuse she suffered in her marriage and how that shaped the rest of her life.

I didn't work until I decided to leave my husband. It was at that point that I really found myself. I was in very bad shape, if you can imagine. In those days, if your husband beat you, you didn't talk about it…So then, I went back to school. I was planning on going to university and I took all the courses by correspondence, including French. I got my matriculation and entered university. By that time our marriage was gone. It had a very, very violent ending as well. I was left for dead in the back alley of our home.

Despite all of her early setbacks, Muriel managed to begin building a new life, completing three years of university before having to give it up to go to work in order to support her children.

I saw this little wee ad in the paper which said Métis Nation was hiring. So, I went over there and I got what was left. All the other positions were filled except the 'job opportunities in placement' position, which turned out to be the best thing that ever happened. There were very few people there who had any education at all, any secondary education. So, I started Native Outreach and hired all the good people

in the province, I believe. I was younger than all of them, but they were terrific. Native Outreach began as a three-year government sponsored program, but it grew to become one of the most successful such programs in the country. Said Muriel:

Syncrude was going at that time and Native Outreach was there. We held seminars and training for the workers. Mostly, we lobbied with the unions to try to get our guys in.

She was also not afraid to lobby the government and company executives to make the case for Indigenous rights. In 1973 she made a presentation to Premier Peter Lougheed when he was visiting Slave Lake in which she described the discrimination against Indigenous people, as well as the work of counsellors who were trying to assist them in their search for jobs. Her comments must have hit home.

I still remember the phone call from him at 8:30 in the morning, telling me he was creating the Alberta Human Rights Commission. He then asked me if I would agree to be a commissioner. My work on the Commission really helped me focus on all people and the tremendous amount of work that needed to be done to help give Indigenous people a real voice in this province.

During those initial four years when she was part of the original seven-person Alberta Human Rights Commission created under the Lougheed administration, Muriel advanced the interests of Métis people, while her colleague Marvin Fox, spoke for workers from the First Nations. This led to Muriel chairing a new Aboriginal Commission on Human Rights and Justice. Amongst its many achievements, the Commission helped Indigenous people negotiate a system to deal with complaints of discrimination, whether at work, school or in encounters with police. Muriel was particularly proud of a booklet she helped publish entitled "The Rights Path," which explained the human rights Alberta's Indigenous people could claim. It was endorsed by Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In 1994, Muriel founded the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW). Its purpose was to counter the negative stereotypes in society which cast Indigenous women as prostitutes, addicts and bad parents. She desperately wanted others to respect Indigenous women as human beings and to give them credit for their strength of spirit and resiliency. The next year, Muriel and long-time friend and colleague, Margo Pariseau, established the Esquao Awards. Since then, more than four hundred Indigenous women from eighty Alberta communities have been honoured for their accomplishments in a variety of fields, from doctors,

teachers, artists, community leaders. Muriel chose the term “Esquao,” as it derived from the Cree word for woman. Over its thirty-year history, the IAAW has participated in UN forums, developed programs and research projects, and in 2024, purchased a 22,000 square foot building as a new centre to house its many staff and activities.

So, I thought, if we don't honour our own women first, how can we expect the other people to do it? That was why we created the Esquao Awards, simply to honor Aboriginal women. We believe that it is the only organization in the world that is totally dedicated to the Aboriginal women in a province. It's been wonderful; it's really been wonderful in bringing us together.

Muriel led several projects within the Alberta Labour History Institute to preserve the stories of Indigenous workers. A particular focus for her continued to be the movement to bring attention to missing and murdered Indigenous women and the systemic racism Indigenous women endure at the hands men, an uncaring society and the justice system.

The extent of vulnerability of Aboriginal women is incredible in this country. We've had so many examples, like serial killers in Saskatchewan, and Vancouver, and the Highway of Tears - unconscionable suffering by families for the deaths of the women...I believe the deaths of Aboriginal women in Canada to be the shame of this country. Canadian representatives cannot stand up at any international forum, such as the United Nations, and talk about the persecution of women in any country until they solve and address the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. There's been so many. The Native Women's Association has counted 562 women murdered and missing, but I believe the number is much higher, and it’s higher, I believe, because of bad police work.

On the political front, Muriel ran for the New Democratic Party in both federal and provincial elections during the 1980’s. In 2017, the government of Alberta honoured Muriel’s lifelong dedication to Indigenous rights by naming a provincial building after her. The Muriel Stanley Venne Provincial Centre is in Edmonton at 142nd Street and 123rd Avenue. At the unveiling ceremony, Muriel offered words of inspiration and encouragement to all Indigenous women.

I hope this is a sign to young women and girls across the country that they can raise their voices and demand to be treated with respect. In the past, I didn’t feel welcomed in my community, my province or my country. That has changed today.

A complete transcript of this interview is available on the Alberta Labour History Institute Website at albertalabourhistory.org/indigenous-labour-history-project/**muriel-stanley-venne-1**



TREVOR ISAAC EDWARD STACE

Labour Historian and Worker

> *"In choosing the study of labour history, maybe it's giving an Indigenous perspective to potentially a non-Indigenous topic that was new and that was a way I could contribute."*

The work life of Trevor Isaac Edward Stace took a long and circuitous route before he discovered his passion as a labour historian. He was born in Edmonton in 1983 to a father who came from Sainte-Rose, Quebec and a mother from the Little Grand Rapids First Nation in Manitoba, and grew up on the City's southside, attending W.P. Wagner High School.

Trevor came to value his Indigenous heritage and acquired an adventurous spirit because of his mother. In his words, she chose to segregate herself from the reserve when she moved to Edmonton in the 1970's, leaving behind siblings and her connection to family and its past. Lessons she imparted to her son have lasted a lifetime.

I had personal history with being an Indigenous person. In my spare time, I study Indigenous history where I can. It was a personal passion and it's a personal interest, and I keep it near and dear to my heart and the people around me.

Trevor dropped out of Indigenous Studies during his first year at the University of Alberta, after which he worked at various jobs, pumping gas, assembling gas meters in a shop manufacturing oil field equipment, and even moving into shipping and receiving, before he finally thought to give higher learning another chance. He retains particularly clear memories of his job at National Oil Well Varco, where he assembled gas meters for pipelines, an experience he described as 'brutish.'

Trevor proved meticulous on the job with an eye for detail, which helped him survive a downturn at the company, kept on while most of the crew was laid off. He moved into shipping and receiving, and then delivery, but after missing out on a promotion to management, realized that it was time to move on, a decision that took him back to an academic life:

... for that year that I was driving, I also started attending Grant MacEwan Community College at night. I didn't quite know what I wanted to do, but just that I was just taking Arts courses because they were university transferrable credits. When I got my grades back, I was starting to pass everything. How do I choose? Is it about passion? Is it about interest? At that particular time, it was pragmatism that informed my decision. I saw, hey, I'm getting better marks in psychology than I am in any other course. So, when it came time to apply to the University of Alberta again, I applied for a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Psychology.

It was while taking an introductory course on Roman history, when he was just six credits short of completing a Bachelor's degree, and when he was still not settled on what he would do with a degree, that he experienced the power of serendipity.

All of a sudden, a graduate student does a presentation. It's like, hey, does anybody here need six credits? My ears kind of perked up from the back of the room. Does anybody here like classical history or the idea of getting those six credits in Rome? In my head my wheels are spinning. Anybody want to spend a month in Italy? I said, yeah, this is great.

Professors Steven Hijmans and Andrew Gow, accepted Trevor into a month-long field course in Rome. While there, students were walked to a different site each day at which they were presented a comprehensive account of the history of the location. Evenings were spent back at the hostel, a convent, where they shared dinner and became acquainted with each other.

It was then that Trevor Stace finally discovered his passion for history. He went back to the University of Alberta and completed the courses needed to qualify for a Masters' program in history, after which he was accepted into a PhD program at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. After four years in the program, however, economic strain forced the couple back to Edmonton, where Trevor was awarded a contract by the Alberta Labour History Institute to conduct research that would inform an indigenous labour history project.

Trevor's life changed once again when his wife landed an art gallery job in North Battleford, Saskatchewan. In March 2020, the couple packed up pets and belongings, and drove 3500 kilometers west. Everything looked great until the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a global pandemic, and his whole world was locked down. Trevor's wife was not able to start her new job until the fall. Trevor continued working on his doctoral dissertation, but had to find work to bring in some money. The couple was surviving on CERB, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, when Trevor was offered a job at Walmart as the "meat guy", hauling meat out of the freezer. Excited by this, he dashed over to the art gallery to tell his wife the news. Lynne's boss was also there, and once again, serendipity intervened to change Trevor's life.

She said, what else have you applied for? Well, I saw this other position as a tutor and I applied for that with this person named Eleanore Sunchild. She said, oh, I know Eleanore. She's a lawyer. She's like, let me make a call here. She gets out her phone, Eleanore picks up. Tell him to come in tomorrow afternoon at 1 o'clock for an interview.

Sunchild first hired Trevor to tutor her thirteen-year-old son, but before long, had Trevor working as a paralegal on claims she was handling for survivors of Indian day schools.

In 1920, the federal government had enacted a law requiring all Indigenous children between the ages of four and sixteen to attend Indian day schools. These were generally on the reserves where children attended school during the day and went home at night, differentiating them from the Indian residential schools. Both systems, however, were designed to eradicate their Indigenous culture, language and community, and students suffered physical, emotional and sexual abuse in both. Indian day schools were excluded from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as from Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement of 2006, leaving survivors to pursue their own class action suits against the federal government. They won a large settlement on August 19, 2019, which established categories of abuse and levels of compensation for survivors who filed claims.

699 federally operated Indian day schools were recognized, but more than 680 other Indian day schools were not. Trevor was hired by Sunchild Law to provide legal assistance to day school survivors making more complicated claims.

I worked from September 2020 until July of 2022. I went and proofed and was witness to about 900 narratives of abuse of Indian day school students. It was tough. It's something that I had not really heard about before working there. It really kind of bothered me. Here I was proofing these documents and I could see what was happening. It was just as bad as what happened at those residential schools – maybe not during the night, but definitely there's a lot of back rooms and places that abuse can occur inside facilities. It was work that was very, well, it was really kind of sad. At the end of the day, it was tough just to kind of deal with it. It was a really stressful job.

The settlement agreement established categories of abuse and five levels of compensation ranging from $10,000 for Level 1 to $200,000 for Level 5. Survivors could fill out claim forms for Level 1 and Level 2 compensation easily enough, but those who had experienced multiple harms such as both physical and sexual abuse were often reluctant to recall the trauma, and needed assistance.

It was the lawyer's job to guide them through that in a very, I guess, therapeutic way… to kind of open the shell of these individuals who experienced trauma in the places, these institutions. They took notes. My job was to proof that narrative afterwards…The claims process was people provided a narrative of what happened to them and that's it, that's the extent. But that still is a little tricky to do on your own. People are exploring these emotions that they probably kept suppressed for quite a long time or are still suffering from. They have to write a coherent narrative that a claims administrator is going to review and then assess at a certain level…That's the difficulty when people just sort of string together a narrative without legal consultation for a legal matter…I can only imagine that if you put your heart on the line to develop your narrative and then you get the government saying no you're not a Level 5, you're a Level 3, that could be incredibly retraumatizing...When I worked at Sunchild Law, I started to think of our position kind of as a shield.

Trevor's job as a paralegal ended once the deadline for submitting claims passed in July of 2022, after which he landed a position as an historian with Parks Canada, which entailed a move to Ontario.

A complete transcript of this interview is available on the Alberta Labour History Institute Website at albertalabourhistory.org/**trevor-stace-2**



JODI CALAHOO STONEHOUSE

Member of the Alberta Legislative Assembly

"It's really about the love and nurturing, learning to love ourselves when, really, we were demonized."

Jodi Calahoo Stonehouse was elected to the Alberta Legislative Assembly in 2023, winning more than 65 percent of the vote in the riding of Edmonton Rutherford. Her win as a New Democrat MLA marked the first time a First Nations woman would take a seat in the provincial legislature.

Of Cree and Mohawk heritage, Jodi's lineage goes all the way back to Iroquois hunter and fur trader named Karhiio, also Kwarakwante, Calehue, or as he finally came to be known, Louis Calahoo. Louis was contracted by the Northwest Company as a fur trader, and in 1800 paddled from Montreal to Fort Edmonton. When his contract with the Northwest Company ended in 1814, he and some of the other Iroquois traders stayed out west as Freemen. Louis's son Michel was chosen as

the first chief of what became known as the Michel Band. In 1878, Michel Calahoo signed an adhesion to Treaty 6, and in 1880, the Michel Band was granted a reserve of 25,600 acres along the Sturgeon River. It was prime agricultural land coveted by the settlers, however, and from the early 1900's onward, the Federal Government and developers schemed to get the land. Jodi's grandfather Roderick Calahoo was the last hereditary chief when the Michel Band finally lost the remaining acres of its reserve in 1958. Said Jodi:

I do know that in 1958, there was a meeting between two priests, a representative from the Federal Government, and fifteen men from the community. There are multiple stories. Some men say they were going to learn about what enfranchisement means, all kinds of different stories. Ultimately, it meant that there were an enfranchisement and some, not all families, were paid to leave the reserve. I think it was $3,000 to leave their homelands. Some moved to St. Albert, some moved to Kikino, some to Alexander, some to Alexis, and some to Onoway, Calahoo, Villeneuve, Riviere Qui Barre, the smaller surrounding towns. It isn't so much the loss of the land that has really been devastating, it's been the loss of our connection to one another. When I go to other First Nations and spend time, kids are going to their grandparents or their aunts for dinner or their uncles, or they're riding their bikes to their cousins. We didn't have that.

In 1985, after years of legal battles, the Government of Canada finally restored full Indian status to 750 descendants of the original Michel Band. Jodi believes that there could be at least 500 more to claim status, and the fight continues to regain band status for the Michel First Nation.

Jodi grew up in Onoway. When she was seventeen, her family relocated to Calgary. At first, she hated the move, but in retrospect, she calls it the best thing that ever happened.

I ended up going to Bowness High School where Steven Harper came to our high school and he brought Mikhail Gorbachev to visit. I was chosen to be the ambassador and I got to spend some time with Mikhail Gorbachev and his daughter. It was, I think, that moment in my life where I recognized that the world is not so far away. These leaders that we read about and learn about really are not so far away from our realities, and the things we do impact people around the world. It was a really profound moment as a young girl to speak and get to know him through his daughter. It was a blessing. (around March 23, 1993).

Following high school, Jodi enrolled in a Community Rehabilitation program at Mount Royal University. She spent her practicum at Morley, Alberta,

the headquarters of the Stoney Nakoda Nations, where she worked with indigenous elementary and high school students.

That's where I really learned about the harm of racism. To me, it was unfathomable that a high school had no high school graduates, that the same curriculum that I received from grade 12 was not being offered. Still to this day in 2023 the same curriculum is not offered to First Nations children on reserve, because reserves are federal lands. So, systemic racism is embedded in education.

Jodi discussed the residential school system, which operated in one form or another before Confederation until the last school closed in 1996. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission established that of the 150,000 children who were forced into the system, over 6000 died, many buried in unmarked graves. After 1894, attendance was compulsory. The system was funded by the Federal Government under the Indian Act and was administered by various Churches. It isolated Indigenous youth from their families and communities for the purpose of assimilating them into Euro-Canadian society or what has been called the act of "killing the Indian in the child". Removing children from their communities led to much harm, including physical and sexual abuse, malnutrition and disease. As a result, the residential school legacy is one of overwhelming trauma from neglect and loss of identity, a trauma that filters through the generations. She described the effect of losing ties to family, in particular one's parents

The fractured family identity is huge. Then you have babies and you've never learned nurturing, kindness and love. In fact, you were raped, sodomized, abused, neglected, beat, and you're often using drugs and alcohol to numb your trauma. Then you have children. Well, you have no coping skills and you have no parenting skills, not through any fault of your own but because you've experienced nothing but horrors. It's not just a school or a family, it's the majority. Alberta had the highest number of Indian Residential Schools, which means we have the highest number of Indian Residential School survivors and intergenerational survivors. It takes generations to break the cycles of trauma and abuse and harm and neglect. ....

Over time, in my anti-racist work, I started to look at colonialism, genocide, all of the things that impact a people. Now since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, all Canadians are starting to grapple and understand the reality that First Nations have had to live through and the legacy of the Indian Residential School.

Jodi eventually moved back to Onoway to start a family and eventually to further her education. After graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Native Studies, she studied Indigenous legal theory at the University of Victoria, where she earned an MSc in Resource Economics.

My research was based up in Fort Chipewyan. I was looking at water and women's knowledge. In science everything is about men's knowledge… Coming from the trapline in my childhood, I knew that women know just as much as the men do, and trappers and hunters organizations focus on just the men. But I know that the grandmas and the aunties are just as busy on the trapline doing the work behind the scenes to make sure their husbands or their brothers can get out and are walking along beside them. My research focused on women's stories over time around the water, the delta, migration patterns and species.

Jodi's extraordinary accomplishments through her adult life are a testament to her drive and leadership skills. She has served on the Edmonton Police Commission and as Executive Director of the Yellowhead Indigenous Education Foundation. She spent many years at the University of Alberta, serving in faculty development, advancement, recruitment, community relations and as a reconciliation advisor. At the Faculty of Law, she helped establish the Wahkohtowin Law and Governance Lodge. Jodi also hosted the award-winning program *Acimowin* on CJSR campus radio, after which she produced a series of films on Indigenous themes including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Sixties Scoop. She named her company Miyo-Pimatsiwin Film Productions.

Miyo-Pimatsiwin in Cree means living your best life. When you're living your best life it means you're eating traditional foods from the land, you're speaking your language, you're participating in ceremony or prayer with your loved ones. Miyo-Pimatsiwin means you've got a good quality of life. Really, it's about bridging the gap between non-indigenous and indigenous folks. How can we tell our stories so we can get to know each other? That's really the biggest divide, that we don't know one another.

A complete transcript of this interview is available on the Alberta Labour History Institute Website at albertalabourhistory.org/jodi-calahoo-stonehouse-2



MÉTIS IRONWORKERS

> *"We used to play with the angels every day, climbing and fighting and going around having a good time. But if you didn't have a good time, there was no sense working."*
>
> – Ivan Beauregard



The twenty-six story CN Tower built in Edmonton between 1964 and 1966 remained the tallest building in Western Canada until 1971. Most people would be surprised to learn that much of the extremely dangerous construction work on this early skyscraper was done by a group of Métis ironworkers. The main contractor on the job was the McCurdy Steel company, and through him, the workers earned the nickname 'McCurdy's Indians.' Through the 1960's and 1970's, they worked on most of the skyscrapers in Edmonton's downtown core, where they developed a reputation for being fearless, quick, and always able to overcome incredible challenges to get the job done.

In 2018, the Alberta Labour History Institute interviewed seven of these retired Métis ironworkers, recording their memories of working high in the sky. The group included Tom Daniels, Larry Avery, Ivan Kelly Beauregard, Homer Doucet, Hugh Edgar, and brothers Hugh Kopp and Denis Redhorse Kopp. On the basis of the interview and with additional research ALHI produced a video documentary "Waltzing with the Angels" to immortalize the contribution these proud ironworkers made to the City of Edmonton.

The workers came to the trade as young men, generally from rural communities, with no high school diplomas, and looking for work. Their wages at the time ranged from below a dollar an hour, and later, to just over five dollars, when they became member of the Ironworkers' Union. Safety provisions were woefully limited compared to today's standards. Instead of a full safety harness, for example, they would rely on a 'hook' made out of a piece of heavy wire to hold them against the building as they tied wire to the rebar pillars. Tom Daniels remembers,

We didn't have the luxury of steel toed boots, safety belts, nothing. Not even snap-on hooks. We made our own. You come to the job. You got a hook? No. Here's a piece of rebar. Make one. That was the whole thing. I think the reason, in my estimation, is get the job done.

Hugh Edgar recalled what it was like to work without guardrails.

The carpenters would get the floors ready, put the concrete in but we were in such a hurry to get started. They never had the guard railing up yet and we'd be putting the perimeter beam in. You're looking down over the edge and people looked like ants down there. It's a long ways down and we just couldn't wait for them to get that guard railing in. It was hurry, hurry, hurry.

They worked with rebar, twelve-foot lengths of heavy moulded steel rods that were used to reinforce the concrete poured around them. It was their job to carry the rebar on their shoulders to where it would be tied with wire onto the 'pillars' before the concrete was poured over them. It was painful, backbreaking work, as Larry Avery recalls.

We did three thousand tons of rebar. We worked at it pretty hard day and night, twelve-hour shifts. The boys at nights would do the CAD welding, which was columns added up together all the way up to the top of the tower. Then, in the daytime, the boys would come in and do the slabs for each floor. We were doing a floor every second week. It was hard work and dangerous really. We were sliding around on slippery floors. The floor was all greased with diesel fuel so the concrete wouldn't stick to it, and they had to put that down before they put the rebar on it because you can't get no oil on the rebar. The rebar has to adhere to the concrete.

Accidents invariably happened and sometimes they were fatal. Tom Daniels lost brothers, also ironworkers, to accidents on other jobs. Hugh Edgar recalled one particular fatal accident that occurred during the construction of the CN Tower.

When we were first starting the building, we were on the third floor. One of the foremen, he was working up on a wall. He was 57 feet up and he fell and he ended up going right down through an elevator shaft. It ripped him all apart and it killed him. It was just a mess. Nowadays, you'd be hanging on a rope. When he fell, he would never got hurt. But back then it was just very, very dangerous the way things were done. No safety equipment.

This brotherhood of Métis ironworkers bonded over the daily experience of supporting each other as they faced down fear on the job. But their swagger did not end there. They regularly took that same bravado into rodeo rings across Alberta and North America. A few beers afterwards never hurt, either.

Looking back, Tom Daniels reflects on what this group of Métis ironworkers accomplished.

We got these jobs because other people couldn't do it. That's how we got them. Because we didn't care. It's work. And along with work, the money, I think there's a great big sense of pride that you've done this. And now I drive through town with my great grandkids. I'll say, yeah, Papa worked on that one. Papa worked on this one. It makes you feel good that you're leaving behind something for generations of Métis kids to come.

A video of the Waltzing with the Angels is available for viewing on the Alberta Labour History Institute Website at albertalabourhistory.org/**waltzing-with-the-angels**



DESMOND THOMAS

Journeyman Pipefitter

"Regarding my pipefitting career, I've been extremely blessed, always employed, always had good men and women teaching me the trades."

Desmond Thomas is a pipefitter and a member of the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters, Local 488. He was born in 1983 in Grande Prairie and is a member of the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation. At the age of two, his mother moved the family to Edmonton, which is where he and his four siblings grew up and went to school. Desmond talked about the struggles he went through in his early years.

A couple months before I was to graduate or we'll say finish Grade 12, I'd gotten thrown in jail for almost a year for, again, we're going to call that 'conflict.' When I got out of jail, I was still a pretty destructive individual at that time. But you know what, thank Creator for a mother's love. At 19 years old, she cried at my feet and begged me to move out of the city. Those were literally the only two options for me; either go to jail for the rest of my life or die, because that was just the pattern that was happening around me.

Desmond's problems continued after he went to work in a variety of jobs in Grande Prairie. He finally entered a rehabilitation program for Indigenous people that combined treatment with training in the trades, and that was where his life began to change.

When I'd gone to rehab, my mind started to clear up. I started to learn some new things about sobriety, and more importantly, I was introduced to different opportunities to move forward in life once I got out. One of those opportunities was a program called Trade Winds to Success. One of the liaisons at the treatment centre I attended, which was Poundmaker's Lodge just north of Edmonton, approached me about this Aboriginal program called Trade Winds to Success. It helps Aboriginal people get into the trades. There were probably half a dozen different trades at the time. There was plumbing, electrician, ironworkers, pipefitters, boilermakers, carpenters. I was like, all right, which one makes the most money? These boilermakers do. Regardless, I got out of rehab, got myself into a recovery house, and that's where life really started to change for me.

Trade Winds to Success Training Society is located in the Coronet Industrial area just off 51st Avenue. The partners involved included the City of Edmonton, CMHC, several trade unions and companies both large and small. More than 3000 students have attended training sessions at the Society since 2005.

While I was in Trade Winds, we did something called a trade streaming process, where we sort of dived into each trade to see what they do. I'd seen what boilermakers do, and you can't pay me enough to do that. What really attracted me to pipefitting was that it looked like it was really meticulous work, took some skills, some really good hand skills. There's a lot of mathematics involved in pipefitting, I guess it depends on the type of pipefitter you are. But anyways, a lot of different mathematical skills, just things that I already had and stuff I didn't mind using. So, I did the Trade Winds to Success program which was absolutely incredible.

After completing the six-month pre-trades training course, Desmond immediately found employment in a fabricating shop. He registered for the apprenticeship program which he completed in three and a half years. Along the way he became the father of three children. In 2014, he earned his designation as a journeyman pipefitter, a great source of pride for him, and in 2022, started working on shutdown maintenance jobs. He talked about the dignity involved in 'doing the job right,' a habit that was instilled in him during his apprenticeship under a seasoned journeyman:

When I started my apprenticeship second year, got put on the fabrication table, I had gotten this journeyman, Jose DeSilva. He was my journeyman

I would estimate two and a half years. He's a Portuguese man who's probably early 50s when I first met him, 53 or 54. Extremely good shape and extremely hard work ethic, but most of all this man took pride in what he did. One of the first things he told me is, Des, I don't ever want to hear the words out of your mouth, "that's good enough." Good enough is never good enough. It's gotta be right; it's gotta be perfect. We're tradesmen, we are not just pipefitters. We're not just journeymen, we're tradesmen. We take pride in what we do.

Desmond also gave a great deal of credit to his Union for not only winning superior terms and conditions of employment, but for also engaging in affirmative action to ensure that the rights of ethnic minorities were integral to the way it conducted its business:

Success, this Aboriginal program, having a classroom within their college. I believe we also have - I'm going to call this individual an Indigenous liaison, but I know that's not the correct term. I believe it's like that across the board with all the unions, that they're putting an effort to try and get more Indigenous men and women into the trades and support them. Same deal with immigrants, people who have just moved to this incredible country of ours. I've seen a lot of different ethnicities on the workforce. I've seen a lot of Filipinos, I've seen a lot of Somalians, Ukrainians. The Plumbers and Pipefitters Union is extremely diverse today.

A combination of pride in his accomplishments that was combined with gratitude to all of the people who helped him succeed came through clearly in the interview.

Right how I've been at Scotford for the last two months, but I lucked into Scotford with not very many skills regarding shutdown or fieldwork, because I've always been in welding shops. But just like the welding shops I've worked in, I was surrounded by excellent tradesmen who again I found really took me under their wing. I had minimal skills, but they showed me how to perform the work effectively and safely, most importantly safely, because it's a dangerous trade. The result is that shutdown is done, 98 percent of the workers have been laid off, but I'm still there. Not only am I still there, but they transitioned me over to days, which is definitely a blessing. I feel, too, that it's a privilege, because there are some men and women who work so hard to try and get to the current position that I'm in. I was able to get to the position I'm in with this company in a matter of two months, again one hundred percent attributed to the men and women that I work with who keep teaching me. All I do is show up with a good attitude.

A complete transcript of this interview is available on the Alberta Labour History Institute Website at albertalabourhistory.org/**desmond-thomas-2**



DWAYNE NEMLANDER

Transit Driver

"I'm a proud Indigenous person and I do a lot to learn more about it, as much as I can, and promote it, and try and teach my kids what I've learned."

If you go looking for Dwayne Nemlander, you'll probably find him on one of Edmonton's roads behind the wheel of a big vehicle. Dwayne started his working life as a young man driving trucks. Then it was a school bus for a reserve near Cold Lake. The next stage led to jobs driving highway coaches before he finally, he 'landed a gig' he really enjoyed; driving coaches for musicians who were on tour. Eventually, however, he had to choose between spending months on the road away from his young family or coming home every night for supper and hugs from his children. So, these days, you will find Dwayne driving a transit bus for the City of Edmonton.

I would say it's a great job and I love it, but it has its challenges. You're definitely having to not only watch for passengers, people, and bus stops, what's going on in your bus, what's going around, all the traffic,

maneuvering a large vehicle throughout the city or wherever it is… It can be tough dealing with the public, depending on which part of town you're driving through and depending on the clientele you're going to get.

When asked about the human behavior he experienced in his contacts with the public, Dwayne referred to the Covid pandemic, that negatively influenced the way people respond to daily challenges.

I don't want to say anger, but it's definitely shifted how everything is with how people deal with a lot of things. We talk about the discrimination and the anger and stuff that people don't deal with, us following the rules that are set in place for us in public transit and this and that, and there's a lot of that. There's a lot of that social disorder on transit, because there's a lot of people that didn't have a lot of places to go. During Covid everything shut down. These people didn't have the places they could go to all the time: the libraries and the malls--everything was closed. So, they kind of moved into that downtown core and they still don't have any place to go. So they're still there. When they want to move around in the wintertime, you see a little bit more where they want to get on the bus and warm up and be warm. It's tough to have that. What do you do? Do you let them stay on because they're cold?

As an Indigenous transit driver, Dwayne is no stranger to discrimination. He has experienced it in the way passengers have treated him, as well as from each other.

Most times, it's if someone has a disagreement with you, and that's when it comes out. The funny part is, if there's a disagreement, they always tell me to 'to get a job, you lazy Indian'. I'm like, well, I'm pretty sure this is not a volunteer position. I have a job, I'm here, and if I didn't have this job, you wouldn't be able to get to where you're going.

Stereotypes such as those Dwayne has encountered underpin the systemic racism to which Indigenous people have been subjected since the early days of European settlement of Canada. Yet Dwayne's accomplishments fly in the face of these crippling societal myths. He has worked with the Edmonton Transit System for over seventeen years and is an active member of the Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 569. In addition to driving a bus, he participates as a teacher in the City of Edmonton's Indigenous awareness program which aims to break down racist stereotypes through better understanding of the hardships imposed on Canada's Indigenous people because of colonialism, and the inter-generational impact of the residential school system with its resulting loss of family, culture and identity. The sad reality is that until the Truth and Reconciliation Commission gathered testimonies from

Indigenous people in the early 2000's, most Canadians had little knowledge of the trauma and abuse visited upon the First Nations people. One critical factor in their history, has been the residential school system.

Ultimately the mandate was to kill the Indian in the child and make them assimilate to the white culture. They were taken from their homes and sent to a residential school to stay for however long. Most were six, seven, or eight when they first were taken to go, and you went until you actually turned sixteen. Once you turned sixteen, that was it; you were just kind of out the door and left to go on your own… A lot of them were not in their home communities. They were sent far away from their home communities and just left out on the streets to fend for themselves. Because you were taken away from your family, you're not knowing who your family is or who you are as a person. You're kind of left out on the street to fend for yourself. So a lot of these people turned to drugs and alcohol to kind of mask the pain of what went on in residential schools and what happened to them there. They really had no place to turn or anyone to turn to.

Even when these young survivors of the schools managed to return and reconnect with their relatives or communities, they would find the earlier generations also. Dwayne observes that even when resources are available to help the school survivors, people are often reluctant to use them. The truth and reconciliation process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, he believes, is only the beginning of a process of change which must take place.

Dwayne's own roots are with the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation in Alberta's northeast. However, like far too many Indigenous children, Dwayne was separated at birth from his mother, an act that had the effect of denying him a connection with his heritage and his blood relations.

I was actually adopted from birth, from three days old. I was born in Charles Camsell Hospital here in Edmonton and was put up for adoption from birth and adopted by a family here in Edmonton. I lived in West Edmonton for a good majority of my life.

At this stage of life, Dwayne finds himself uncovering his own heritage at the same time as he is shares his insights with others.

I've met a lot of people throughout my careers and my path and my journey, and I always like to share a little bit of the knowledge that I have so you have a better understanding of who I am and who we are as a culture and why we do things the way we do. If you're willing to listen, I'm always willing to talk.

Institute Website at albertalabourhistory.org/**dwayne-nemlander-2**



VICKI GILLINGHAM

Oil Sands Worker and Union Activist

> *"I had to work extra hard just to prove to them that I didn't need them to carry me. I didn't need them to do my work."*

When Vicki Gillingham set her sights on working in Alberta's newly developed oil sands, she faced discrimination on two fronts; firstly, for simply being Indigenous, and secondly, for being a woman who dared to enter a man's world of work.

Vicki was born in the late 1960'S in Pembroke, Ontario, but grew up in northern Alberta, splitting her young years between Fort McMurray and Fort Chipewyan. Life was rustic with few modern conveniences in the remote Indigenous communities that shaped her. In 1989, her home was still heated by a woodburning stove, and water was delivered by horse and cart to barrels in the kitchen. Since finishing high school, Vicki has worked in a number of jobs, including at the local volunteer fire department and at the municipal office. In addition, she devoted many of her evenings to looking after her grandmother.

It's tough to leave home. I was taking care of my granny with my dad. My dad worked at night and I worked during the day, because my granny was blind, so somebody had to be with her all the time. So, we worked shift – I worked during the day and my dad was home, then he worked at night so then I was with my granny at night. I didn't want to leave her.

Despite strong bonds to family and community, Vicki knew she had to get out of Fort Chipewyan. In the end, it was her dear granny who persuaded her to leave, counselling the young woman that "she had to work somewhere and she had to get a good job". So, at twenty years of age, Vicki struck out on her own. She enrolled in a ten-month program at Keyano College in Fort McMurray to train as a process operator in the oil sands, which included a six- month co-op placement at Suncor. After passing her exams, Suncor hired her to work as a process operator in the cokers, an entry level position.

Cokers are the upgrading units that 'crack' heavy bitumen residue at 450–500°C into lighter hydrocarbons and petroleum coke. The work involved incredibly hard, physical labour, and Vicki was the only female on the crew. Worse yet, in those early years, some men were not happy working with a woman. This was especially true of the older workers, the ones Vicki called the 'old school.' She soon realized that if she was going to survive at Suncor, she would have to work twice as hard as the men to prove she could hold her own.

You started off in the cokers as a 'grunt.' In the cokers, you're a pipefitter, you're a labourer, you're a boilermaker, you're everything. These drums get filled with the hot bitumen and then they're cooled, and that's where we get our vapours to make our gas, oil, kerosene. That's part of the process. You have to de-head these big coke drums. So, you take the top head off and, of course, you let all the water drain out, and then you take the bottom off of the drum. It's like a can, so you take the top off, take the bottom off, and then there's somebody that cuts the coke, like with a big drilling rig almost. It's dirty, it's hot, it's hard work. You find out you have muscles in the back of your shoulders and neck here that you never thought you ever had.

It took years to move up the occupational ladder, but Vicki persevered, progressing from cokers to tank farm, finally to be given a chance to train as a unit leader in the plant.

It was hard to get into the plant back then because you had to work your way through the cokers and tank farm, and the plant jobs didn't open up very often. So, there was a job open in the plant and I wanted to get more

steam time so I could maybe write my Third Class. So, I transferred and went into Plant 5, which is like the front end of our process. It's where we get the oil from the tank farm, from extraction, and we process it to send it to the cokers. So, I went to that progression.

Moving into the plant, however, came with its own challenges, once again involving discrimination.

Remember when I said "the old guys, the old school?" (In Plant 5) I ended up on a shift with two guys like that…My unit leader didn't want me there. Some people say he didn't want no Indian on his shift. Then the supervisor didn't want no woman on shift…So they just made it really hard. They nitpicked me a lot. If you think about it, it comes right down to just plain harassment.

After six years into her career at Suncor, Vicki married and in 1995, gave birth to a baby daughter. She discovered that if starting out as a young woman worker was hard, that returning from maternity leave would be disastrous.

On my first day back to work, it was hard enough leaving my baby. He (the unit leader) said I was nothing but a fucking embarrassment. I knew then that it was time to leave. I couldn't work with him. I couldn't work with the supervisor. The supervisor backed him on all this. So, I went back to the cokers and I had to start all over right from the bottom. I had to work my way all the way through again.

At the time, Vicki did not find much support for women on the jobsite in her male-dominated union, and it certainly did not help that her unit leader was also in the union. It was not until she started working her way up from the cokers for the second time around that Vicki accepted an invitation to attend a meeting of the union's women's committee.

I started going to the women's committee meetings and then I started hanging out at the hall a little bit and just offering my help. I figured I should give back. So that's how I became involved with the union more.

The women's committee provided to be a safe place for female employees to talk about work, their families and their community. Eventually she took on the role of its chairperson.

We try to support certain things in town, like say the Canada Day parade, Labour Day picnic. We fundraise for the Family Crisis Society, and last year we raised I think $3,000 at our Christmas party. So, the women's committee organizes the union Christmas party. I got a bunch of silent auction items that we made money off, and all that money goes to the

Family Crisis Society because it's sad, but they need to build a bigger women's shelter.

When Vicki was interviewed by the Alberta Labour History Institute in 2015, she was already 25 years into her career with Suncor. She had succeeded in staying with the job through sheer resilience and determination. As a trained process operator, she rose to the position of unit leader for off-plots, which Vicki describes as encompassing just about everything outside the plant, such as managing utilities, wastewater, pipelines, tanks, steam, natural gas, nitrogen, and sulphur.

We maintain. Because I'm unit leader, I take care of all the permits for maintenance. I have my own crew and there's usually about six guys on a shift.

The tables had turned, and Vicki was now the 'boss' of all these men. As for her approach to management, humiliation was not something in her toolkit. Neither was revenge:

No, I wouldn't do that, because I know how it felt to be treated that way. I'm not that guy that picks on people. I help my guys as much as I can.

Given her earlier experience in the workplace, Vicki appreciated the fact that the attitude of men towards her as an Indigenous woman changed, once she proved herself in charge.

They don't mind because they know that I'm there to help them. I'm sure there's some days they think I'm a pain in the butt, but I work pretty good with people. I'm not mean and nasty. I'm helpful. I have a little bit of OCD, so that help, because everything has to be in order. I just try to make everything run smooth. If they need help, I'm there to help them.

By the time Vicki Gillingham retired from Suncor in May of 2024, she had logged 35 years and 9 months with the oil sands company. She had survived racial and gender discrimination, hard physical labour, and the brutal hours of shiftwork. She had purchased a house with all the modern conveniences and, with the help of a nanny, raised a beautiful and successful daughter.

A complete transcript of this interview is available on the Alberta Labour History Institute Website at albertalabourhistory.org/indigenous-labour-history-project/**vicki-gillingham**



ANGELA FIDDLER

Oilsands Camp Worker and Shop Steward

> *"Because we're starting to actually rise up as First Nations people, we're not going to let anybody tell us that we can't practice our spirituality anymore, or we're not allowed to practice our culture or speak our language, or anything like that. We're not going to allow them to do that, because that's our right."*

Angela Fiddler is a member of the Waterhen Cree Nation in Northern Saskatchewan. It was in 2010 that she decided that the only way she could improve conditions for herself and her six children was to take a job in one of the camps that house oilsands workers across the provincial border near Fort McMurray. It meant being away from her family for weeks at a time, but her ex-husband was willing to take care of the children while she was away.

At first, Angela found it lonely at the camp. She was confined to a position as a kitchen helper for ten months until she simply could not take one more late night shift alone in the 'dish pit.' Before applying for a job at the camp, Angela had taken courses in business administration and a three-month kitchen worker program at the regional college, so she was hoping to do much more than simply wash dishes. When she warned the chef she would quit, he suggested a move into the dining room, which turned out to be an improvement. She liked being around people and worked hard doing all that was asked of her. However, the pleasantness changed when she reported an older supervisor for bullying and swearing at her.

She denied it but I went straight to HR and that's when I started understanding what a union was about. I didn't really understand what a union was for or the rights we had. I went to HR and wrote her up because I wouldn't allow anybody to treat me like that.

After that, Angela was moved into a job in housekeeping. As before, she worked hard, but was constantly frustrated that she could never seem to escape the stereotypes and racism directed at her as an Indigenous worker.

As a First Nations person, I saw right in the beginning I was making sure that I did everything perfect because we already have that stereotype as a drunken Indian, dirty Indian. I even had one of my coworkers say that to me…I often thought about things like that. I could go tell on them but at the same time they need to work, too…The way I am, I am a forgiving person, so I'll just let it go for now. I think sort of as a First Nations person, the way we were raised, we don't say much. A lot of times, we won't say what's bothering us. We won't say what happened to us or what these people said to us. Then we just end up quitting. We just quit instead of having to cause waves in any work situation or anything like that. We'll just give up without saying anything.

As Angela became increasingly aware that these slights and acts of discrimination were happening to the other First Nations people in her camp, she felt compelled to do something about it. Her chance came when management introduced a new policy that forbade keeping or using flammable materials like candles or matches in the workers' rooms.

So, my coworker couldn't practice his spirituality anymore because he used to smudge in his room with sweetgrass and everything. So instead of talking with him, they just wrote him up and they said, if you do this one more time you're fired, you're terminated. He said, that's a human right and you can't do that… Try it, he said, I am still going to practice my spirituality and you're never going to stop me. The thing with that is because we're starting to

actually rise up as First Nation people, we're not going to let anybody tell us that we can't practice our spirituality anymore or we're not allowed to practice our culture or speak our language or anything like that. We're not going to allow them to do that, because that's our right…When he said that I was like, okay I said, this is what we're going to do. I said, we're going to form a committee and we're going to see who else is having these problems.

As much as it pained her to be away from her children on her precious days off, Angela signed up for the next shop steward training course offered by her union, Local 401 of the United Food & Commercial Workers (UFCW). Soon after that, she began a campaign to get elected as shop steward for her section.

The same way my dad was chief, my grandpa was chief, I have many uncles who were chief and things like this. I know how to be political. So, I went around to all the First Nations people and Métis people and said, you know what, I'm going to run for shop steward so I need you guys to back me up and you need to vote for me. So, I went around and started my campaign and everything and it's like, yes, I like this. So, I got in as a shop steward.

There were about twenty other people from the First Nations working at the camp, but no cultural or social supports were being offered to them. As a result, many quit from sheer loneliness. As shop steward, Angela now had the backing of union for her efforts to change this.

Her next step was to form an Indigenous Committee within the Union. It was in this capacity that she made her first approach to management as a union representative.

I said I'm the Chair of the Indigenous Committee. I'm the Chair of the Wapasu First Nation, Métis and Inuit Committee. They were like, what? They didn't even believe what was going on. I said, you need to change. You need to accommodate. I said, First Nations people need to have their spiritual right. It's a human right. So, they were like, okay, comeback and talk to us later. It was in one ear and out the other.

Management stalling and inattention failed to deter Angela and her committee. They lobbied relentlessly for a teepee where they could smudge and pray without breaking camp rules and the company eventually conceded. Unfortunately, the teepee was placed next to a noisy road. As well, Angela's people found it too cold to use during the winter months, so they campaigned for a stove, a request that had to go all the way to company's headquarters in Texas for approval.

As our committee began gaining ground and taking back our human rights, then any issues I brought up as shop steward and having the union behind me, they started listening. I was just so grateful I had the union to back me up. Creating awareness, cultural awareness, is what I was doing. I was culturally training them. Everyone that I talked to, every manager, I spoke to one-on-one. I went to them. I explained things. I said, this is what you need to do. I won them. I got them all on my side one-by-one. Even the union, because we don't really have any First Nations people within union in a higher place.

Angela next set her sights on a number of other company policies. She was encouraged to join the local negotiations team by Chris O'Halloran and Tom Hesse, who were on staff of the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 401 at the time. On her first day at the negotiation table, Angela added her own touch to the meeting agenda - she brought Bannock to the table.

As a First Nations person, we always feed our guests. Anybody that comes to our house, we'll immediately make tea, coffee, and we'll cook them something…So when corporate came walking in, they just looked at me. I could see it in their eyes, like, what is Angela doing there in Tom Hesse's chair? I was calming myself down. I had to pray before. I just asked God the Creator to give me the right words and understanding and everything in order to gain ground for our people. So, they came and sat down and I said, so before we sit down and start negotiations, I'd like to feed you guys. We don't have a meal but we do have bannock and butter. They were so happy. Their faces just lit up and I was like, yes, great plan. So, I said, help yourself before we start. So that's what they did. They went and helped themselves, and then we sat there. Then I went down about all the issues at camp and here's how to solve them. So, I gave them all of that, and then after that, everybody was just clapping. Even management, even the ones from corporate. I was thinking, wow. It was the day the Indian won.

Corporate headquarters responded to Angela's presentation with a letter of understanding outlining where the Indigenous employees could practice their spiritual and cultural traditions, set up teepees, and establish cultural rooms. As well, it was agreed that they could celebrate their Aboriginal Day with pay.

I felt so proud. It was like, I did this for us, for our people. If it wasn't for them believing in me, backing me up, if it wasn't for the union backing me up, none of this, I couldn't have accomplished anything.

A complete transcript of this interview is available at
albertalabourhistory.org/indigenous-labour-history-project/**angela-fiddler**



SERENA NELSON

Grocery Clerk and Union Steward

> *"There's strength in numbers, she said, and we have the power to be a voice here. We were the minorities. So, I joined and became a shop steward there."*

Serena Nelson spent her childhood years at Fishing Lake Reserve in Saskatchewan. Then as her family moved around, she attended school in Swift Current, Shellbrook and Big River. By the time she moved to Lloydminster, Serena was married with two young children to raise. She started working as a grocery clerk at the local Superstore, where was quickly promoted into a management position. Along the way, she even encountered a short strike by her union, Local 401 of the United Food & Commercial Workers (UFCW).

I was the grocery nightshift manager there, so I did have an understanding on how management works with the union and how the relationships shift and go different ways … We worked while they were away.

She recalls that the strike ended after a few days and that everyone went back to work, even though the workplace issues causing the strike continued. In spite of this, Serena concentrated on developing a positive relationship with the union employees under her supervision throughout this period.

I never got a complaint from the union or from any of the members against me while I was a manager for five years. I worked with them closely… On that part, everybody was getting along and I could voice opinions for other employees that were there.

It was a dispute with her own management supervisor that set Serena on a different path. As a result,

I passed the keys back to him and left my $60,000 a year job. I went over to Safeway and started out at $15 an hour, back at the bottom of the totem pole. I became just a general clerk. When I was hired there, I was doing the nightshift stocking. Everything was great, the work conditions were much better. When I was working there, I met a lady named Colleen, and she was a shop steward. She also was of native descent. We were having a conversation one day and she said to me, Serena, I think you should be a shop steward.

It was a discussion she had with fellow workers about finding strength in numbers, especially as a member of an Indigenous minority, that finally convinced Serena to take training from her union, UFCW Local 401, to become a shop steward

I found that people weren't really aware of what the union was about. Their membership, what they were paying dues for, they weren't really aware or involved…Our contract was expiring, so we had to negotiate a new contract. So, I took it upon myself to campaign, to go to every employee and tell them, you need to vote. This is what's going to affect you and if you don't make these decisions, somebody else is going to make these decisions for you and you're going to have to live with them for four years. So, you need to be there.

The Union was completing negotiations for a new contract with Safeway at the time. Her efforts to educate her fellow union members in her workplace about the bargaining process paid off, as she saw a high turnout for the ratification vote and expressions of pride among her colleagues about belonging to the union.

So that was success to me. Now, I do have active members that are happy that I'm a shop steward, that we have a voice. I see it as my duty to make sure that it's a fair and equal workplace for everybody to work and

earn their money and go home and be happy. Not to hate. Not to dread to come to work. It's your right.

Serena is rightfully proud of her Indigenous heritage, and talked about her spiritual connection to other beings and the earth. This sense also informed her work with the union. She found that where strength in numbers helps union members find a voice, it also helps Indigenous people find a voice and a place. Her lifelong experience fighting discrimination and stereotypes taught her that Indigenous people needed to be heard. The bullying and racial denigration she encountered cut deeply, leaving a hurt that did not stop at the school yard. Stigmas about Indigenous people originated back through the generations, leaving a legacy that Indigenous people such as Serena are forced to confront at work. For example, on one night shift when she was moving a case of cider, the glass bottles jangled. The fellow she was working with said,

Oh, I bet you like the sound of that. I just said to him, pardon me? He goes on, do you know where your kids are? I said to him, as a matter of fact, I do know where my kids are. My son is dead and gone, if you must know, and my daughter lives with me …So I dealt with that at Safeway and I dealt with that with a few managers there.

The fact that many of the co-workers she represents as a shop steward are also from minorities that endure discrimination and marginalization is not lost on Serena. As for changing perspectives and prejudices, Serena says of Indigenous people, "we just want to belong." And that requires resources to promote education and reconciliation.

Acceptance is a huge part of our world. Indigenous people have been trying to be accepted forever. Will that ever change? I don't know. I don't think I'll see it in my lifetime...But that does not make me lose hope, because by speaking about it and talking to as many people as I can, by telling my story, it's out there and you can't ignore it.

A complete transcript of this interview is available on the Alberta Labour History Institute Website at albertalabourhistory.org/**serena-nelson-2**



LINDSAY POLL

Flight Attendant and Union Supporter

> *"I think being part of a union brings that solidarity back, knowing that somebody's got my back at work."*

At the time of her interview, Lindsay Poll had been working as a flight attendant with Westjet for over twenty years. During this time, she was active within her union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, serving in several positions, including membership on its National Indigenous Council. Based in Fort McMurray, Lindsay is also wife and mother to five adopted children with special needs. She credits her father for introducing her and her siblings to Indigenous teachings, something that has remained at the centre of her daily life.

Lindsay's father is from the Michel Band, now called Michel First Nation, which finally lost the last remnants of its reserve near Villeneuve in 1958, the final chapter in a series of land grabs that displaced Indigenous people from their ancestral homes around Edmonton. Her mother's family

had also been displaced, as they fled Nazi-occupied Holland during World War II to settle in Canada. Lindsay's parents shared a passion for long distance running and met when they were living in the Crowsnest region of southern Alberta. Her mother was a social worker and after her father graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Education, the young family moved to Calgary where he got a job teaching with the Catholic School Board.

Lindsay's grandmother, her 'kokum,' was a devout Catholic and raised her family to follow that faith. Her father chose a different path:

When I was really young, my dad started to pull away from those teachings and really went deep into our First Nations Indigenous and Métis teachings, to go back to the real root of who we were. I was raised with very community-based Indigenous communities and teachings because my dad didn't want us raised Catholic. He wanted us raised understanding both worlds and understanding how important it was to be indigenous and be proud of it.

Through her father's teachings, Lindsay came to understand Indigenous spirituality as one's everyday connection to the land, water and animals.

The white colonial teaching is that we're the top of the pyramid; we are the owners of everything. But the teaching of the land of our people, is that when Creator went to the animals, he said, 'I'm going to bring this two-legged beast to the world. Will you give your life and take care of this beast? This animal is going to be hairless and have no fangs and no claws. It's going to be the lowest of all the animal kingdom. Will you give your life to care for this creature that I'm going to put on this earth?' All the animals agreed to give their life to sustain us. That's why, when we eat animals, we pray to the spirit of that animal and have gratitude, because that's our brother and sister animal who's given its life to keep us alive and it's the great agreement between the Creator and the other animals.

Lindsay grew up in Calgary surrounded by an extended family and dozens of unrelated children, some in care, and some who were just living in poverty, children that her parents would bring home and feed. As well as inculcating a social conscience in them, her parents involved her and her siblings in sports. After graduating from high school, Lindsay moved to Japan to play rugby, but a severe head injury sent her back to Alberta. After that, Lindsay worked in a dental office until she decided to apply for a job as a flight attendant with a new airline called Westjet.

I got the job. I was like, okay, I guess this is what I'm going to do for a bit. I went into five weeks of training. I really learned that we are true safety professionals, we're not just people who serve drinks. If there's a fire on

the plane, we're the ones that have to deal with it. If somebody's hurt, if somebody's even just sick, or if anybody needs anything, we are at the front line of that. I've been in a situation where I've stopped human trafficking. I have also brought light to elder abuse onboard the airplane. I've had situations where couples have been physical with each other, and having to pull them apart.

As a flight attendant, Lindsay attended to the needs and safety of passengers. As an employee, however, she soon had reason to question who was looking out for her needs.

I would turn to my dad and ask him because he worked for the teachers' union. I have friends at Air Canada and they would talk about their union. I was like, well, why don't we have that? Why don't we have this type of teachings in our airline? There was a lot of head-butting between the employer and the employees with this, and it was a very tumultuous time… I think being part of a union brings that solidarity back, knowing that somebody's got my back with work.

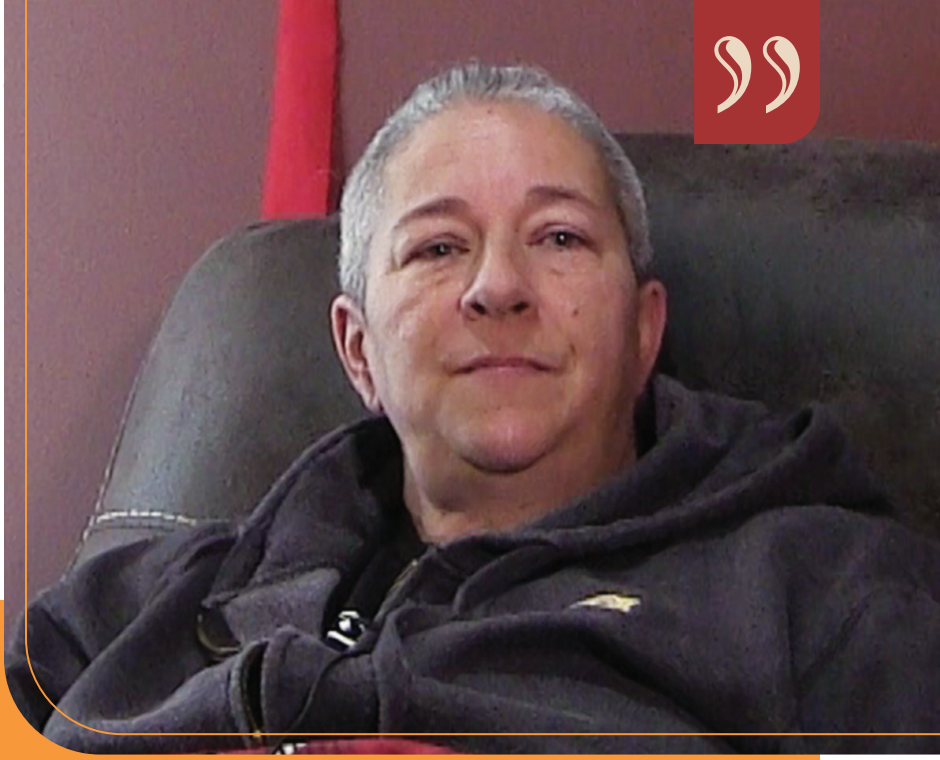
Among Lindsay's concerns as an employee were those concerning her retirement and the work benefits that would help her support her growing family.

We built our family through the adoption process. I have five children that are all siblings who have disabilities. They all need mental health care. What does their future look like? How can I be supported (at work) as a parent? What if my kid gets sick and I need a day off? What is your plan to keep me safe as a worker?

As a member of CUPE's National Indigenous Council, Lindsay has made it her mission to improve support for Indigenous workers by removing what she calls colonial constructs.

When it comes to indigeneity, a lot of these things are federally regulated, which is what airlines fall under. Some of those gains are the recognition of National Truth and Reconciliation Day. In terms of traditional teachings, like powwow or food gathering, hunting, any type of traditional ceremony, we can have up to five days off for those traditional moments. I would love to see an Indigenous person in an executive seat at every local in CUPE. …I really want to decolonize structures of how we deal with people, So, removing the tables that are a colonial construct, and putting it in a circle, using restorative justice to deal with conflict…bringing those teachings to the table and making it a common way of managing people through the indigenous lens and indigenous teachings.

A complete transcript of this interview is available on the Alberta Labour History Institute Website at albertalabourhistory.org/**lindsay-poll-2**



COLETTE CULLEN

Military, Emergency and Prison Service

> *"It's probably one of the highest suicide rates as far as frontline workers go, but it's way worse for the inmates. (As a guard) you're doing time with them; it's just at eight-hour increments."*

Colette Cullen was in her early fifties when she decided to go back to school. She felt it was about time to give her body and mind some relief after a long gruelling career of service; firstly in the military, then as a first responder, and finally as a prison guard. The army had prepared her for a regimen of endless training and continuous learning, and now, her goal was to enroll in Native Studies and Anthropology at the University of Alberta.

As an Indigenous woman working as a first responder and a prison guard, Colette both observed and experienced firsthand what happens to Indigenous people who are forced to live lives on the margins of society. She felt university might offer a path to a deeper understanding, and perhaps some solutions for her people.

Colette was born in the late 1960's and grew up in Spruce Grove just west of Edmonton. Her mother was of Cree Métis heritage related to the Lizotte clan, so the family would spend their summers with Indigenous relatives who lived near Grande Prairie. At seventeen, Colette graduated from high school and immediately signed up in the military.

Colette found the preparations for her first battle tour to Bosnia mentally and physically gruelling, but she made it through training as the only remaining female soldier, and in a unit where half of the male recruits in her cohort did not succeed. The grit she discovered in herself kept her strong in the war zone. She served under the banner of the United Nations, and one of the roles assigned to her troop was to help survivors in villages where there had been what is known as a 'cleansing.' She explains:

Cleansing was a very real thing on both of my tours. If one faction (of Serbians or Croatians) didn't like the other faction, they would just simply 'cleanse' a village or town. Sometimes we could get in and help. Sometimes we couldn't. We would hire locals to cook for us, make bread, but it wasn't very safe for them. They didn't like the UN there, so if locals were working for us, mostly women, they would become targets. You'd have to escort them home and make sure they were safe …When we were being shelled or mortared, they'd be terrified …So you'd take off your flak vest and give it to them, and your helmet, knowing full well it's not going to help anything. But it would calm them down and they would feel safer.

During her second tour of duty in Bosnia, Colette was part of a transport platoon which provided logistics for a battalion, as well as running convoys when needed.

That was my job – Convoy Commander. On my second tour, we would run convoys up into Sarajevo bringing out supplies. We were pulling the Canadians out of there. That was fun because you'd have to go down Sniper Alley every three days. Looking back, maybe not so much (fun), but at the time you're in your early twenties. You're fairly indestructible until you lose somebody.

Colette served a total of twelve years with the Canadian military, retiring with a rank of Master Corporal. By this time, she was also a mother, and ready for different challenges. She signed up to train as an emergency medical technician (EMT), and at the same time, took a job in the oil patch to help pay for her schooling. This job put her back in a truck, driving 'hotshots' or delivering parts to oil rigs and gas sites all over the province, an assignment that lasted until she finished her training. Part of what attracted Colette to work as a first responder was what she calls the 'camaraderie' that exists amongst those in uniform.

It's one thing that you kind of search for when you get out of the military. You can't really share with a sibling or a parent because they don't have that lived experience, the same lens to look through. And you don't want to talk about it. So that camaraderie that you have in the military is very similar in any kind of first responder role.

However, once on the job as an EMT, Colette was confronted daily with the type of stereotypes and racism leveled against Canada's Indigenous people that is deeply ingrained in our society.

When you're out on the streets and you're in the ambulance and you have an overdose or whatever it might be, and if there's a white kid and an Indigenous kid and you only have one Narcan kit, hands down every single ime it will be the white kid that gets saved first, which is unfortunate and wrong. How do you make that decision anyway?

The discrimination she encountered eventually took its toll on Colette and she left the profession. Once again, she turned to jobs in the oil and gas industry to tide her over, taking a job cementing downhole equipment. Then she moved into occupational safety management for a time, before deciding to try her hand at police work.

I wanted to work with the police or in the jail system or both, and try to find a path for Indigenous people. Why was that happening and why were we so disproportionally represented? That's when things changed for me on lots of different levels. That was an eyeopener for sure. I started working with commissionaires, of all places. They hire veterans. They put you through a security course and send you off to wherever. I worked with Edmonton Police Services in West Division in their cells and that's where you really get to see the underbelly of the policing world.

About a year later, Colette was hired to work in the Remand Centre, starting first at the Fort Saskatchewan jail, and then moving to the old facility in downtown Edmonton.

I was just forty-ish what I started in the jails, so I at least had some life experience and a different lens to view through …I didn't feel unsafe in the jail. I think part of it is because I could relate to a lot of them. My siblings were on the other side of the law, as I was the exception in my family, which was weird. I did have relatives come through when I was working at the jail. You never spoke of that. You didn't say if you knew somebody there, and they knew not to say that they knew you, because they would get labeled and probably beat up as well.

At the Remand Centre, Colette developed a program called Positive Outcomes in which she used her drug dog Marley to establish rapport with the inmates. She explained:

There'd be fifteen or sixteen gang bangers, all in the same room. They don't even know why they hate each other. They are almost always all Indigenous. I'd bring in my dog and they'd be like, what's that dog doing here? That's a dope dog! I'd be like, whoa, that's Marley. She's a dope dog, you're right. She works for the cops. She's black, she's tattooed and she comes from the rez, too. Then they would laugh and joke.

During these sessions, Colette would talk about how to do everyday things that most people take for granted; e.g., how to plan a budget, what it means to speak politely, and how to de-escalate a violent situation. She explained:

If nobody teaches you how to speak, if nobody teaches you manners or teaches you that you're worth something, then that's what you believe of yourself. If you treat people like animals, they will respond like that.

After the third or fourth session with the inmates, Colette would try something different. She would come into the room, let her dog off her leash and pretend to kick it.

By then all these big tough gang bangers are saying, Marley, we love you and they are using little baby voices and it's very cute. You can see the humanity…And then you pretend to go kick her. They're like, what are you doing? I'm like, whoa, what are you doing? Didn't you beat up your wife or girlfriend? Why did you do that? She didn't do anything. Neither did my dog. You have to find those bridges so they can connect and make those connections. Then they would start to write their stories down for you. They'd show up in your mail, ten or twelve pages of these handwritten stories of what happened to them in day school, residential school, on the rez, at home – all these different things and how they got to where they got to. It gave me a really huge insight into where a lot of our people have been for decades and how they end up in jail.

Every day on the job brought challenges and tragedies. Some days inmates died, and on some days, she would see parents being incarcerated along with their teenage children.

A complete transcript of this interview is available on the Alberta Labour History Institute Website at albertalabourhistory.org/**collette-cullen-2**



KATIE-JO RABBIT

Writer and Indigenous Employment Counsellor

"I don't normally think of myself as a role model, but I can be a voice for Indigenous people, because I find that a lot of people my age don't speak up."

If there is one phrase that comes to mind when trying to describe Katie-Jo Rabbit, it would likely be 'human dynamo.' Katie-Jo is a remarkable Indigenous woman from the Blood Reserve who has amassed an impressive list of achievements in her early adult life - so many in fact, that the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce recognized Katie-Jo as one of their 'Top 40 Under 40' in 2019. In doing so, the Chamber applauded her contributions as a community leader, innovator and advocate who displayed a passion for enhancing the lives of Indigenous people in Lethbridge, noting that she is also a published author and radio personality.

Katie-Jo was born in 1982, and grew up near Standoff on the Blood Reserve in southern Alberta, where she attended junior and senior high school. During that time, she excelled at rugby and basketball, and was

later recruited by Medicine Hat College to play for the Medicine Hat Rattlers. At the end of her first year at college, she moved to Edmonton to study journalism at Grant MacEwan College (now MacEwan University).

I stayed in Edmonton for five or six years, ended up going to the University of Alberta, and worked as a copy shop manager. I really loved that job, it was fun. I took some art classes, and from there it led to volunteering at CJSR, the University radio station…I had my own show called 'Aboriginal Voices.' We spoke Blackfoot on the radio. We had people call in. We listened to all different kinds of Indigenous music. It was a really good time. It was the only Indigenous show at that time.

This was during the early 2000's, and despite her positive experience at campus radio, Katie-Jo could not completely escape society's prejudice against Indigenous people.

The U of A at that time was not as diverse as it is now, so it was a really hard struggle dealing with covert racism, systematic racism, discrimination. It was just a constant struggle. Because I was the only Indigenous person in my program, it was a lot to become that token Indigenous person and take on that weight of having to speak out against injustices, speak out against biases, be an ambassador almost for the culture. Anything that came up in history, I had to be the one to always speak to that. It was a lot.

Katie-Jo's next move took her back to the south, this time to follow a herd of bison through Yellowstone National Park, thanks to a scholarship she won to attend the University of Missoula in Montana.

We did a non-invasive genetic study which kept me four months camped out in an isolated area in Yellowstone following the trail of a Grand Teton herd of buffalo. That was an amazing experience; I learned a lot.

Upon returning to Canada, Katie-Jo turned her attention to the scholarly pursuit of English literature at the University of Lethbridge, but after three years, she was again ready for a change. Her next major pursuit followed a disappointing experience at a Lethbridge employment centre. Katie-Jo was sure that she had some ideas to improve job searches, and that is when she started down the road to employment counselling for Indigenous youth.

As luck would have it, I ended up getting a job at another employment centre geared toward homeless people. I started off as a data entry clerk. Within a span of four years, I became assistant manager for an organization helping the Indigenous population of Lethbridge … I was able to liaison, and because I had gone through the system myself, I knew exactly how to help people help themselves. That was basically

my goal – to empower people, to understand that being Indigenous, you have a lot of resilience, a lot of strength and power. It might not be recognized in the non-Indigenous world, but decolonizing employment is important because we need to indigenize everything that we do. I was able to do that with the community, and as a result I was very successful at my job.

Through her work with Saamis Aboriginal Employment and Training, Katie-Jo continued her advocacy in groups like the Reconciliation Lethbridge Advisory Committee. She also served as the Indigenous representative on the Economic Development Lethbridge Committee. Through all of this, she never gave up on her passion for writing.

I've always been a storyteller. I've always wanted to just express myself in the literary world. It started with journalism, writing articles here and there. I started noticing a real need for some contemporary perspective of Indigenous women. In my research seeking out Indigenous Blackfoot authors; they were few and far between. And the ones that were published were all about traditional knowledge and values.

Winning a scholarship to attend the Banff Centre for the Arts motivated Katie-Jo to start working on her first novel. She is often invited to speak about her writing process and her art. In 2019, one of her short stories was published in the book *'Bawaajigan: Stories of Power'*, an anthology of modern Indigenous writers.

A complete transcript of this interview is available on the Alberta Labour History Institute Website at albertalabourhistory.org/**katie-jo-rabbit**



HEATHER SHILLINGLAW

Métis Mixed Media Artist

"I never thought I was political, but in the act itself of creating and making your work, you become very political. Now I'm trying to stand up and protect what's left through those canvasses."

Heather Shillinglaw is a mixed media artist who comes to her calling from an Indigenous background. After studying at the Alberta College of Art and Design, now called the Alberta University of the Arts, she began to produce art work that has been exhibited across Canada, Europe and South America. She believes that much of the inspiration for her work comes from the land and the ancestral stories passed on by her mother and grandmothers.

She uses a broad range of techniques in her art. In her paintings, sculptures and sewing, she incorporates such materials as hides, forest vegetation and beading to produce visual stories about Indigenous history and the relationship of her people to the land. The themes she chooses

are expressed in such works as 'Don't Shoot My Star,' 'Buffalo Girl,' 'My Mind Digs In The Soil Like A Turtle,' and 'Nohkums Quilt.'

Heather is proud of her heritage and counts Nêhiyawêwin, Cree, Dene, Chipewyan, Salteaux, Ojibwe, Scottish and French among her blood lines. She was born in 1971, and grew up on an acreage east of Edmonton near Cooking Lake. She remembers it as a time when people tried to hide their indigeneity because it invited discrimination.

I was very dark-toned when I was little. So much so, that (once when) I went over to a friend's house… we were playing and her mother called her in and said, 'Do not play with her; she's a dirty little Indian.' Ever since that, I was very angry and very upset and hurt. I told my mother what happened and she said, 'Never play with that kid again'. I was very quiet and reclusive just because I was in a very small school. I went to Ministik School. What really saved me is that some of the teachers really saw that I was hurt, because that girl would gang up on me with the other girls. I didn't have a lot of friends. …The teachers said I could stay inside at recess and draw. So I did. Essentially, I saw my mother many nights paint. She would make paintings just to get a little bit of extra income. So that maintained my fascination with art.

Over the past three decades, Heather has developed into a prolific and successful artist, using her work as a means to advance an appreciation of Indigenous knowledge that is based upon a the close relationship Indigenous people have to the land.

She can count herself among a fairly small and exclusive group of artists in Edmonton who actually make a living with their creative talent. However, it is not easy, as she explains:

To make money as an artist, your survival is dependent on the grants that you write and the partnerships that you make to move your artwork forward. That's the essential part of making it a job. The success rate is very difficult. Only a few survive. Even from my graduating class. I looked at the photograph, and there were over a hundred people that graduated, and there's just a small handful of artists that still make and create and that's their job. Some artists end up moving into other parts of the field of art. They become professors. I have some colleagues who have gone so far as becoming artists working for Disney. Really successful. Then, there's other folks in the movie business.

Over the years, Heather has received funding from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Edmonton Arts Council and the Edmonton Heritage Council. A recent honour was a Leighton Studio

residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts. She also shares her culture and knowledge through art workshops promoting what she calls MEAM, a Métis Ecological Arts Message, whose purpose is to raise awareness about the colonial destruction of traditional Indigenous lands, at the same time as it conveys an environmental philosophy based on reducing the modern footprint on the natural landscape.

This concept is clearly evident in her work, most notably in 'Whispers in the Forest,' an exceptional art installation that Heather created after photographing trees on a prohibited visit to the Primrose Lake Air Weapons Range, where military activities have wreaked so much damage. She was inspired by a series of sketches by world famous Indigenous artist Alex Janvier who also visited the Primrose woodlands. The collection she produced was called *Atui*, which means "lots of fish" in Dene.

There's a lot of history with Primrose and the land being taken away from the Indigenous peoples. The surrounding reserves, Canoe Lake and Heart Lake, they relied on Primrose to harvest big game in the winter. My grandfather remembers hunting up there. During the Dirty Thirties, people may not know that a lot of people starved. But up north, the people knew how to live off the land, and they never starved. They always had full bellies because they knew the land. That land was taken away from them in the '50s by our government. They turned it into a bombing range. It has mutilated the landscape many times over. When I was visiting with Alex, his daughter showed me pictures of the reserve and the elders going into the land, and she showed me photos of the fish with all their cancers inside, these mutilated fish, of the guts inside the fish. It's graphic and horrifying that they did that to the land, because that land had saved so many families.

Heather believes that reclaiming memories and healing the land provides a path towards healing the wounds the Indigenous people suffered from colonization. The lingering trauma of residential schools is something she experienced by living through the personal struggles her mother went through after attending residential school.

As an artist, I can resolve some of that hurt and pain within my own art. But others can't. It's a difficult road that we all have to travel together. When you talk about the land itself, this is within our own lifetime that we have to conserve it. We're already having so many problems ... There's a huge journey with the red lines that you see in my work that talk a lot about that. Those are bloodlines, those are maternal sources of energy within the landscapes. There's loss, there's pride, there's culture itself all hidden within the work.

A complete transcript of this interview is available on the Alberta Labour History Institute Website at albertalabourhistory.org/**heather-shillinglaw-2**



DALLAS YOUNG PINE

Rodeo Rider and Movie Stuntman

> *"When that drumbeat connects with your heartbeat, that feeling you have is like rodeo. It's in your blood, it flows through your bloodstream. You can never get rid of it."*

Dallas Young Pine discovered a passion at an early age for riding bareback and bulldogging steers at rodeos. It was a passion he shared with his father and grandfather before him.

That history, that legacy, is very important to me. My father, Jerry, he rodeoed. He was one of those true all-around cowboys, worked both ends of the arena…and being around my father and my grandfather, Joe Young Pine, I watched my grandfather farm his own land … They were instrumental in the horse industry. My grandfather in 1939 went down under to Australia. At that time, they sailed from Vancouver down to Sidney, Australia. He along with seven other cowboys, natives from Treaty 7 area, travelled down there on a ship to help promote the greatest outdoor show on earth, the Calgary Stampede. A lot of history there.

Dallas was born in 1957 and raised on the Blood Indian Reserve in Southern Alberta as a member of the Many Children Clan. He attended St. Mary's Residential School and when not at school, he spent time on the land with his father, learning how to ranch and raise livestock.

When my dad was working for the Blood band ranch dealing with cattle and horses, rounding up cattle, fencing, I grew up learning (that) at an early age. But there was something that intrigued my interest in the sport of rodeo. When the employees there got paid…my little brother and my sister, we went to the rodeo pen, chasing the range bulls, and we started dreaming about being rodeo champions. Of course, we didn't have the luxuries again or the money to go to a rodeo school. We just did it with passion and excitement. We were having fun. We were dreaming big.

Before long, Dallas was riding bulls and bucking horses, after which he moved up to wrestling steers, called 'bulldogging.' To keep in the top athletic form required for this difficult and dangerous activity, he also became a runner.

By running and working hard … I was fit and was able to do a lot of things. I did marathons. We ran in the Jasper men's relay. Just going from a marathon to rodeo, powwows, just putting everything together was very important to me.

Dallas approached his rodeo work the same way he approached other aspects of his life – with discipline and a strong work ethic. It is now something he instills in the new generation of rodeo riders he mentors. His father had a military background and was strict, but it was attending a summer cadet camp in Vernon that became a defining factor for young Dallas.

That little experience really taught me about the world outside the reserve. I was able to immediately find out about order. Your dress code was very important. When I say order, getting up at five or six o'clock in the morning. For your sleeping quarters, everything had to be perfect. I learned that at a young age. Being active physically was utmost.

Dallas rode novice bareback at the first Calgary Rodeo Royal in 1970 when he was only thirteen years of age. Over his ensuing career he competed as part of several associations, including the Indian Rodeo Cowboys Association that was centred on the Blood Reserve.

I came back in '78 when the Indian Rodeo Cowboys Association was thriving. I remember in 1978 the entries were almost 800 entries - 800 entries. They had over a million dollar purse…. I really picked up in '85, I really picked up rodeo - riding bulls, bucking horses. I started bulldogging ….I didn't get rich on rodeo. But it was a passion - that mixture of having fun in life, that camaraderie, that competitiveness, that motivation to win.

Riding in rodeos opened the door to another career for Dallas Young Pine, working in the movie industry as a stunt rider and actor. His major credits in that field include *Dreamkeeper* in 2003, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* in 2007 and *The Revenant* with Leonardo DiCaprio in 2015. He also appeared in the documentary series *Rodeo Nation* on APTN in 2022.

Dallas' break in the movie industry came in the early 2000's when Dallas and his fellow rodeo riders caught the attention of a movie scout. Hallmark was casting for the television mini-series *Dreamkeeper*, which told the story of a Lakota elder and his troubled teenage grandson driving cross-country to a powwow. The road trip turned epic as the old storyteller brought to life the ancient legends of his people by relating them to his grandson. Dallas re-enacted one of those legends and recalls his first day on the set, when the wrangler Wright Bruised Head paired him with a nasty horse called Red Dog.

Nobody liked Red Dog. He was a paint. I got on that horse, and that horse and I just connected. My younger days kind of paid off, riding bareback at a young age. With the long hair that we had, working hard, our riding skills came in (handy) in the movies and we just took off with that.

On the set of *Dreamkeeper*, Dallas found himself in the company of famous Canadian Indigenous actors Gordon Tootoosis and Tantoo Cardinal. The money he earned there was far better than what he earned in rodeo riding. The stunts, he explained were spectacular, but also dangerous. As one example, he remembered riding bareback in a scene with 1600 stampeding buffalo at the perilous Kootenay River near Rigby, Montana.

Three of us were kind of put in front of all that herd. The movie people were down in the valley. When those buffalo got to that corner they started trotting, then they started running towards three of us riders. I thought to myself at that time, what are we gonna do? We can't stop that 1,600 head to stand still there. The only thing that came into my mind was we gotta move with them. By the time they got to where we were at, they were full throttle and we had to move with them full speed. When we got down into the coulee there was a big swamp. There comes Red Dog, that horse I mentioned. There was no way I could run around that swamp. That's where I had to have all my faith in that horse, and that was to go through that swamp full speed. We got over the Milk River Ridge and that herd of buffalo just left a black trail. There was twenty-six of us riders. I thought, we just relived history.

A complete transcript of this interview is available on the Alberta Labour History Institute Website at albertalabourhistory.org/**dallas-young-pine-2**

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