

Indigenous Peoples of Canada

Introduction - Video 2

Susan Blight:

My name is Susan Blight; I am Snapping Turtle Clan from Couchiching First Nation which is in the Anishinaabe nation of Treaty Three. So that's in north-western Ontario. I now live and work in Toronto; I've lived here for about six years. I work at the University of Toronto, but I return home often and I'm still really connected to my community there.

Gail Maurice:

I say I'm Indian. As far as educating people on being Indian - Aboriginal - Cree - Métis, you know, in BC [British Columbia] alone there's over 200 First Nations, you know, groups and languages. Cree is the most widespread across Canada. And the traditional Métis is different as well; like it's from, like I said, *coureurs du bois* [the first French settlers] times, so my grandmother was Métis, my grandfather, their parents, their parents, their parents, their parents - 1600s. It's like there's a, down at the root of it, there's one French person and one Cree and they matched, and so that's how we were born. So I just try to explain that as opposed to "Oh, you're half white and half Cree". No; no it's not - no I'm not half white and half Cree. It's a historical - there's a huge historical base for the Métis. We have our own music, we have our own language, you know. Growing up I would have just said "I'm Cree; my language is Cree." Technically my language is Michif because the linguists needed to categorize - categorize my language, I guess, instead of just it being Cree, in the blanket of Cree, although I do speak the Cree as well. I just say Cree, I'm Cree; I speak Cree.

Shandra Spears Bombay:

Well I definitely thought of myself as a white kid the whole time. I knew that I was part Native, and in Canada you can be a white person and think of yourself as part Native and still think of yourself as white, so that's definitely how I grew up. And I had been told that I was 1/8 Native, so mostly, most of my bloodline would be white - white family members except for this one great-grandparent, was the story I had been told. When I - I was able to meet my birth mom - she's white, and she was telling me about my father, and I said, "Oh, he's a quarter Native", and she said, "No, he's Native". And

this conversation went on where she was just explaining to me that he was a Native guy; he might have been a little bit mixed with white, but he was a Native guy. And I believed so strongly in the lie that I had been told that I argued with her for quite a while until I actually realized, no, this actually is a lie. And what I realized - what I later came to find out is that the government lied to almost all of us. And so if both your parents were Native they would tell you that you were half Native; and in my case, one parent was Native and they told me I was an eighth. And they would just do that to thousands and thousands of Native kids. So that was a lot for me to take in, and I think I was just around 20 at the time, and when I began to realize that this had been done on purpose, across the board to all kinds of adoptees, I wasn't happy about it, and I think it really made me want to reclaim that identity even more. And so then I became a Native person who's part white, which is different. And it's a very big leap but it actually took about 10 years. It doesn't sound like that big of a difference but it is a very big difference.

Verne Ross:

My name is Verne Ross. My Nishname name is Minoh Gishe ga Gini Wa-she Bini-she. And what that means is "nice day, nice bird". And that was given to me by my late grandfather. He - he had to dream about the name first before presenting it to me. It was early part of the morning when we - he was - when he met with me along with my other family members. We had a feast that went with that, and that's when he told me that: "This is your name, Verne. And this is a name that you are going to live up to. And you're going to look after your name. And that name will guide you through your journey wherever you are venturing into." And so my name represents kindness, be good to people, be good to nature, and because it represents birds I have to be good to all the birds, even the pigeons.

So I'm from Cody First Nation - it's out in Saskatchewan. We're a population around about 2500. My language is under the Algonquian group, which is a Sodo language, which means it's - my people originated from the Sault Saint Marie area [in Ontario], and then when - during the colonization came about they were pushed out west, towards Saskatchewan, Manitoba. So we were known as People of the Rapids, and my chief, my grandfather, is Chief Gabriel Cody, and so I know it's important that I know part of that history, just part of my identity. And I know some of my language, which is very close to the Ojibwe and Oji-Cree. And - but growing up on a First Nations community was not easy. I was born in 1963. I wasn't raised by my biological parents; they gave me up when I was a baby. So I lived with extended family, with my aunt and my uncles, and lots of cousins, in a small

house that needed a lot of repairs. I have a lot of childhood memories - good memories, but also some bad memories, you know.

John Croutch:

I grew up in Parry Sound [in Ontario] knowing that my mother was Aboriginal, and we had Wasauksing First Nation - it was over on Parry Island - so I went to school with a lot of First Nations kids. As you can tell probably by looking at me, I could pass as a white guy, right, but I knew, you know, from looking at my brothers and sisters who looked more Aboriginal than I did, that, you know, I was Aboriginal. But I had doubts all the time, right, because, you know, the First Nations kids would ask me; they would say "How come your mom is an Indian and you're not?" And I'm just like... And then they'd say, "Well you're probably adopted" and I'd go home in tears and say, "Mom, was I adopted?" - you know, crying into her arms, and she'd say, "No, you're my son." "I know, but I don't look like my brothers or my sister." "Well, you look more like your father. That happens, right?"

Michaela Washburn:

My grandparents used to speak Cree until I was about 11, and I started asking and wanting to know, and calling them Mushom and Kokum, and it completely stopped. And it wasn't until way later in life, that I was going to go to my cousin's wedding, and I wasn't dating anyone so I was going to bring a friend, and she happened to be Aboriginal and looked very Aboriginal. And my aunt said, "Can you not bring her?" And I said, "Oh, I know, plates are expensive" that sort of thing. And she said, "No, it's because she's an Indian." And she said, "Grandpa would be offended, and your mom would be offended" and that didn't ring true for me. So I phoned my grandpa; and my grandpa was the kind of guy who you'd shake his hand, and you'd get a box of Rosebuds, but I was always - I always hugged him up and kissed him up anyway. "I love you Grandpa!" And he would be like, "Oh hoh..." He didn't reject it; he didn't embrace it; but I think he liked it. And I was the only one who would do that; people were very formal with him and they'd talk around him, and assume what his opinions were, and I didn't do that; I was direct.

And I phoned him, and I said, "Grandpa, what's with the native thing?" "Why you gotta know about that?" And I said, "It's in our blood! It's part of who we are! Why is everybody so weird about it?" He said, "We got no language and no land. What's the point." And he - that was a heartbreaking statement, and my grandfather ran away at 13 and escaped residential school, you know. He lived up and down the railroad and made a living, and his siblings went to residential school for 10 years. And they - my mom and

her siblings grew up: "You're French; you're not Cree." Because it wasn't an easy time to be Aboriginal, and in some circumstances it still isn't for people. I'm fortunate - fortunate and unfortunate in the sense that I pass [as white], but I used to wish like was that I was really brown and that I had a reservation to always be my community. So what it means to me is a whole bunch of things: pieces missing, and pieces I'm reclaiming, trying to just broaden the understanding of it. I practice traditional things but I also take things from Catholicism that I was raised with. The majority of it doesn't work for me, but I like "Peace be with you", and I appreciate the singing and the incense, and shaking hands - I don't mind that, you know. I appreciate the virtues that are in a lot of spiritual traditions and so I kind of pick and choose.