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Tommy Bird last year at the Woodland Cree Gathering in Prince Albert doing what he loves. Forty years ago, there were 29 dog-sled teams in Southend, but now he is the only one. It has not deterred him because he loves the sport. (Photo by Tommy Bird)



*By Amber Bear
for Eagle Feather News*

Tommy Bird may be a commercial fisherman and business owner by trade, but for the past 40 years the world champion dog-musher has been keeping the tradition alive in the ever-changing north.

Born and raised in Southend, Saskatchewan located seven hours northeast of Saskatoon, he's always ready to share stories about what the north looked like when he was young.

Growing up in a remote community at a time when houses were heated by a wood stove and had no running water, his people survived even the harshest winters.

Bird said trapping, fishing, and hunting not only help keep him connected to the land but

to his roots.

"The way of life has changed but the land is still out there and being out on the land, it's different," said Bird. "There's healing just being out on the land."

His dogs also help him keep the old ways alive.

Bird spends many hours throughout the year caring for and training his dog team.

Like everything else in the north, even the landscape of dog mushing has changed, he said.

Bird recalled a time when the main event at winter festivals was dog mushing.

According to the University of Saskatchewan's Indigenous Saskatchewan Encyclopedia, the use of snow mobiles replaced dog-sled teams in the 1960s.

continued page 2 ...



Isabella Kuluk

KAMSACK BRAVE

"Then I started getting calls from all over the country... I realized this story was taking off and that a lot of people cared about what happened."

- page 10

January 2023 is our

**Storytelling
Month**

February 2023 Issue:
Health Issue



FIRST NATIONS UNIVERSITY OF CANADA INCA TREASURES

Pages 11-15: As part of a special collaboration with First Nations University of Canada, students from the INCA 100 class this fall semester created a storyteller series for Eagle Feather News. The students chose a person to profile who either had a unique story to tell or advice to share about storytelling. I hope you enjoy their work.

- page 12



FORMER REGINA MAYOR PAT FIACCO Reconciliation Ally

"We call upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources."

- page 9

A hunter, fisherman, trapper and a world-champion dog musher shares his story

... continued from page 1

But the tradition was not completely lost. Bird said in the late 1980s and early 1990s there were 29 dog mushers with dog teams in Southend.



Tommy Bird, 2022 Woodland Cree Gathering. (Photo supplied)

“Now, I’m the only one,” says Bird. Competitions took him as far north as Anchorage, Alaska and down south to the mountains of Wyoming. His dog-mushing accomplishments include seven world championships at Lac Brochet and another world championship at The Pas. When Bird is not racing, he uses his dog mush-

ing team for demonstrations and rides. He says dog mushing takes a lot of time, money, and patience, which may be a deterrent to some. Another explanation for the decline of dog mushing is the disappearance of the trapline lifestyle. Dogs were once essential for basic survival in the north because they were needed for travel and for hunting and trapping. Bird appreciates how his parents and family members taught him, which usually took the form of stories told around a campfire. Although the stories were entertaining, they were used to educate



Tommy at World Championship Dog Race 2013. (Photo supplied)

and prepare the next generation of trappers. Often the stories were full of fine details such as the direction of the wind, descriptions of the landscape, what animals they had seen and how long it took to hunt, said Bird. Within the stories, teachings were passed on. Bird recalled a memory of his late brother and him trapping as children. “We (would) go trap muskrat, weasels, squirrels and then we would order candies with those [furs] when we were kids,” he said.

Growing up in the north as a child was very different for Bird’s generation. He was given the proper knowledge of how to use the tools to work with when they were ready.

“As you’re growing up, you know, as you get a little older like nine or 10 years old, we were given a gun, a .22 (calibre rifle) and we’d go hunt chickens all day,” said Bird. The community also functioned differently when he was young. For example, people living in the camp were checked on regularly and when a hunter came back with meat it was shared, said Bird. “If somebody got sick, there always was herbs and somebody in the camp would know how to mix it,” he said. “Then you look after that person.” Times have changed over the years, but Bird chooses to keep the old ways of doing things alive, including the art of hide tanning.



The view Tommy Bird has been enjoying for the past 40 years. All year, he cares and trains his dogs and, once the snow-falls, they go to work for the dog-musher. (Photo by Tommy Bird)



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Life in the Big City (part 3)

I am a storyteller. Technically, I am a print journalist – I tell stories of what’s happening around me, make a record of it, and publish it in a newspaper.

I recently read Harold Johnson’s The Power of Story. I learned valuable lessons about how story shapes our entire universe from our creation stories to the way we interpret our inner voice.

The book got me thinking.

What stories do we tell as Indigenous peoples?

Are we defeated victims of colonialism? Or are we champions of our sovereignty who will create and maintain a powerful future for our children?

We can manifest one or the other, but how do we collectively manifest a good future?

In my travels, I’ve met people with different viewpoints and encountered disagreements. But hopefully through storytelling we can begin to learn from one another.

Living in Toronto is sometimes a challenge, but I’m learning a lot from the diversity that exists here.

Not to say what I learned growing up in the rez is bad – what I am saying is we will eventually come across individuals who see the world differently. We can either find the lessons in those differences or find an issue with them. The choice is ours.

Currently, we should take a good look at ourselves and ask if what we are telling ourselves is meaningful, and if the stories we tell are good for our future. In other words, what are we manifesting and telling our children?

As I write this, it dawned on me that I am living my manifestations. I told myself a story one day that I was destined to be a writer because I felt it in my gut.

Today, I write for an actual living, despite the struggles to get here.

Looking back, I never read a book nor did I write an essay until Grade

12. I swear, I thought I was dyslexic.

I could hardly read a sentence without a headache and feeling defeated – but our teacher challenged us.

We were told to not only read all 511 pages of Lawrence Hill’s Book of Negroes. but also write a book report on it.

I recall throwing that book at the wall a few times out of sheer frustration. Things weren’t great at home either, but in order to graduate, I told myself I’d finish it.

Three months later, I completed the task.

I got my book report back almost completely covered in red ink. My teacher, committed to seeing me grow as a writer and student, went over it with me.

Although I got impatient, she didn’t take it personally.

I wish all Indigenous youth could have this same experience – for someone to believe in them and work with them, and for students to have the tenacity to grow, and the will to be challenged.

In Toronto, I find my writing and storytelling is being challenged yet again.

My editor wants to see me grow even further.

Aside from writing, I’ve been thinking about how much of our culture can vanish in just one decade alone.

When I was a kid, if you entered our community hall, you’d see people sitting around tables and speaking Cree to one another.

Today, nobody really does.

As Indigenous storytellers, we have a lot of responsibility to carry. We cannot forget about our sacred languages as we move forward and figure out our destiny.

Johnson’s book really made me think about a lot of things but mostly about where I am, what I am doing and where I’m going.



Life in the big city
Jamin Mike



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The Crown-Indigenous relationship is a complicated story

By **Liam O'Connor**
of *Eagle Feather News*

When Queen Elizabeth II passed away in September, it sparked mixed emotion, because not only was it the end of an era but, for many around the globe, it was a time to reflect on the dark colonial history associated with the monarchy.

In Jamaica, polls indicated the people are in favour of severing ties with the Commonwealth. Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness said the nation no longer looks to extend its relationship with the Crown, citing aspects such as slavery and no specific formal apology.

Here in Canada, the provincial and federal governments share a different outlook on the monarchy.

“Canada is in mourning,” said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau immediately after the Queen’s passing.

However, the statement did not accurately represent all Canadians, especially Indigenous people.

In 1763, the Royal Proclamation was signed, and so began the long and often contentious relationship between Indigenous people and the Crown.

Dr. Cassandra J. Opikokew Wajuntah, an associate professor at the First Nations University, offers a deeper look into the Indigenous-Crown relationship.

Wajuntah said there’s no pan-Indigenous view on the relationship with the Crown — there are those who respected the original treaty and went to the Queen’s funeral.

She also indicated a trend of Indigenous people who disagree.

Wajuntah credits older generations for being more moderate with their grievances. However, the newer generations have “a more emboldened voice,” which means they feel safe to freely express their opinions.

“I think both perspectives can be true at the same time,” said Wajuntah. “You can respect that First Nations leaders at some point signed a treaty with the Crown, while at the same time, you can acknowledge that

colonialism was a terrible policy that was absolutely carried out by the monarchy.”

These events are not as historical as one might believe, Wajuntah points out the effects of the monarchy are more recent than they are a relic of the past.

“Realistically, those policies that she represented, I mean, they’re still



The sculpture on the front of the T.C. Douglas Building, which houses the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina, was created by artist Duane Linklater. It’s called Kākiwē/Forever and the phrase “As long as the sun shines, the river flows, and the grass grows” is often used to represent the Treaty relationship between the signatories – First Nations and the Crown. (Photo by Kerry Benjoe)

in place,” she said. “The Indian Act still exists in Canada. Indian agents were still operating in Canada in the 1960s; the last residential school only closed in the (late) 1990s.”

It’s time to turn a new leaf, according to Wajuntah — and it starts with ideas like Indigenous communities seeking self-determination, and not being governed by the colonial policy they had no part in creating. She points to how the very system that set up residential schools cannot be the same system to achieve self-determination.

In an email response from Matthew Glover, spokesperson for provincial government, he says the government is in full support of the relationship between the Crown and the new monarch.

He said the province believes the “special relationship between the Crown and Indigenous people” will be fulfilled by King Charles III.

“Our province recognizes that the path to healing and reconciliation is ongoing,” said Glover. “And we continue to work diligently with First Nation and Métis people to create a better province for all Saskatchewan residents.”

There was no response as to whether or not Don McMorris, the Minister responsible for First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs, has consulted Indigenous communities on their relationship with the Crown and if they are happy with the current status of it after Queen Elizabeth II died.

“There was so much done of the celebrating of her life and what that meant,” said Wajuntah. “And I think some people found that incredibly painful because it didn’t come with a discussion about what about all the other things that the institution she represents?”



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Scott Eaton
Director of Supply Chain Management – City of Saskatoon

Wanda Hunchak
VP – Westcap Mgt.

Geoff Gay
CEO – Athabasca Basin Developments

Barry Payne
Procurement Assistance Canada/Public Services and Procurement Canada

Four months interning at Eagle Feather News

By *Liam O'Connor*
of *Eagle Feather News*

Joining Eagle Feather News

About eight months ago my journalism instructor told me I got the internship at Eagle Feather News (EFN). It was the opportunity to write about and exclusively cover Indigenous news.

I wanted to work at EFN because, often, Indigenous concerns are put to the side in Canada. Examples in recent history that come to mind are the Wet'suwet'n land defenders in B.C. or Crown land sales in Sask., but the list is long.

This is not to say there aren't journalists doing this because there are, and they are great, I just think there needs to be more mainstream support behind it.



Liam O'Connor is a student from the University of Regina's School of Journalism. He joined Eagle Feather in September and spent his time learning more about how to tell Indigenous stories. While here, he produced a wide range of stories. O'Connor chose to intern at Eagle Feather because he wanted to learn more about the Indigenous community. He spoke with youth and Elders from across the province. Liam has been a welcome addition to Eagle Feather News who worked to keep the pages filled with amazing content. We at Eagle wish him well in his future endeavours. (Photo supplied)

As journalists, I think it's important we cover these issues and make sure Indigenous people and communities are heard — it's the most pressing news of our time.

One might critique that frame of mind and think it's biased and wrong to think like that as a journalist, but it's my belief that it wouldn't be very productive as a journalist in this day and age to listen to that.

My experience covering news for the paper

I was enthusiastic, but also nervous because I didn't have that many contacts as I was coming to the paper. And it's not only important, but essential to have contacts in journalism.

However, my editor and owner of EFN Kerry Benjoe always had my back with advice or numbers to call.

One of my first stories I did was on Tim Eashappie, who runs various culture camps to teach young kids in school about Indigenous knowledge. This one took place out at Brightwater, which is about 10 minutes or less south of Saskatoon.

The opportunity to do this story came from another one falling out, to which I immediately panicked and asked Kerry for guidance. She then referred me to Tim, so I started making some phone calls.

Soon I got ahold of Tim. I was looking to do a 15-minute phone call or maybe slightly longer, to ask him about his outdoor camp.

Tim wasn't that interested in doing it over the phone and invited me to come visit and experience the camp in person the next day — to which I accepted.

Once I got to Brightwater, Tim gave me hours of time to talk to him and understand what he was doing. He opened up about personal subjects, like his difficult time in the residential school system, but also about his optimism in teaching youth about the earth through an Indigenous lens.

It shouldn't be a lot to ask of journalists to do in-person journalism like this, so I'm not trying to take credit for going the extra mile or act like I did something special here, but I think I'll remember this story for a long time to come.

This sums up my time at EFN pretty well, in that I learned a lot with every story I did. Sometimes that required me to make idiotic mistakes, but I guess if you're not failing, you're not trying — some wiseman said somewhere.

Advice to other young journalists

To state the obvious, bring tobacco as a sign of respect when speaking to Elders, especially when invited somewhere. It doesn't have to be a lot; a guest speaker at the journalism school told us we could get a large pack of tobacco and then fill smaller pouches as offerings.

It's important to not leave the complete onus of covering Indigenous news on Indigenous people, so if you're in a journalism program or media position, remember that.

Ask for help when you need it and people like Kerry will be there to advise you in the right direction. Maybe don't ask as much as I did or Kerry might leave the paper altogether.





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Rez-olutions

Well, new year is among us friends. Time make our rez-olutions for 2023.

In the past, it would be around this time, I would commit to fixing the old van in the back yard, replacing the sheet over that back window and vowing to eat less KFC. I still have the van and the sheet, but I am eating a lot less KFC, simply because there isn't one in my town, which is a blessing.

This year, I am committed to three things: learning to make bannock, fixing the 1997 Chrysler Town and Country (again) and redecorating my crib, again.

I'm okay at making survivalist bannock, kind of a hard-tack, long-lasting, easily transportable puck, but I lack skills to make it taste good.

This year, I think I will focus on fried bannock by putting on my headphones and tight shorts, cranking "Greasy Fry Bread" by Punkin' Lusty, and doing my sweet thing in the kitchen until I get it just right.

Hopefully the results will be good. The Chrysler is another story. I don't predict much success with that battle.

The thing is blessed and cursed with one feature: it always starts. If it weren't for that, I would find it much easier to just have the auto wrecker come get it, then I would at least have \$300 to hire someone to make bannock after mine burns.

I mean, it's a pretty good van, all it needs are tires, breaks, shocks, seats, doors, a cv joint, new radio, new battery and air conditioner and to have the tape deck rewired.

That's right, the old girl still rocks a tape deck and sometimes the radio. This means occasionally it will turn on by itself at full volume and decide I need to hear a song. Lately, it seems to prefer outlaw country and classic rock. Thank you, radio.

I thought about selling her the other year, but I wanted to do it fairly, so I started making a list of all the things wrong with it for prospective buyers,

sort of a mechanic's special.

I stopped about two-and-a-half pages in. I just couldn't do that to someone, plus nobody else knows how to play with her headlights to get them to turn on right. I guess she's mine for life.

Redesigning the house is a little easier now that I am working full time and things are a little more stable. In the past, I would be deciding which sheets to hang on the doorways and if I should get a different colored couch for the front yard.

For now, I sit drinking eggnog, which of all the nogs, is my most favourite, looking out the window at my dog's yellow snow trail up my walkway to my house.

Somehow, "Follow the yellow snow trail, Dorothy!" doesn't sound quite as magical as the other famous Wizard of Oz quote.

As I sit, mug in hand at 11:59, I am reminded of many years ago, when a friend was visiting the city from up North for the first time to celebrate New Year's Eve.

At midnight she went out on the porch excitedly waiting for everyone to come fire their rifles into the sky like they did back home.

"We could do that here sweetie, but it means the SWAT team might show up... again, and nobody wants to ring in the holidays looking at a pencil drawing of a Christmas tree on a jail cell wall again, which is unpleasant... or so I hear."

Much better to be here, with a snoring dog on my lap, consuming my nog, and looking out at a snow-globe-winter scene with a fake fire on the T.V.

Dear reader, I hope you were snuggled cozily at home, enjoying your nogs and dogs, or if you don't have those things, you were at least with someone who cares about you.

2023 is our year!



Lighter Side
Eric Standing

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Ribbon skirts help one woman share her story of empowerment

By Memory McLeod
for Eagle Feather News

Having a talent for making ribbon skirts and promoting them with a message toward self-care and healthy relationships is a passion Tala Tootoosis takes seriously.

She uses her status as a high-profile Indigenous designer to share her knowledge with others.

“I can teach you how to make a ribbon skirt but creating a safe healthy environment for healing and prayer, that is something that we need to work to develop,” said Tootoosis. “For me, I took a negative experience with my ribbon skirts and turned it into something that is a symbol of protecting myself, to deflect those predators who use their authority to get closer to someone vulnerable.”



Tala Tootoosis is not only a ribbon skirt maker and designer, she is also a therapist who combines her two skills to raise awareness about creating safe spaces for women. (Photo by Tala Tootoosis)

She is open about her story of sexual abuse and the cultural exploitation she experienced, to shine light on the difficult topic.

As a mental health therapist and body-autonomy-and-consent workshop facilitator, Tootoosis is determined to educate Indigenous people about the dangers of sexual predators.

She said it’s a serious issue that needs to be addressed for several reasons.

“These convos, we don’t have enough of them,” said Tootoosis. “When a young person seeks help and then is taken advantage of in a relationship of trust, they

give up and end up turning away from ceremony and back to drugs and alcohol. When a disclosure of abuse is made, it’s important to believe them. Being believed is suicide prevention.”

After leaving what she described as “a cult, led by a predator,” she gave away all her ribbon skirts, which were made to the exact specifications of



Tala Tootoosis at the 2019 Otapiakki Calgary Fashion Show. The designer has a strong connection with ribbon skirts because they helped her recover from an abusive situation. She found her strength and now shares her knowledge with others about the importance of self-care and body autonomy. (Photo by Tala Tootoosis)

her abuser.

“When I left the cult, I (gave) up beading, quilling and sewing,” said Tootoosis. “I stopped going to ceremony and powwows for two years. I was terrified. I was lucky that I had the support. Getting that support is what made me begin to want to do this work again.”

Tootoosis credits her mother’s love and the education she received from the Saskatoon Sexual Assault Centre for her successful recovery from the abuse.

Once she was ready, she chose to be proactive and help others.

“A lot of what I learned is that it wasn’t my fault,” said Tootoosis. “Not something I wore, or where I went, but it happened because they had an urge to do it. So often we blame ourselves. In our Indigenous way we are taught to take accountability, that is part of our growth.”

During her recovery not only did she learn about victim blaming and rape culture, but she also learned more about healthy relationships and body autonomy.

“We learn through our experiences,” said Tootoosis. “I saw that I could promote body autonomy and safe cultural practices through teaching about the ribbon skirt.”

These days wearing a ribbon skirt is a symbol of self-love and protection. The skirts are also a way to signal to others that ceremonial practices and adornment are meant to honour and respect those taking part.

“I go into ceremony to pray,” said Tootoosis. “I put on my ribbon skirt now and I am protected. When I am in that space, I can practise my body autonomy and say no to any touch or attention that is unwanted.

Once a person sets boundaries, it can be life changing, she explained.

“We get stronger,” said Tootoosis. “It gets easier to apply that same level of assertion everywhere else. It’s all about counteracting that fear mentality.”

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Reconciliation Ally

Pat Fiacco working towards
Reconciliation is a life-long journey

By Kerry Benjoe
of Eagle Feather News

Pat Fiacco, Regina’s former mayor, has been walking the road towards Reconciliation for decades.

His journey began as a youth growing up in Regina’s Cathedral neighbourhood, where many of his friends and classmates were Indigenous.

Over the years, his circle of Indigenous friends has increased.

During his career in municipal politics, he worked to build positive relations with Indigenous people.

“As the mayor of the city, I had an obligation to ensure that there was full inclusion of Indigenous peoples whether it was at City Hall, in regards to the workforce, but also in general,” Fiacco told Eagle Feather earlier this year. “I took the initiative to go out and visit almost all the bands in Treaty 4 and spent time with chief and council and Elders, for the most part, and the community.”

Fiacco served four consecutive terms as Regina’s mayor before announcing he would not seek a fifth term in 2012.

However while he was the mayor, Regina led the nation in a number of firsts.

In June 2007, the City of Regina was the first municipality to proclaim June as National Aboriginal History Month, which is now known as National Indigenous History Month.

Other provinces followed suit and, in June 2009, it became recognized at the federal level and National Indigenous History Month became official.

In August 2010, the brass sculpture of Chief Payepot, a signatory of Treaty 4, was unveiled at City Hall as part of the 135th anniversary of the Treaty signing. Piapot First Nation is the closest First Nation community to Regina, with many choosing to call Regina home.



Pat Fiacco at a podium. He is a long-time advocate for Indigenous economic development. (Photo by Pat Fiacco)

Another first was the installation of the Treaty 4 Flag in the City of Regina courtyard.

On October 11, 2011, Fiacco and his councillors made history when they raised the flag alongside the Regina, Saskatchewan and Canada flags. Not long afterwards the city raised the Métis flag as well.

Other municipalities have followed suit and it’s become increasingly more common to see Indigenous flags in urban settings.

The establishment of urban reserves also flourished under Fiacco’s leadership. The first urban reserve was established in 1990 by Nekaneet First Nation in the industrial area.

In 2008, the Piapot Cree Nation established an urban reserve in North Central. Since then, others have been established within the city limits with more in the works.

Fiacco’s relationship with Indigenous people did not end once he left office, but instead expanded. By 2015, he joined Four Horse Developments, which is the economic branch of Zagime Anishnabek Nation, and was instrumental in helping the First Nation establish its business hub on the city’s west side.

He established Fiacco and Company Management Group and works with First Nations and Indigenous organizations.

Currently, Fiacco is working with Carbon RX and with First Nations, so they can participate in the carbon capture market.

Although his work predates the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action, he is a strong advocate of Action 92 which states,



Pat Fiacco with Chief Lloyd Buffalo from Day Star at the Global First Nations Carbon Summit in Regina, Sept 2022. The summit was hosted by Carbon Rx to raise awareness about the potential economic benefits of carbon capture. (Photo supplied)

“We call upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources.”

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The brave little girl from Kamsack

*By Memory McLeod
for Eagle Feather News*

After receiving Royal Assent, January 4 will forever be known as National Ribbon Skirt Day in Canada.

For many, it's a public way to celebrate the beauty and pride of culture, family and clan.

While each skirt holds its own meaning for the owner, one skirt changed the course of history when a little girl in fifth grade proudly wore it to a formal day at her school.

Judy Pelly shares how her granddaughter Isabella Kuluk became the face of an international movement.



Isabella with Judy Pelly, wrapped in a starblanket. (Photo supplied)

It all started with Kulak being excited about wearing her new ribbon skirt to her school formal.

"This skirt was so special to her, made by an aunt who is highly skilled," said Pelly.

"She was so proud and couldn't wait to show it off."

The day did not go as expected.

Instead, a school employee pulled Kulak aside and told her the ribbon skirt she wore so proudly was not formal wear.

It was devastating for the young girl, and she left the school in tears.

"Such a turn from her joyous way of leaving to school that morning," said Pelly.

Instead of being silent the family decided to take action.

Pelly stepped outside her comfort zone and wrote a public Facebook post about her granddaughter's experience. She didn't leave out any details and the heartbreaking story sparked an almost instantaneous response on a global scale.

"It was so unexpected when my son told me my post had gotten

8,000 shares, not likes, but shares," she said. "Then I started getting calls from all over the country... I realized this story was taking off and that a lot of people cared about what happened."

The Kulak family are private people, so Pelly became their spokesperson when media outlets and concerned allies from countries as far away as Norway, Sweden and Japan began reaching out.

She knew something historical was happening.

"Two Indigenous female U.S. senators told us they were showing solidarity by wearing their ribbon skirts to the senate," said Kulak.

The support for the normally shy little girl continued to gain momentum in the days and weeks following Pelly's Facebook post. Even the Prime Minister, during a morning address, referred to Kulak as, "the brave little girl in



Isabella Kulak sitting during the Strength of Our Women Awards. (Photo supplied)



Isabella receives a hug from Judy Pelly at the FSIN awards gala. (Photo supplied)

Kamsack." Almost two years from the day Kulak ran home from school in tears, she was on stage at the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations' Strength of Our Women Awards.

The purpose of the awards is to honour woman warriors.

"She's so cute. She puts her arm up to show her pride," said Pelly. "She's beginning to speak out (and) she's only 11 years old,"

Although it was the official first National Ribbon Skirt Day in Canada, Kulak and her supporters began celebrating the day last year.

In 2021, a meeting between the family, the school board and superintendent was arranged. That day, the Cote First Nation Chief along with many supporters wearing ribbon skirts walked the family to the school.

"We wanted them to acknowledge institutional racism, which they did," said Pelly.

The family chose to educate because of the school's high Indigenous population and its proximity to a former Indian Residential School.

"No punitive measures for the E.A, but that she and other staff receive cultural awareness and sensitivity training. It started there in a classroom but has reached around the world."



Isabella Kulak on stage with Judy Pelly at the FSIN Awards. (Photo supplied)

For one journalist, telling Indigenous stories the right way is in her blood

By Alex Kozroski
for Eagle Feather News


Journalists are trained to find stories; but Francine Compton knows if you are patient and respectful, stories will come to you.
Compton, a member of the Sandy Bay Ojibway First Nation in Manitoba, has a family history of telling stories.
“When I was 15, I was looking for where to go for high school,” she said. She talked to her father, Jim Compton, who was “one of the first visibly native





Francine Compton, a long-time journalist, shares her story of how she got into the field and about how she approaches storytelling. She is a producer for CBC Indigenous and is based out of Winnipeg. Compton began her career at the Aboriginal People’s Television Network (APTN) straight out of high school. In addition to her role at CBC, she is also the current and first Canadian president of the Native American Journalist Association (NAJA). Compton plans on bringing the annual NAJA conference to Winnipeg this summer. (Photo by Francine Compton)

journalists on TV in Canada.”
Her father worked for CBC from 1983 to 1993 and was a founding mem-

ber of the Aboriginal People’s Television Network (APTN).
“My dad said, ‘You can study broadcasting because we’re going to have our own network one day,’” said Compton. “And I just thought, ‘there’s no way we’re ever going to have our own network. He’s dreaming’ (But) he was right.”
On Sept. 1, 1999 APTN hit the airwaves.
It was also the same year Compton graduated high school.
By Feb. 2000, she was part of the APTN studio crew, then moved into a research and writing position and eventually became the executive show producer.
Compton said the station had an impact on other broadcasters.
“APTN’s storytelling helped the industry evolve,” she said. “Nobody was covering this stuff like we were. (Such as) doing the first federal election covered by an all-Indigenous news outlet. We were really leading in a few areas.”
While at APTN, she got involved with the Native American Journalist Association (NAJA) because she wanted to be part of “a network of Indigenous journalists.”
Compton eventually became the first Canadian to be elected president and is currently in her third term.
In 2016, she left APTN to be a national assignment producer for CBC Indigenous.
“I saw a big difference right away,” said Compton about the move. “I was going from a little network with a big Indigenous team ... to an enormous network with a tiny Indigenous team.”
Despite the change, she never forgot her roots.
“One of the things that’s important to know when going into communities is ... you don’t need to go in there and be aggressive, and run around sticking microphones in people’s faces,” said Compton.
While covering the papal visit in July, she approached the news coverage differently. “I walked around and took it in,” said Compton. “I knew, if I sat anywhere, someone would talk to me. I just knew that. I had that feeling. And it happened ... I sat next to a Survivor and I waited for him to start talking to me.”
She went in with no camera or microphone.
“He turned to me and started talking,” said Compton.
After a while, she asked him for an interview.
They spoke then he posed for some photos.
Compton said he wanted her to see the back of his vest.
“We always take pictures of people facing us, but he had this vest where his clan was on the back and he wanted to turn around and show me,” she said. “That was a really special moment for me, for him to share his story with me, for him to want to show me his clan on his vest.”
She still keeps in touch with the Elder.
As a journalist, she believes it’s important to break down colonial borders and sometimes it means doing things her way.



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Les organismes communautaires peuvent soumettre leur demande. La date limite d’admission est le 21 février 2023 à 17 :00 HP. Visitez www.fondsderelancedesservicescommunautaires.ca pour savoir comment préparer et présenter une demande.



Heather O’Watch creates her own story by looking to her past

By Andrea Bellerose
for Eagle Feather News

To say Heather O’Watch is a woman of many interests would be an understatement.

An alumni of the Indigenous Communications Arts Program at First Nations University of Canada, she is currently pursuing a graduate degree from the Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy and is releasing her first children’s novel this year.

O’Watch is a storyteller at heart.

It’s a skill she developed by combining her formal education with her traditional Nakoda and Cree teachings.

“A lot of my great-grandfather’s stories were around prophecies, but were also around kinship and relationships,” she said. “There is a particular story he told that talks about respect and having the mutual respect of someone else who has another faith whether that be Christianity, maybe Islam, maybe Buddhism.”

Being respectful of all faiths is something O’Watch not only learned from her ancestors, but practises in her own life. At the same time, she’s aware that some stories have been altered to fit a certain narrative.

“As a younger person who listens to some of the stories, sometimes I listen to it through a Westernized lens and I have to take a step back to recognize that,” said O’Watch. “So I have to unlearn that part of me that’s been so engrained in the way society is shaped around us.”

When asked about what makes Indigenous storytelling unique and special, she shared her insights.

“I think that what makes Indigenous storytelling unique and special is that it’s done, usually orally,” said O’Watch. “It is done through jokes, sometimes it is done through laughter. It could be done through crying as well and I think that is what makes it unique. It is not just one way or another of telling it.”

Heather’s perspective on what makes Indigenous storytelling unique has carried over into her own writing.

She is set to release her first novel, Auntie’s Rez Surprise.

“It started with a story about an Auntie that has this relationship with their niece and has brought over a surprise and one of those surprises is a rez pup-

py,” said O’Watch. “As an Auntie myself and an Auntie that has five dogs who are all rez dogs, it came to be this really loving story about kinship.”

In keeping with the Indigenous storytelling style, it also has some humour and some jokes mixed in, she said.

As a young Indigenous woman, O’Watch is aware of the obstacles in her way. In the sectors of philanthropy she currently works in, she doesn’t necessarily see a representation of herself.

“There are sectors of industry that didn’t want us in these places to begin with,” said O’Watch. “We’re starting to create and share our own stories whether it be some humorous book about Auntie’s Rez Surprise or whether it’s about working on a global spectrum or whether it is just about hearing other people’s stories sitting down in a community hall, or a centre, or even a public library.”

She believes her generation is taking on roles that weren’t created for them and the next generation is going to take up a leadership role as well.

She maintains positivity and hope for the future.

O’Watch was able to publish her book after winning the Second Story Press’ Indigenous Writers Contest where she received a publishing contract. The book will be released in both Cree and English versions sometime this year.



Heather O’Watch has a wide range of interests. She is currently a graduate student and a children’s book author. (Photo by Heather O’Watch)



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The narrative sovereignty of storytelling

By Hannah Scott
for Eagle Feather News

For acclaimed author and journalist Jesse Wenté, sharing stories is a universal human impulse.

“I try to tell stories all the time. I think the way humans communicate is through story,” says Wenté, a Toronto-born Ojibwe member of Serpent River First Nation. “It’s the most distinct thing about us from any other animals.”

But don’t call him an Indigenous storyteller -- Wenté prefers to say “narrative sovereignty” to describe his life’s work, which includes 25 years as a CBC radio host and culture critic, along with numerous leadership positions in the arts and film communities.

In any case, Wenté says he focuses his work less on the labels for it, and more on creating spaces for marginalized people to share their own stories freely and how they see fit for themselves. Wenté currently serves as chair of the Canada Council for the Arts, a national organization that supports Canadian artists.

When asked whether he fulfills the role as a storyteller for his family by



Long-time journalist Jesse Wenté shares his thoughts on storytelling with INCA student Hanna Scott. (Photo by Redworks Photography)

his own standards, Wenté hesitates. He says he doesn’t see himself as fulfilling a set role, either for his family or for ceremonial purposes. Instead, it’s just a way of being.

“I think that’s literally what is central to the whole human experience, is storytelling. The other animals don’t really make art, right? They don’t paint. They don’t tell these stories on the walls. We do,” he says with passion.

In 2022, Wenté published the national bestseller *Unreconciled: Family, Truth and Indigenous Resistance*, which made the *Globe and Mail’s* annual Best Books list and won the 2022 Rakuten Kobo Emerging Writer Prize for Non-Fiction.

In *Unreconciled*, his storytelling takes a highly personal turn. Wenté says he wrote the book for his children, to explain his life and his decisions when they are ready to hear them.

When it comes to colonialism and the impact it’s had on Indigenous people, it’s immeasurable, he said.

Wenté explains that residential schools replaced Indigenous stories with

colonizer’s stories, weakening the ability of people like his own grandmother to pass their own stories on to future generations.

That process continues today through colonial systems, including the education system, he says.

However, Indigenous voices have not been silenced. Maintaining authenticity in storytelling is Wenté’s advice for any aspiring creators and students.

A film lover at heart, he wraps his work around culture and filmmaking and sees hope in the field.

“I think that’s literally what is central to the whole human experience, is storytelling. The other animals don’t really make art, right? They don’t paint. They don’t tell these stories on the walls. We do,”

Wenté says filmmakers like Alanis Obomsawin and Darlene Naponse have created stories authentic to themselves, free from colonial influence and labels. Another director who made a significant impact in the industry was Jeff Barnaby whose work consistently made headlines at the Toronto International Film Festival, an event Wenté was heavily involved in, including serving seven years as film program director at the TIFF Bell Lightbox, a showcase and learning centre for emerging filmmakers and artists.

Barnaby passed days before the interview with Eagle Feather News.

Wenté’s advice for aspiring filmmakers and journalists is about self preservation.

“Make sure you preserve something in your storytelling for you. Just for you. That you don’t give it all away, because the storytelling industry can be an extraction industry just like any other one, and they’ll take every single drop they can get out of you,” he says. “They’ll pull it all until you’re empty and what I would say is, I don’t know if anyone is deserving of all of it.”



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Mervin Brass, a storyteller focused on language

By Kelsey Wiks
for Eagle Feather News

Mervin Brass, a journalist turned senior managing director, currently holds the highest title of any Indigenous person in CBC history.

Today he's using that position to help promote the revitalization of Indigenous languages.

Originally from Treaty 4 Territory, Brass is Anishinaabe and Cree from the the Key First Nation.

Like many Indigenous children, Brass was affected by the loss of language in his home due to residential schools.

"My mom and my dad attended residential schools and both my parents spoke their languages beautifully and fluently" he said.

But Brass' parents, like many others, were taught to be ashamed of their language. As a result, it was not passed down to their children.

"They never taught the children how to speak (their languages) every day in the house," he said.

Because of this, Brass is committed to the growth of Indigenous languages.

From a young age, Brass had an interest in current events and began exploring journalism. He knew he'd found his true passion. After studying Indigenous Communication Arts (INCA) and journalism, he graduated from the First Nations University of

Canada in 1997 and started his career.

From there, he worked in many areas such as a reporter for CBC Regina, in private radio as a senior reporter and host, and even started his own newspaper called Treaty 4 News.

He was managing editor at CBC North for four years before moving to senior managing director in 2020, overseeing eight bureaus across the northern territories.

Brass loves the work CBC has been doing to revitalize Indigenous languages. In 2017, CBC launched the Indigenous languages archives project. The goal is to digitize all the audio tapes in the broadcaster's Indigenous language programming archives.

"What we hope to do is to get those languages into the communities, so that the communities can have access to those stories and listen to the Elders speak," said Brass.

He believes hearing voices from the past will help energize future voices.

"What we are hoping is that it will help to revitalize the language and bring back some of the phrases and words and storytellers that you know for generations, people have not heard," said Brass. "So, we are hoping in result of that,

it will help to make the languages stronger."

As senior managing director, Brass is focused on hiring more northern Indigenous people as journalists, producers and hosts.

However, there have been some challenges. Many potential journalists come from remote communities and would like to stay in their homes with their families, he said.

Finding ways to employ people, so they can stay in their communities, is all about being flexible, explained Brass.

Another challenge is the decline of Indigenous language speakers.

In the last Canadian census, only 13 per cent of Indigenous people said they speak an Indigenous language. This total percentage includes fluent and semi-fluent speakers, and many of those 13 per cent are aging.

Brass remains hopeful more young speakers will speak their language around their communities and revitalize their Indigenous languages.

Language immersion needs to happen, so people become comfortable speaking their language, he said.

Currently, Brass is very excited about CBC's Indigenous language podcasts he's been working on. So far, one podcast in Inuktitut has been aired and he says it is very popular around the communities that speak the language.

Brass is excited to see what the future holds.



Mervin Brass and Shannon Avison stand in front of CBC Yukon. Avison is an INCA instructor at FNU and Brass is her former student. The two are now colleagues and actively work to mentor up-and-coming journalists. (Photo by Shannon Avison)

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Stories help create understanding and keep history alive

By Janice Bird
for Eagle Feather News

Paula Daigle’s world revolves around books, but she has her own unique story to share.

Originally from the east coast, the First Nation University of Canada (FNUniv) librarian is far from home.

Daigle was raised in Halifax, N.S., but her story begins with her father who is from the Acadian fishing village of the Baie-Sainte-Anne in New Brunswick.

The fishing community, located on the Miramichi Bay, has Acadian roots dating back to the late 1700s. The majority of those from the area are bilingual with many still speaking Acadian French.

Acadians, like Indigenous people, have a very distinct identity within Canada.

They are the ancestors of the Cajuns, having been deported there after the 1755 Expulsion of the Acadians. However, some escaped the deportation and stayed in Canada, explained Daigle.

She shares a little about her culture, some of which First Nations can identify with.

Daigle said many Acadian traditions involve food and this includes storytelling.

It’s customary for an Acadian to bring food as gifts and once the food is shared so are the stories, which are sometimes accompanied by music and song.

Similarly, First Nations will gift tobacco to an Elder or Knowledge Keeper before stories or knowledge is shared.

Daigle said the family storyteller is her aunt Séraphie Daigle-Martin, whose stories date back to the early 1600s even before the Acadians immigrated from France. These stories have been archived at the Université de Moncton and studied in Louisiana and France.

However, it’s the stories of Little People Daigle remembers most vividly.

She said there are family stories of the Little People who would visit her grandmother. There were also stories of how the Little People used to braid the manes of horses.

In comparison, the Cree have stories of the Little People also known as the mêmêkwêsiwak.

Traditionally, stories are told once there is snow on the ground.

Elders will often share stories of their own encounters with the mêmêkwêsiwak, but young people also talk about incidents with the Little People.

A common practice among First Nations is the act of making relatives.

When meeting someone for the first time, family ties are often uncovered, whether through blood or marriage, because family history is important.

Daigle explained Acadians keep track of their own history in a similar manner.

For example, her father was given the nickname “TiMon,” a shortened version of Petit Raymond or little Raymond and, when asked, she identifies herself in a unique way.

She will say, “Paula à Timon à Fred à Jacques à Julien.” When translated this means Paula of Timon (her father) of Fred (her grandfather) of Jacques (his father) of Julien (his father).

People of Acadian heritage share similarities with First Nations, especially those who rely on the land for their livelihood because stories of the land are universal.

Not only are stories a way to learn about a family, a community and a culture—they help to preserve history, as is the case for First Nations and Acadians alike.



Paula Daigle at her desk. The FNUniv librarian can be found on the Regina campus ready to help students. (Photo by Bee Bird)



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