Heritage Canada Discovery Project Akwesasne Elders

Heritage Canada, a non-profit organization, has been asked to compile an oral history of the Elders of Akwesasne.

The Heritage Canada Discovery Project entails the recording through various media (audio, video and photography) of the elders of our community. Heritage Canada has funded a four month program that will run from March 23 until July 17. The idea came up from previous projects that were being conducted outside the area by Heritage Canada. A request was made by the Travelling College (Barb Barnes) and the Historical Research Department (Salli Benedict) to Heritage Canada to do a survey of the elders of Akwesasne. The need for this project arises from the fact that there have been several deaths in the past years of the very old in our community.

When these people died, they too with them a look at our past, another way of life and the wisdom of decades.

These people witnessed a time of great change in our community, changes that their grandparents never dreamed and their grandchildren would never understand.

We hope that through the memories and stories of those still alive, we can offer the children of today the guidance and wisdom that may not be available to them from any other source.

The histories that we look into books to find, paint of a picture of Akwesasne's past that was invariably written by an outsider. The outsiders view has not been a kind one. One only needs to look at newspapers of fifty years ago to see the ignorance and prejudice that was conveyed throughout the media about the people of Akwesasne. This is the history that our children will be reading when they look to find how their grandparents lived.

With this survey, Heritage Canada hopes to change that negative perception. The elders of Akwesasne paint a different picture of what life was like in our community and it is through their eyes that we hope to get a glimpse of the past.

There are several elders who were born in the 1890s. They will have memories of the turn of the century. Memories of people who should not be forgotten. And a connection to Akwesasne's past that tells of a land that would grow any crop, of a river that you could drink out of and of fish so big that they could feed a family for a week. Stories that the young generations can look to with pride and to treasure for their children.

Because the project is going to be only four months long, we will not be able to interview all of the estimated 300 elders over 70 years in our community. We hope to get the opportunity to speak to as many elders as possible in the short time we have.

The cooperation of the community will be greatly appreciated. It is hoped that when we interview the elders we can have one or two family members present so that we can make the elder as comfortable and relaxed as possible. Old photographs, letters and diaries are also invaluable references that may be used during the interview and may prompt an important memory.

Heritage Canada would like to offer the past to the people of Akwesasne through the eyes of their elders, an insiders look at life here. The information gathered will become the property of the community and will be stored in the archives of the Travelling College and the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne's Historical Research Department.

The Heritage Discovery Project is made possible through funding to Heritage Canada, provided by the Province of Ontario through the Ministry of Culture and Communication.

We are:

Jack Whyte, Vivian Smoke, Tsionni Fox and Kevin King.

We Got You Again, Drew

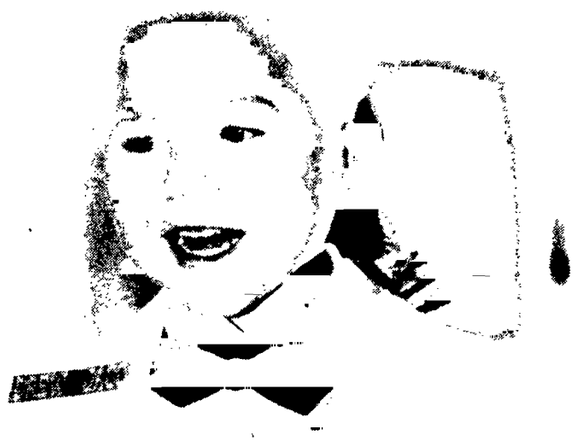

Photo: Timothy Thompson

Drew Jacobs at the Sunburst Canada Contest at the Holiday Inn. This is the second week in a row that this lad was in Indian Time. Last week he was the fellow who jumped in front of the camera at the Akwesasne Womens Volleyball Tournament in Hogansburg.

Jacobs.

Cont'd from front pg.

The Akwesasne Mohawk Police Department has appointed Cst. Cheryl Jacobs as the Community Relations Officer. Cst. Jacobs was appointed to the Mohawk Police in October 1990.

Interim Chief of Police, Ernie Houghton, posted the position to all officers. Cst. Jacobs has in the past worked in the three area schools, promoting various Safety topics. Cst. Jacobs is also very active in the Akwesasne youth sports programs run through the MCA Recreation Department.

Cst. Jacobs role as the Community Relations Officer will be to work in the three area schools, promoting Safety topics, the role of the Community Police Officers, media relations, working with various community organizations, and also to work towards familiarizing the community with a better understanding of the provincial laws enforced and the Akwesasne By-laws.

Cst. Jacobs can be reached at 575-2000 if you or your organization have any questions or concerns to bring to the Mohawk Police Department's attention.

Excerpts of Joe Clark's Address to the First Peoples Conference and the Constitution

Two weeks ago, representatives of the three federalist parties in the House of Commons signed unanimously the Report of the Special Joint Committee on the Renewal of Canada. That Report recommends: "the entrenchment in Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, of the inherent right of Aboriginal peoples to self-government within Canada."

If they ever did, Canadians no longer consider Aboriginal issues to be secondary or separate. They want the Canada Round to be an Aboriginal Round as well. They want this whole country to move forward together.

Time is short. Our purpose over the next two and a half months is to come a Canadian consensus on the whole Canada Round. Nobody likes deadlines. But they exist. They exist by law in Quebec. They exist because of issues we have left alone for too long. Aboriginal issues, the Senate, a more effective division of powers. We must address all of that and more detail, directly, and come to a constructive and comprehensive conclusion. That will be no easy task.

Obviously, Aboriginal issues cannot all be resolved between now and June. But the basics can be agreed, and so can commitments as to how we go forward from there. This is the time for serious talks, serious decisions, serious solutions.

Our purpose is consensus. Our instrument must be compromise. Our raw material must be understanding.

Part of that is knowing history. We don't know enough of our history in this country -- and sometimes what we know is partial, or wrong. For too many of us, Aboriginal history is at best a fable, at worst a fraud, filled with stereotypes and myths. This is a disservice to all of us.

When I was in school, I was told that my ancestors discovered and explored and were the first settlers of this country. That the Europeans brought civilization here, to what was a vacant and a virgin land.

But the first Canadians from Europe were not the first Canadians here. This country had been explored and charted and settled long before the rest of us arrived. And nor were those Europeans the first to bring order and government. From coast to coast to coast in Canada, First Peoples had built a life of prosperity and order, centuries before the Europeans came. Their cultures were rich, the languages varied and the political systems were sophisticated.

At that time, Europe was feudal. It was run by princes and dukes, with serfs and citizens underneath and under-thumb. But here, in this country, Aboriginal peoples had developed different systems. The Iroquois Confederacy is one example. Over a vast territory, its Six Nations had developed a system which met the needs of each nation while ensuring cooperation between them. Each delegation to the Grand Council of the Confederacy had an equal voice. Decision were made by consensus. That system was so impressive that it served as a model for Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin as they grappled with designing the American Constitution. The separation of powers, the concept of impeachment, the design of the American federation itself -- these find their parallels in the Aboriginal governments of that day. The word Caucus, which most Canadians would probably think comes from Latin, in fact is an Algonquin word, the practices those people had developed to create consensus, without division, through discussion.

Aboriginal self-government is not new. It was here before the rest of us arrived. It was taken away. This is some of the history we need to know to understand why the word inherent is both accurate and just.

That's one history. There's another. And that is what the people who came later did to those who were here first. The motives were mixed, but the outcome was clear. Intentionally or unintentionally, with malice or without, the identity and culture and confidence and dignity of Aboriginal people were ground down. There are people here tonight who were taken away to schools and told to despise their language, their culture. There is a Canadian veteran who went to war for Canada and, when he came home, was told that he had lost his status, and his right to his people's land, because he had been away. Away fighting for Canada. That was the law of the land he had fought to protect.

Many of you here know all to well about the Indian Act of 1876. Some of you may not. Let me describe what that Act and its successors say. The government was legally entitled to take Indian status away from any man who was literate and debt-free. That happened automatically when an Indian became a soldier or a professional. Women who married non-Indians lost their status. Native were not allowed to leave reserves without passes. Foreign concepts of band governments were imposed, undermining traditional systems. Central rituals were banned -- the pot latch and the sun dances of the West. Native children were regularly taken away from their homes and put in residential schools where abuse was widespread and various. It was only in 1960, under John Diefenbaker that Indians were given the right to vote in the elections of the land that was once theirs.

Many of those lamentable laws were changed over time. But the Indian Act we now have is an artifact and a shame. By-laws passed by Council can still be overruled by the federal government. The wills of Indians on reserves are invalid unless the government approves them. Indians can't use their reserve land as collateral for a loan.

None of us who are not Aboriginal s would accept that kind of systematic discrimination and indignity. None of the rest of us has had to. The most basic tenet of democracy -- the right and responsibility to control one's destiny -- is not a right, not a responsibility enjoyed by Native people.

I believe that is contrary to justice. Most Canadians I believe agree. But it is also contrary to common sense. Look what these policies have brought this country and its Aboriginal peoples.

We know the statistics -- infant mortality that is double the national average; suicide that is twice as common; a rate of tuberculosis that is ten times higher; and a situation where the proportion of Natives that have less than grade 9 education is more than twice the national average.

That is a tragic portrait. But it is more than that. Because people without power become people without hope. People who are forced to depend on others will cease to depend on themselves. People without the instruments to develop will be unable to develop. What is remarkable about Aboriginal Canadians is not the rate of disease or despair. What is remarkable , in the circumstances, is that so many Aboriginal Canadians have overcome these circumstances and conduct themselves with such dignity and strength. This is a tribute to them, not to us.

Aboriginal self-government is not about feathers or folk dances or dancing with wolves. Aboriginal self-government is about the fundamental fact that is the only way that Aboriginal peoples -- Metis, Inuit and Indian -- will be free to build their own lives, their own communities, their own country called Canada.

In the weeks ahead, we need to keep some fundamental factors in mind.

One, we are all going to have to compromise here. I have said that in Quebec when I talked to Quebeckers. And I have said that in Alberta, in Saskatchewan and elsewhere. Nobody here is going to get exactly what they want. Not the federal government. Not the provinces. Not Aboriginal peoples. That's not the nature of this country. It's not the nature of consensus. To move forward together we have to come together, and this is a two way street.

I know that Aboriginal Canadians have waited a long time -- a painfully long time. I know the energy and emotion and desire to do as much now as possible. I agree with that. But I emphasize the word "possible". Not everything will be possibly here. Some things will be left over for later action--because of difficulty or disagreement. We want to do as much as we can here. But to do that, we must never let the perfect become the enemy of the good.

Second, on this issue perhaps more than others, we need to build knowledge and understanding. When people meet, their minds can meet too. And we need much more of that. This conference is an important step in that process.

What the five conferences before this one told Canadians is that we share more than we know, more than we are told. That myths mask what we have achieved together, what we can accomplish together in the future, what we stand to gain by standing together. Canadian common sense took hold at those other conferences. I believe it will take hold here.

Third, we must all practice a little diplomacy. Any debate starts with disagreement, sometimes strong disagreement. But to get over that we need to use words that heal, not words that hurt. We need to avoid as much as we can stepping on the sensitivities of others in order to advance our own cause. That applies to all aspects of the Canada Round, including Aboriginal issues.

Forth, we need detail through dialogue. I find that Canadians become more comfortable with the distinct society when they know its history, its content, its reality. I find that Canadians are more supportive of Senate reform when they understand its need and mechanics and mission. We need the same for Aboriginal self-government. Indeed we need it more, because while the concept is old in our history, it is new and surprising to many Canadians.

You may have important questions to address.

- To what degree should self-government be defined in the Constitution?
- What powers might Aboriginal self-government encompass -- what federal or provincial responsibilities?
- What should the structure of the relationship be between a new third order of government and the existing federal and provincial systems?
- What are the implications of modernizing the division of powers within Canada for Aboriginal people?
- Is a national treaty or a Constitutional accord to be used to provide a framework for self-government negotiations?
- How are the extraordinary differences between on - and off-reserve Aboriginal communities to be best accommodated?
- What about the Metis?
- What new funding arrangements should accompany new power arrangements?
- What would be the relationships between existing treaties and self-government arrangements?
- How can the recognition of Aboriginal Canadians as First Peoples be recognized in the Constitution including safeguarding and encouraging the development of their cultures and languages?

To secure self-government, all Canadians must come to understand self-government -- its history; its need; its detail; its impact on all of us. None of that should threaten. Indeed it should reassure and build confidence. Much of the Canada Round is about confidence-building measures. And that is what this conference can do. I believe there is a growing consensus now on the concept of inherent self-government within Canada. We need to begin to move from consensus on concepts, to consensus on content.

I will conclude with two references from the past. On July 1, 1967 -- the centennial of this country -- Chief Dan George spoke to 32,000 people at the Empire Stadium in Vancouver. That crowd was there to celebrate. He was there to remind them that celebration for his people was difficult. He said, "Oh Canada, how can I celebrate with you this centenary, this 100 years? Shall I thank you... for the loss of my pride and authority... No! I must forget what is past and gone... Give me back the courage of the olden chiefs... Like a Thunderbird of old I shall rise again out of the sea... I shall see our young braves and our chiefs sitting in the houses of law and government... Ruling and being ruled by the knowledge and freedom of our great land. So shall we shatter the barriers of our isolation. So shall the next 100 years be the greatest in the proud history of our tribes and nations".

Almost 100 years before Chief Dan George spoke those words, the Indians of the Prairies were going through grievous times. In his book, *Silent Surrender*, Geoffrey York describes how the Indian chiefs of that time signed their treaties with the white man. Disease and alcohol had arrived and their culture was beginning to crumble. But those chiefs, and their treaties, talked about those who would come later. They spoke of their "children's children's children's children's children. That was known as the fifth generation of prophecy, the vision that would bring a new life for the Aboriginal people of Canada.

In 1992, we are in the midst of that fifth generation. And this can be a fifth generation of all of us -- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, new Canadian and old Canadian, English and French. Let us act together as Canadians of the fifth generation and make that prophecy come to pass.

Royal Canadian Air Farce to Perform in Brockville and Cornwall

"After two hours of watching and listening to The Royal Canadian Air Farce, [observes a Halifax Chronicle-Herald scribe] one truth strikes home, it is just possible to die laughing."

For nearly two decades, the Juno award-winning group has applied its limitless supply of irreverent razor-sharp wit to a national lampoon of Canada, leaving audiences gasping for breath. Nothing is sacred - Joe Clark riding a bull that goes berserk every time somebody mentions Brian Mulroney; PMS Airlines where the passengers are flummoxed by the unpredictable mood swings of the attending staff: Flora McDonald trying to get a writer's grant from the former colleague Perrin Beatty; Joe Clark and Dan Quayle facing off in a goofy version of Jeopardy; a country radio station from Alberta called C.O.W. radio; Mila Mulroney and her closet full of shoes.

No two Air Farce shows are alike. Material for a given performance usually isn't penned until minutes before, and an intermission is necessary, says founding member Roger Abbott, "so we can write the other half of the show." Customizing their comedy so that it's fresh as well as topical is what makes the Air Farce stage show such a rave, and is a key to why the group has won an astounding 15 ACTRA 'Nellie' Awards and been recently named to the Maclean's Honor Roll of 'Canadians who make a difference', whose "work and achievements enrich the life of the country".

"The Air Farce cast, [Roger Abbott, Don Ferguson and Luba Goy] bounds on stage with the enthusiasm of teenagers. The audience howls with laughter, applauds freely, groans when expected, and enjoys every minute of the show," according to the Vancouver Province. Find out for yourself at the Brockville Arts Center on Saturday, April 11, 8 p.m.; or on Sunday, April 12, 8 p.m., at Cornwall's Aultsville Hall, St. Lawrence College. Reserved seating tickets for the Cornwall show are available at Ran-Gal Photo, Brookdale Mall, 938-7779, and, for the Brockville show, at the theater box office, 342-7122.

The Air Farce has taught us there is much to laugh about in Canada - and these days, what a pleasure it is to laugh! For more information, call 613-346-2622.