

Newsletter

JUNE 2022 | ISSUE 49

REFLECTING ON NATIONAL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY

What Does it Mean to Be Indigenous?

SN Community Analysts Emily Huntinghawk and Dylan Peyachew take space to reflect on how they've navigated their identities as young Indigenous people.

EMILY:

To me, being Indigenous means being resilient and proud despite everything that has happened and continues to happen to Indigenous people.

It took me a long time to get to that point though. I grew up walking in two worlds; I was living in my community, going to ceremonies, listening to my family speak Saulteaux, learning protocols and language and dancing at pow-wows.

On the other hand, I was going to school in a small town and later on in a city away from my family and community, playing every sport imaginable, participating in things like 4-H and tap classes and being one of very few Indigenous youth to be doing those things. I kept both parts of myself completely separate and it was tiring.





In my two worlds, I had different friend groups, different memories and experiences and was much more open when I was doing things related to my culture.

I remember always being so hard on myself when it came to concealing this part of me when I was in school or hanging out with my peers because they did not sign up to be friends with someone who was incredibly Indigenous. I was not ashamed of being able to do all the things that I did growing up because at an early age I learned about the horrific acts of assimilation and I knew that it was a responsibility and a privilege to carry on those important teachings, but it was hard when you're trying to 'fit in' with non-Indigenous people growing up. I definitely had a full blown identity crisis at a young age but I am proud to have broken down the walls I built hiding myself.

I knew that it was a responsibility and a privilege to carry on those important teachings, but it's hard when you're trying to fit in.

As I got older and particularly when I went to university, I found some amazing people who had similar experiences as me and we were able to make space for ourselves. A space where we could be ourselves fully without the need to censor what makes us Indigenous such as the loud laughs, endless jokes and even the shared trauma. I found myself seeking the roots I had in my culture and was able to reconnect on a deeper level and integrate both of my worlds together. As I grew, my worlds shifted from school and sports to a professional career and a social circle and I was able to continue my work of being comfortable being a proud anishinaabekwe (Ojibwe woman).

By any means I do not have it all figured out but on this journey I've learned to ask questions, listen with an open heart, to be appreciative of everything, to grant myself grace because the younger me definitely deserved a break and above all else, **I've learned to be proud.** •



Visiting Brokenhead Ojibway Nation for Strategic Planning Sessions in April.



DYLAN:

Trying to encapsulate what being Indigenous means to me initially felt difficult. An entire lifetime of memories, thoughts, and feelings swirl around as I ask myself that question.

I'm immediately brought back to family trips to our reserve where my cousins and I would run through the trees playing kick-the-can, awaiting our uncles to return from a day of fishing. I think of attending pow wows with my Koko followed by baking with my aunties where I would laugh until my belly hurt, eagerly awaiting more of their stories.

Simply, being Indigenous was the feeling of belonging; being with family and being apart of a community of people where your race/identity was not up for debate or even a point of discussion.

Off reserve, I've struggled with the concept of identity for as long as I can remember. I was surrounded by people (both peers and teachers) who doubted my identity and almost applauded me for being in the city. It was truly a bizarre feeling as I was always excited for the next time I'd find myself in Skownan with my family.

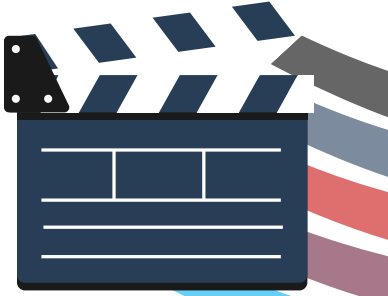
I always felt like these racist ideas were embedded in me at a young age and majorly contributed to the detachment from my Indigenous identity. After all, I no longer attended ceremony, I didn't speak the language or know our history as Ojibwe People other than past atrocities, so who was I to disagree?

But as I matured and continued to expose myself to new perspectives throughout university and opened the dialogue with my family, those walls I built slowly degraded. **Since then, I've slowly established a renewed sense of belonging, something that I get to own and continue developing for myself.** Being Indigenous was once about finding identity, but it has become so much more, now focussing on reconnection and relearning. I've found resources to help learn our language and I have the great pleasure of using my skillset to help improve the lives of Indigenous Peoples here at SN. I feel immense pride in saying that I am Indigenous and I am excited to continue exploring that for myself. Our people are beautiful and resilient, enriched with culture and have a deep, unbounded connection with this Earth and it's with that in mind that I will continue to base my actions. •

ON THE NEXT PAGE: ★★★★★

Watch and Read: Indigenous Peoples in Media

Indigenous people are taking back how they're represented in media. Below, Dylan and Emily have curated a list of important books, TV shows, and movies by Indigenous people, ranging from comedies to non-fiction.



Awake:
Free on Vimeo



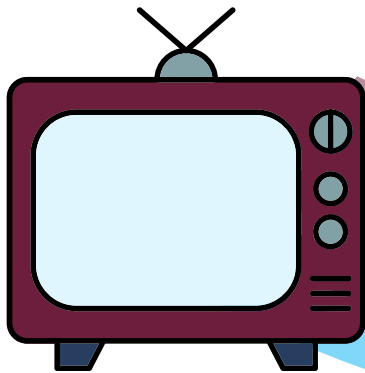
Wind River:
Netflix



Indian Horse: Prime Video



Birth of a Family: CBC Gem



Reservation Dogs: Crave



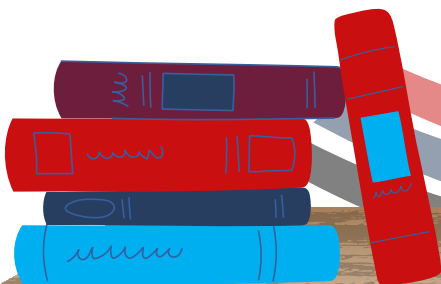
1883: Paramount+



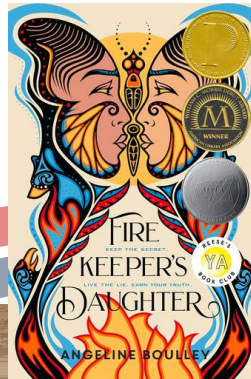
Rutherford Falls: Prime Video



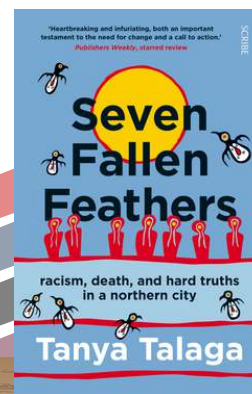
Mohawk Girls: APTN Lumi



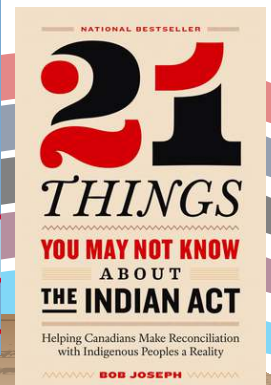
Trap Lines by Eden Robinson



Fire Keeper's Daughter by Angeline Boulley



Seven Fallen Feathers by Tanya Talaga



21 Things You May Not Know about the Indian Act by Bob Joseph



BY ALLAURA LOVELL, COMMUNITY ADVISOR

Carrying on a Legacy of Pride Activism in Fort St. John

Did you know June is also Pride Month? Allaura Lovell, one of our Community Advisors, reflects on her time volunteering for Pride Week in her home community of Fort St. John, BC.

Pride has always been important to me. My dad has always been an extremely active LGBTQ+ ally throughout his career and I hope to do the same. Pride celebrates diversity which is a critical part of community building because being exposed to other backgrounds and ways of being we can foster greater acceptance and understanding among all people.

At times my small community of Fort St. John can be perceived as an overtly conservative community. This can contribute to a feeling of uneasiness and fear for members of the LGBTQ2S+ community. I joined the Board of the North Peace Pride Society because the programming we offer provides a safe and accepting space for members of the LGBTQ2S+ community and allies who may not always feel comfortable being open and proud about who they are.

This year during Pride Week we organized 4 very successful events and took part in the production of a documentary. Our first event was a week-long Pride Art Exhibit. Local artists ages 14-60 submitted pieces that represented what pride means to them and they were displayed at the pop-up gallery. Saturday June 4th was the Pride Walk and the festival in the park which had over 500 people in attendance. The festival included an amateur drag competition and each of our local participants did an amazing job.

The day ended with a Pride dance which saw more than 110 people attend making this Pride Week our most successful to date.

A production company was in town shooting a documentary about Pride in FSJ. My Dad and I filmed our interview for the documentary at North Peace Senior Secondary School in my Dad's old classroom of 30 years; classroom 107 where he founded the first Gay Straight Alliance club in Fort St. John.



Allaura and her dad at Pride.

It was the first time I had been back at my old High School since I graduated, and it was a very nostalgic day. It looked very different, but it still served as a significant and meaningful backdrop for our interview.

We were asked lots of questions about my dad's past activism, the legacy he left and how I am now working to carry it on and further improve our community.

We also brought them a VHS tape to be digitized of a homophobic rally in FSJ that took place at the legion in 1997 where my dad spoke up in front of the crowd of 400 people. Towards the end of his speech the conservative woman leading the rally says that only her side has the truth and dad tells her that in 20 years her opinions will not be popular or acceptable, she then contradicts him saying they will be. I think that's such a crucial moment in the tape because now it's been 20 years and **I feel so much progress has been made and that it's no longer acceptable to spread hate like that woman did.**

Also being featured in the documentary are an LGBTQ+ married couple who recently moved to Canada from Guatemala. They made a beautiful statement that this was the first pride they had ever been to.

In Guatemala they were too afraid to attend pride because homophobia and violence is still common. **They said that being away from their family has been hard but the safety, friendship and love the community has given them has been amazing.** Their story is why we do what we do. Pride contributes to changing people's hearts and minds. The continued progress of the NPPS proves and encourages the notion that change is possible, even when homophobic and transphobic attitudes exist. Pride events empower LGBTQ2S+ individuals to reclaim the rights and freedoms they are denied, and the public space they are often excluded from. For some Pride is a celebration of one's own individual identity and their ability to live authentically, for others it is an expression of support for family and friends.

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Fighting shame and social stigma, through pride events, participants assert that they will not be intimidated and that they will continue to demand equality. I am so proud of my community and look forward to seeing its continued improvement and success. •





LEFT: Pride Perogies by a local business.
BELOW: Festival performers!



Puppy Pride!



Secwepemc
**WORD
OF THE
MONTH**

Sexqélqeltemc "Summer".

Summer is finally here. Other seasonal Secwepemc words are *Segwses* (sunny), *tkmesqt* (sky), *sxixèyt* (heat), and *skulecw* (mid-summer).

Thanks to Brenna Barley, our Administrative Assistant, for the words of the month. Brenna recently took Secwepemc language classes at Thompson Rivers University.