

DOCTOR, LAWYER, INDIAN CHIEF

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(cont'd)

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Narration: - Our grandmothers they were law-makers, doctors, political leaders, farmers, and artists. We have a great path to follow. Grandmothers, know that the strong spirit and the wisdom of our women is not lost. Your gifts remain deep in all our souls. Sisters, think what we owe our grandmothers and follow in their footsteps, take back the power that may have slipped away.

(music)

Narration: - The strength of our grandmothers is continued in Sophie Pierre, chief of the St. Mary's Band in B.C.

Sophie: -Kootenay women were really the backbone of our tribe. Having an understanding of that and of our own Indian religion, that has an incredible influence on my life and it's really helped me in staying in as chief and the tribal Council Administrator, Because there's a lot... oh a lot of times when you feel really bugged about things and... then you just take the time out to do the things that you have to do with religion, and you feel better.

- My early school years were spent in a residential school and I think one of the biggest influences of my life was a negative influence. I was really upset as a very small child, I couldn't have been more than seven or eight years old, and I was in trouble for something or other and one of the nuns told me that I would never amount to anything more than just all the other drunken Indians on the reserve. I mean, this was her way of punishing me or correcting me I guess, and it made such an impact on me that I've...

- ...always remembered it, and I've always wanted to tell her some day, you know, well your prediction didn't turn out, well not yet anyway. Ah! Ah! Ah! So that's one of the influences, I guess that it... it was a negative influence but sometimes those, you know, you can turn them around and they can be good.

Narration: - Sophie's leadership had much to do with the success of her band in its various business activities: ranching, timber development, and Christmas tree sales.

Sophie: - A lot of people still have the concept that being a chief is... one that's really more ceremonial than anything else. But you have to be a good manager, administrator... depending on what type of development your band is involved with. The chief is the one that does the negotiations with government so you have to know what's going on. You've got to be right on top of things.

Sophie: - I don't expect that we're gonna have total cooperation from the province, you know, with this endeavour...

Sophie:
(voice over) - When I was sixteen I was fortunate enough to start on a work program in a drugstore, using the cash and keeping the stock. Then I got a full-time job with the band as band secretary and worked there for a while, then started to work as band manager. At one point I began to feel that I really needed more training, especially in business management, so I took business administration for two years, then I ran for chief and I've been chief since.

Sophie: - That's a good idea.

Sophie: - And I think that our two high school graduates should be honoured first. Kathryn Casimir and Andrea Alexander, could you come forward please?

Narration: - At graduation each year the band celebrates the achievements of the students. Sophie sees this as central to the development of the whole community.

Sophie: For your record of initiative, in graduating. We're really proud of you Andrea, we're really proud of you. There's a little keepsake from us. Big hand for them, our two graduates. We've got two graduates this year, next year we're looking at four, the year after that six, and then twelve. Pretty soon we'll have the whole memorial arena full of graduates, right? Yeah. . .

Sophie: - My mother has a real lot of influence on me. She's made me so very aware of our culture and how important that is, and she has brought back into my life the Indian religion which has been really important to me. It's really got me through an awful lot, you know, which was so different than having spent nine years in a catholic residential school, you know, and just finding all of a sudden that there really is something else that is more meaningful.

(music)

Sophie: - We all come from a tribe, we all have a culture, a language, you know, we've all got people that are willing to teach the young people that. So, Know who you are and feel good about that. Don't let negative influences, you know, from the outside get you down.

(music)

Narration: Knowing who you are as well as what your potential talents are is the basic for a unique program in Edmonton.

Lucille: - If you take this course, like I took courses before, I took courses that I never got anything out of and so I never changed, you know, and so all of a sudden when something like this clicks for me, well naturally I'm gonna teach this because it worked for me and I'm gonna try it out on you and you tell me it works for you, so there we are eh?

Narration: - Lucille McLeod teaches courses that prepare women for employment. Native women come from across Canada, seeking jobs, and here from Lucille they learn some skills for getting them.

Lucille: - I came in from a Northern community to the city at many different times, hoping, maybe hoping to get something but knowing that I wouldn't look, because I didn't have a shred of confidence in my abilities. I just eh... I took jobs like babysitting, and housework and eh... And this is where I stayed, not happily, but I did this O.K.? And just... in order to keep a little bit of self-respect. I was the kind of person that if I made an appointment for a job interview, I never kept the appointment. Even I never made... kept too many appointments at all, you know, and so this was the story of my life but I wasn't happy with it. We are not taught to compete and so we don't know how really to sell ourselves in the employment field. If we're gonna grow, or if we're gonna change we have to first of all become aware of ourselves. We have to start looking inside, then we have to start looking at the image that we have of ourselves, and oftentimes we have a low self-image. So we have to work on it so that we have a positive self-image, right?

Narration: - The value of the program is measured by the students themselves.

Student #1 - Many times I used to think, oh I can't do that, you know. Maybe I'm not good for nothing, you know, and then eh... Then I took the program and in a year or two it gave me that confidence, cause I was just gonna go to school, you know, instead of coming here then I changed my mind and I came here on April 13th, I mean 1982, and eh... I was scared. And then once I started the program it gave me that positive feeling.

Student #2 - I never had like a real job before, and I didn't know that... but I was told that this program would help me not only get a job but help me keep it too, so I thought that was a good place to start, and I got a job.

- What are you doing now?

- Eh... I work part-time evenings at K-Mart. I was a cashier when I started, and I got promoted last year to supervisor, and right now I'm going to school full-time during the day and I work evenings at K-Mart.

Lucille: - You know, I don't have a university degree, I didn't graduate from high school. I have... I can do certain things, but I have to be realistic. Right now I don't have that, so I'm gonna be happy with what I've got and I'm gonna give it all I have. I'm just like a preacher. I'm almost like an evangelist, I'm obsessed at the idea of getting this across, that we can raise ourselves up. We have the potential, once we take all our power and our decision-making power back and put it back where it belongs, instead of giving our power away to all of these people who are so willing to help us, but we need to help ourselves.

Narration: - In the North, more and more native people are taking their political power back. One of those in the forefront is Margaret Joe, the first native woman to become a Yukon Government Minister.

Margaret: - ... of groups and concerned people, individuals from this government...

Narration: - Getting to where she is hasn't always been easy for Margaret.

Margaret: - When I first started going to meetings way back in the early 70's it was very difficult to speak out. I was always amazed at people that would get up and speak their mind and say what they thought, and it was, you know, it was just great to watch them and I would sit there and sort of... I guess if you got angry enough about something then you would, you know, you'd find yourself speaking, speaking out at it and I guess over the years you become very confident about what you're doing, but you certainly have to work at speaking in public. It's not the easiest thing to do.

Margaret: - We have the approval of the full house.

Margaret: - My first job was dishwashing. I think I was 15 or 16 years old. Later on when I decided that I was very smart and didn't need to go to school anymore I quit and went back to that job. I went to work in a hospital, an Indian hospital, where all of the administrative staff were white of course because none of us had those qualifications and we did the housekeeping, the kitchen work, the laundry work and... I did that for a lot of years. I really didn't think too much...

- ...about the future until years later when I was divorced and had a couple of kids and was trying to decide what I was going to do because I couldn't see myself working in a laundry for the rest of my life. I went back to school, I took my training in practical nursing. Trying to eh... you know, care for two young kids and going to school, it was quite difficult but I never never once thought about quitting. I had to finish it and I did.

Narration: - Two communities, native and non-native, live in Margaret's riding. Visits to both help keep her up to date on what's going on.

Margaret: - It's only been in the last few years that Indians have become involved in politics in the Yukon.

- ...

Margaret: - I would strongly recommend that anybody that has interest in political issues to go for it because we know what the problems are, and I think that we have a better chance of trying to make some of those changes that we've been looking at for years.

Margaret - Probably the awareness of being Indian started many years ago. I can remember being belittled, you know, by other people and I could not understand it, why people thought we were different. You were put down just, you know, exactly for what you were, being an Indian. You learned to ignore the people that treated you different. People that know me now would probably never believe it, but there was a time in my life that... that I used to walk with my head down, and I think it probably started when I left residential school and...

- ...went into a public high school, but I was lucky because I was a ball player and I've spent my whole life playing ball. I'm not as fast as I was when I was 15 but, that really helped me build up my confidence, it really did. When you're doing something that you're good at, then you feel good about yourself.

(mixed voices)

- What I would tell young Indian women is that you can't go out there and expect somebody to give you something. If you really want to do something, you have to work at it.

- I can look ten, fifteen years ahead when Indian women are doing all kinds of important jobs. We're moving ahead and I think that we're just starting.

Narration:

- Many younger people are changing traditional work roles. Corinne Hunt of the Kwakiult nation is one of them.

Corinne:

- I'm working on a fishing boat, a commercial fishing boat on the coast here. I'm the drum person. I run the deck and the hydraulic equipment that's used to bring the net in and out of the water. The net sits in the water for twenty minutes and then you bring it back in. You roll it back into the drum. You do that twenty times a day. In the summertime we fish for salmon, Sockeye and pinks in the winter we fish for herring, herring roe. It requires a lot of physical strength, but you can learn techniques in pulling or pushing or any kind of job, any physical job a woman can do if they build up enough muscle strength, then you do that through the season. Initially the first...

Corinne: - ...week or two is hard but, after that you're... you're in tune. There are a lot of young men that work on boats too and they're building their physical strength up as they work, so women can do the same thing. Technically the equipment on the boat is changing as well. There's a lot of hydraulic equipment used to do the physical work that was done before.

Corinne: - When I was offered a job on the boat, it was as a cook inside, and I don't feel very good inside on the boat, it's warm and if you're feeling a little ill, you know... you don't want to stay inside, so I told them I'd work only if I could work outside on the deck. When I was growing up I had a younger brother and his job was to cut the grass and mine was everything else inside, and I didn't want to accept those limitations for myself.

Corinne: - All the women on the boats they only work inside. Their job is limited. Women have to break out of those roles. Women first have to conceive of the idea that they can do it, that they can go out and if they find something interesting, if they want to fly a plane, if they want to work on a boat, then that should be it, that's what they should strive for.

Corinne: - My mother was always a very strong woman. She organized a lot of community events and... I think in a native community, you'll notice that the older women they're strong and they influence you.

- Corinne - I'm studying anthropology because I think it helps you to understand your own culture. For a long time the Kwakiult people were lost because non-Indians tried to take their culture away from them. Now people are recognizing how important it is to have the art, to have the religion that's your own, to feel comfortable with your life and your background and where your ancestors came from, and it's really important to hold you together, it holds you together when you're feeling like you're lost, When you're out in the middle of a city or you're in another country, you know that you have that body of people and ties through the society and your different cultural traits.
- Roberta: - Let me say that Indian people and the parliamentary task force see self-government not only as desirable but as necessary and totally within the realm. of the possible.
- Narration: - Roberta Jamieson speaks to a university conference in Montreal.
- Roberta: - (... and how.) I'll give you a good example. I have to keep using the one I'm most familiar with and that's the Iroquois Confederacy. The decision-making process is consensus building. Everyone gets a vote, including women who are leaders and appoint the chiefs, and including children. Now, you know Canada has only extended the vote to women in the last couple of decades, and the issue of children's rights is only something that is beginning to surface, so don't tell me that Indian people cannot be fair to their own. (Now I'm not...)

Roberta: - I see ahead a time when Indian people are at last controlling their affairs again, and I'm interested in making that happen, whether it's as a leader or as someone who tries to get cooperation amongst the governments that are outside the communities along with the ones that are inside the communities. That's where I see my role.

Narration: - Roberta has the distinction of being Canada's first native woman lawyer. She travelled throughout Canada as a member of the Penner Commission on native self-government. Roberta was born and still lives in Canada's largest Indian community, the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario. But she has to leave her husband and daughter often, and even from the beginning it hasn't been easy to leave home.

Roberta: - When I went to university, I was scared and I went from a totally Indian community to a non-Indian community of millions in Montreal, 500 miles from home, and I was scared, and I thought about coming home. I bought writing paper to write home the very first night, and the thing that really, I think, kept me there and kept my strength and my head together was meeting other Indian women. The fact that we shared a lot of things, humor, I think was probably the most important thing to us. We could laugh at one another and at ourselves, even though we didn't know one another before we met in Montreal.

- I always knew I didn't want to live anywhere else but in my reserve. That's where I feel most secure, that's where I feel a sense of obligation, and so...

- ...when I went away to school those are things that were very much on my mind, preparing myself to come back to the community.

Roberta: - I know there are a lot of young people, young Indian women today that face, or they seem, they think they face a life that doesn't hold too many opportunities for them. They might live in a community where the unemployment is very high, few people work, the suicide rate is high, alcoholism is rampant and I think that they might feel pretty hopeless and then what can they do? What role can they play? And I think what we need most for our children is they've got to realize that they can do anything and they can be anything. The very fact that Indian people have survived into this century is a real testimony to our strength.

(mixed voices)

- It's very important to me, and to my husband, that our daughter know first and foremost who she is. I want her to understand values like cooperation. I don't want her to be caught up in competing. Some of those values, those spiritual values that we hold as a community and we struggle to hold them in the modern world, I want her to understand them. When she has that sense of herself, I'm happy if she wants to be a secretary, a mother, a lawyer, a doctor. I have no designs for her in a profession. I hope she knows who she is and she's happy whatever she does.

Roberta - Are you gonna make hot biscuits when you get to be a lady?

Jessica: - If I remember.

Roberta: - If you remember? I hope you remember, that's why I'm teaching you.

Jessica: - Yeah.

- Our younger people, coming up, they above all need the kind of strength and determination and inspiration that an Indian sense of values will give you.

Narration: - Roberta doesn't just talk about native values, she lives them. At this ceremony her people honour her with a special award to recognize her work in the community.

Speaker : - Roberta has utilized her academic background
(m.c.) and personal commitment to serve her local community, Six Nations, and the larger national Indian population through a variety of roles. She travelled extensively across Canada in an effort to create an awareness and understanding among native people and the general public. Mrs. Roberta Jamieson.

- Bravo!

Roberta: - It doesn't seem to be enough to stand and say thank you for some reason, so I would like to thank you in this way. With great humility I accept this award, and its symbolism. The circle of life of which women form the center, is something in which I have great belief . I would like to dedicate this award to all those Indian women, to the cree lady who dries her moose, to the Ojibway woman who is drying her fish tonight, to the Indian writer who has received her first rejection notice in the mail, and to the...

- Roberta: - ...Indian artist who is struggling with her latest piece; to all the grandmothers to whom we owe the debt for the fact that we have kept our culture, and to the Creator for the spirit that lies within us all.
- Roberta: - Sometimes when I feel really kind of fed up and desperate, and I do, today people say, oh you've made it, you know, everything's smooth. Well it's not smooth and there are hard times and there are times when you feel lonely and like I haven't done anything and it's all worthless, and that's when I come and walk by the river, and think, and... and I gain that strength that... Listen, I'm just part of a bigger whole here, and I'm working for something and I'm making little steps, and however little I'm moving towards something and I'm trying.
- Narration: - Sisters, we have not lost our power. Like our grandmothers we have the spirit to be strong, to use the gifts that we each own. When we are grandmothers, the younger ones will say, our grandmothers had power and used their power for the good of many nations.

T H E E N D