C ATCH DA FLAVA

APRIL 1998

NATIVE YOUTH ISSUE

BROUGHT TO YOU BY
REGENT PARK FOCUS
COMMUNITY COALITION

CATCH "DA" FLAVA'S EDITORIAL BY LISA PETERS

MY LOST HERITAGE

When I heard that I was going to West Bay, a native reserve on Manitouland Island, I was very excited. I would finally learn something about my lost native heritage. On the bus ride up, all I could think about were the questions that I was going to ask. The first morning there was a sad one, because an elder from the community had died the night before and everybody was scrambling around trying to figure out what to do with us. So we spent the morning enjoying the scenery-big green trees, nice clear streams, mountains that seemed to stretch forever and the sounds of birds and insects. I later met some of the native Ojibwa residents. I noticed that some of the people there looked alot like me and had my exact eye color, and skin and hair texture. I learned a few Ojibwa words and at times was able to speak with the same accent making me feel, for a few minutes, native.

Over the course of our visit we were introduced to many aspects of native Ojibwe culture. For instance we got a real taste of native food. One of the meals they served us was "Indian Tacos" which is ground beef, mushrooms, green pepper, cheese and salsa all piled on top of fried bread. It was very delicious and filling. We went to a Pow-Wow and I got to see traditional clothes and dances. I was invited to dance with a few of my new girl friends but I didn't go because I didn't know how. In the midst of experiencing the rich cultural tradition of this community, I felt a great sense of loss. I didn't know anything about this part of myself or my heritage. I can't speak my own language or dance the dances. I wished I was raised with my heritage.

I don't think I could live on a reserve though, there is nothing to do. The mall in West Bay is very small, it only has four stores in it. The community is quite small as well so everybody knows everybody elses business. But all in all I learned and experienced a lot from my visit to the West Bay community that I could never have learned off the Internet, from school or from history books as I intended. In short, this trip reminded me that native culture is living and breathing and found in peoples stories, art and daily lives.

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The Focus Coalition is a resident driven, non-profit organization working to develop a healthier community by promoting healthy lifestyles. Focus is located in the Family Drop-In at 600 Dundas St. E. M5A 2B9. Entrance is at the rear.
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Native Child and Family Services

catch da flava speaks to the diversity of stories, experiences and cultural backgrounds of the people who live in the regent park community
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WE'RE UNDER YOUTH LINKS

LOVE IS IN THE AIR

A GUIDE TO TEENAGE RELATIONSHIPS

Love is in the air, but for most of Toronto's teens the smell has gone foul. It seems that many of teen relationships these days are following a rocky path. Others find themselves at a fork in the road where each individual decides to go their own way. I guess some of the questions raised would be:1) why are so many relationships breaking up these days?; 2) how can we keep ourselves together and happy?

Now you might not agree with some of the answers I've come up with. Unfortunately I too fall short of a pair of wings, a bow set and heart shaped arrows. Still, I do hope that my information is some what useful.

Some would say that teen breakups occur because we are young and still exploring the world. Others say it is because we are still in the experimental stage where we are trying to find out everything we possibly can about how everyone else thinks. But the major thing is that we are trying to find out about ourselves, our needs and our wants. And thus they say or believe that it is not possible for two teens to love and care for each other the way two adults could.

Yes I agree with the part about on how we still are learning about ourselves and others, but I think it depends on the individual and not on the age of the person. Adults still find out new things about themselves and others. Learning is a life long process. Not giving enough time to develop those feelings could cause major problems.

Another reason why teen relationships may not work is the whole glamorization of cheating or being a player by the media and your peers. It seems the in thing to do is to have many men or women on your arm.

con't on last page

PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAM NAMES AND ICONS

DO THEY HAVE THE RIGHT!

With Whites over represented in management, and Blacks dominant on the court or on the field, a number of racial issues arise amidst the context of sports. One group misrepresented in both categories, however, are the native peoples. In fact, we are more likely to see the stereotypical logo of a native person on the t-shirt of a fan, than we are to see a Native playing in the game or even commentating. This was brought to my attention just prior to a trip to the West Bay Native Reserve upon which myself and some colleagues from Regent Park Focus were about to embark this passed summer. I had bought a Cleveland Indians baseball cap, full back of course, when my friend Nigel asked the question, "You don't plan on wearing that to West Bay, do you?" It was at that point that I realized the gravity of the message being conveyed on the front of my hat.

Soon I came to realize that the Indians were just one of many clubs using the image of the "brave Indian" to market their franchise. There is also the Atlanta Braves, the NHL's Chicago Blackhawks, and the NFL's Kansas City Chiefs to name a few. And who remembers the 1995 world series which saw the Braves square off against the Indians. While "Indians" fans sported their happy faced "Indian" logos with pride, Braves fans displayed the cliched tomahawk chop. Though they backed opposing teams, both sets of fans supported the colonial establishments capitalizing off falsely constructed images of the native people.

This is blatant exploitation to say the least, seeing as the number of Native people employed by these franchises is next to none. The resentment rises to yet another level when one takes into consideration the fact that the land that the stadiums are built on was once inhabited exclusively by First Nations People.

The Indians, the Chiefs, and the Blackhawks all represent the level of ignorance common among what is unfortunately the majority of non-Native Canadians. Though it is unnoticed for the most part by non-Native as well as Native youth, this remains yet another factor in the oppression of our First Nations People.

BY KAI JAMES

Redskins

Atlanta

Braves

Cleveland

Chiefs

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NATIVE CHILD AND

Our Philosophy is based on:
"Survival and life enhancement through the realization of Native positive lifestyle alternatives among Native youth.

Purpose
To meet the personal, social and cultural needs of Native youth as they identify them, through:
empowering Native youth to plan and direct their lives;
promoting positive self-esteem and positive identities among Native youth;
developing life skills which facilitate lifestyles conducive to personal growth and collective development;
reducing barriers and increasing opportunities for Native youth; and promoting self-sufficiency through economic enterprise.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

SERVICES OFFERED

Street Outreach Services
daily outreach to youth
referrals and support services
info on safer sex/distributing condoms/advocacy
Lunch Program
free lunch Mon, Wed, Thurs, Fri,
supper on Tues evenings.
Drop-in Services
daily individual counselling, support and advocacy
Ambassador Program
high school and co-op education credits. Must be 16 years old and have a grade nine education
Social Recreation Programs
includes camping, outings, Pow Wows and two baseball teams.

NATIVE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

The Aboriginal Youth Steering Committee and Native Child and Family Services are working together with the Ministry of Education to develop a Native Alternative School for Toronto's Native youth.This project seeks to fill the education gap that many First Nation youth's are facing in the current education system in Toronto

A Native Alternative School would provide Native youth an opportunity to achieve a high-school diploma in an environment that respects their culture. The curriculum that is used in high-schools often contains inappropriate references to Native people. In this school, curriculum will be used to ensure that this does not continue. Efforts will be made to ensure that cultural traits that some Native people have such as shyness and a non-competitive nature do not prevent them from being successful academically.

The proposed school would be located at Native Child and Family Services

YOUNG OFFENDERS PROGRAM

Native Child and Family services have incorporated a young offenders program into their existing services. A staff visits young offenders at Syl Apps Youth Detention Facility one and a half days a week on a regular basis. The objective is to give the youth tools to help them cope and live a healthy lifestyle when they are discharged from the institute.

The youth worker offers support, empathy and an understanding of the various issues that brought Syl Apps youth to this point in their life. In some cases it takes a while to overcome lack of trust, but generally the youth are open to someone who is from their culture. Part of the curriculum is to bring in traditional teachers, pipe carriers and medicine men. The program also incorporate the NCFST youth drum group Askinajig and periodically youth from downtown come to speak with the youth in Syl Apps who come from all over Ontario. The worker will also do a follow up on youth that are discharged.

FAMILY SERVICES

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Graffiti Transformation Project

The Native Youth Graffiti Transformation Program was set up to paint murals on targeted building walls, walkways and alleys in the greater Toronto Area. Mural themes vary according to location but all centre around Native culture, teachings and history. There are six Native youth artists producing the Aboriginal Art, the majority are young parents and all live below the poverty line.

The program works to provide Native youth with an opportunity to learn valuable life, employment and entrepreneurial skills, as well as earn an income in a safe and supportive culturally based environment.

picture drawn by one of the youth at the NCFS drop in

Entrepreneurship involves developing a retail store featuring youth produced arts and crafts

Cultural Programs & Groups for youth (age 16-24 years) including drum circle, recovery/support circle, adoption circle and educational workshops (HIV/AIDS, alcohol

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF THE SUN AND THE MOON?

Many people today, when asked to reflect on native issues, are empathetic to the attempted genocide and the barriers which oppress First Nations people (Can you believe PM Chretien was native affairs minister less than 20 years ago?). However, most people seem to draw blanks when it comes to concrete solutions. I was one of those empathetic, blank people.

I first truly began to appreciate native culture and spirituality after rediscovering my own roots. I was born in Seoul, Korea and immigrated here in 1975. After living in Kanata (Canada in native tongue) for 20 years, I finally returned to the motherland. During my visit, I was asked to take part in a timeless traditional ceremony in order to ensure my grandfather was comfortable in his new grave. I was moved by the shamanic ritual and found new pride in my ancestry. Shortly upon my return to Turtle Island (native tales tells us North America is Turtle Island), I began to notice the familiarities between the Native cultures and not just Korean but Asian cultures. Both Korean and Native people are shamanic at the roots of their spirituality, and have common medicine animals which are important to their cultures such as the bear, the turtle, the fox, etc...First Nations, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan spirituality all use the wheel (circle) as a model for their teachings. Native teachings have its medicine wheel, while the Koreans and Chinese have the Tao (yin & yang). The Tibetans even use the same four colors of people (black, yellow, red, white) that can be found in the native teachings.

There are even more striking similarities By my comparison of the Native and Asian cultures, I do not wish to add to the validity or the subversion of the theory that there is a common ancestry in our peoples (theory that Asians crossed the Bering Strait to North America). To be exactly precise, I just don't know for sure- perhaps the red people crossed over to Asia. However, I do know that Shamanism today is endangered in Korea as it is in Kanata due to the way both countries have industrialized

con't on back page

A NEW SKY

Once in a while, late at night, gaze up into the sky and ask yourself what do you see. Do you see the moon and the stars? Or do you see a sky full of clouds and lights? You might ask, why is this important? Or who cares? Well let me tell you, I was one of eleven people who got to experience what it feels like to sleep under a "new sky." Catch da Flava crew took a trip north (a ten hour drive north to be exact, complete with a bus driver from hell) and stayed in a native reserve, known as West Bay. Everyone got along quite well. We played pool and ping pong until 2:00 am. The most memorable night in my opinion, was the night before we left. I got the lucky chance to gaze up in the night sky and was awed. Staring back at me was a sky cluttered with stars. "Big deal" you might say, "it's a bunch of stars." Well I've lived in Regent Park for seven years and have never seen a cloudless sky and that many stars before. In my opinion this was one of the many hidden beauties of West Bay, and one advantage over living in the city.

By Runell

PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST

Regent Park is the home of many talented people with very unique stories and experiences to share. This issue Catch da Flava correspondent, Michele Cho, caught up with long time resident Lynn Swimmer Lynn was born on Three Mile Plain, Nova Scotia and is of Mic Mac ancestry. She is an active community volunteer, mother/care giver of five children, and a talented native artist.

How does it make you feel to get your art displayed in the your own community? (An exhibit of Lynn's work is on showcase at the Regent Park Focus Drop-In.)

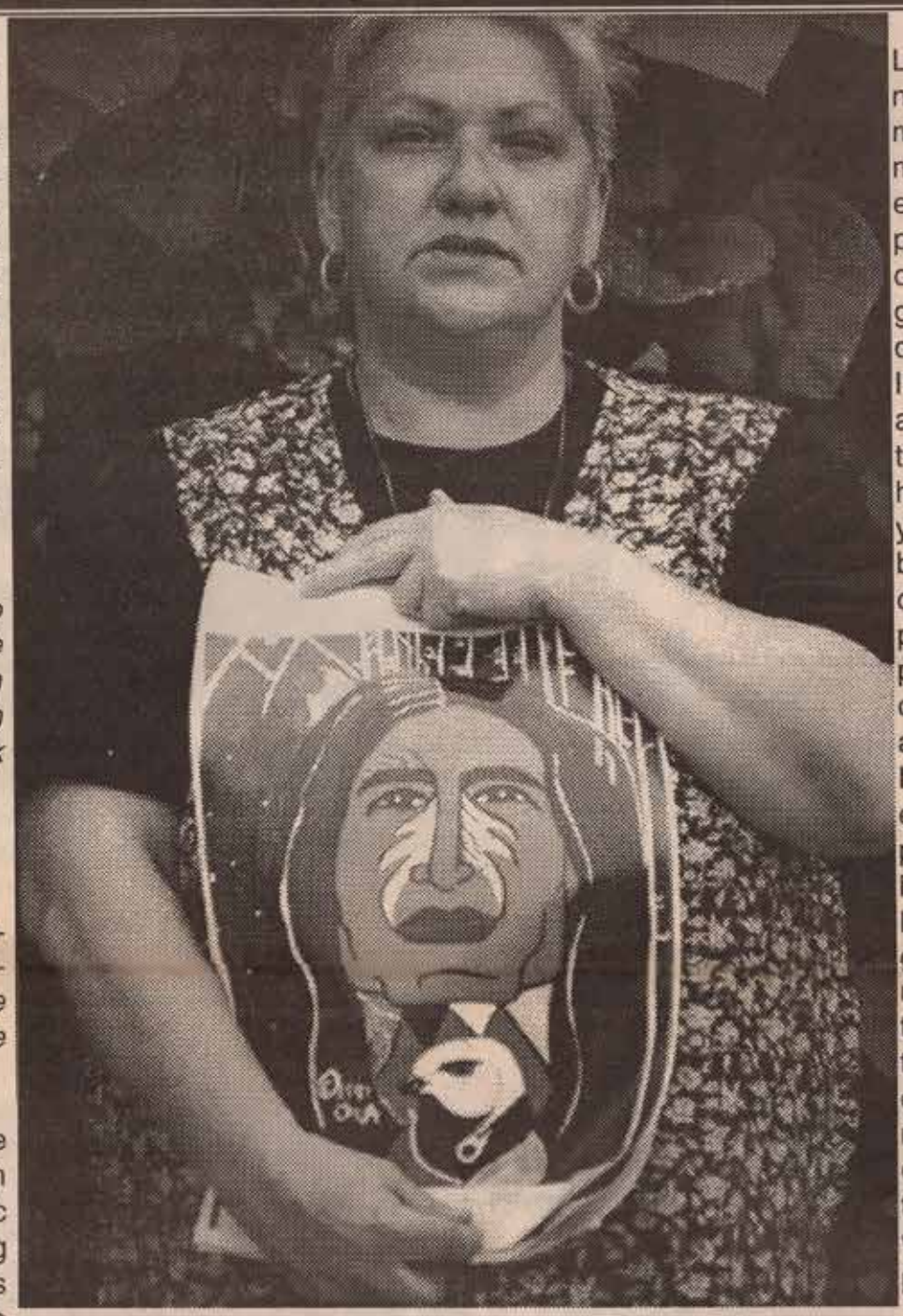
Lynn: It feels really good!

How long have you been living in the Regent Park community and tell us about some of the activities that you are involved in.

Lynn: I've been living in the community for 25 years. I am a member of the Park Public School Parent Steering Committee and serve as Treasurer on the Board of the Regent Park Focus Community Coalition. I am also active with the the Community Center.

What made you get in to art? Who did you learn from and why native art?

Lynn: I never had an art course in my life! I started 9 years ago when I was visiting my mother during the Okra crisis. It came up in conversation that my father was native which was something I wasn't aware of. Later while digging in the garden, I found



a stone in the shape of a face. My mother had some water-colour paints in the house and she said, "why don't you paint me the face of the Queen of England?" So I did. The Queen of England however, wasn't what I was after and after a while I began to explore my native heritage through painting faces and animals.

How is native art different from other art?

Lynn: Well my art work is very spiritual, it comes from my heart. I think a lot of times when people think of native art they only think of spirit forms. So I kind of like to do faces - actual faces of native people that reflect the fact that native people are still here, that we are not just spirits.

Could you take me through some of the steps you go through from the idea stage to the kind of pictures that are hanging here?

Lyn: I'll see the face of a native person, perhaps in a magazine or newspaper. It may be the face of a child, elder or warrior. I'll get a peice of paper, water, acrulic or watercolour paints and I'll go from there. The painting depends on the mood I'm in. I'll see the beauty in the face and a lot of times I'll see in the hardship that my people had to endure over the years. I'll see the colors- the beautiful colours of the medicine wheel. So I try to incorporate all these things in my painting so that each peice is colourful expressing usually a comforting kind of feeling. I'll start off painting the nose, eyes and mouth and as I'm painting I don't know what happens to me. It's kind of like a spiritual thing- like the great spirit touches me, moves in me and pushes me to paint these faces. I don't think its anything that I could explain it justs happens to me. I only spend two hours on a picture and I'm always truly amaze when I stop my work and view what is on the paper.

How do you feel about the survival of native culture and native art? Do you try to pass on these things to your children?

Lynn: Been native and following native traditions as I do- I kind of let my children do their own thing! (Lyn Laughs) My little guys sit and watch me paint. I always encourage my kids to do art work and to get active with their own paintings. I never tell them what to paint. I go to the schools and paint with children. I have also written a

little book on native traditions, stories and designs which I'll pass on to my daughter. My oldest daughter is the one that I am teaching the most about my native culture and she'll pass that down when I am gone, so nothing will be lost.

How do you like Regent Park and how has living here influenced your work?

Lynn: To me Regent Park is just a small peice of the whole society we live in, it's no better or no worse but even as a young girl I was always aware that this is a community with a lot of things going on for people living here.

Regent Park has influnced what I do with my work not so much on what I paint or how I paint. To explain, I see a lot of youth around here who are struggling. I was also a street youth myself. When I was on the streets it was a difficult life. I left home at 15 and lived on the streets till I was 29 years old. I have a history of drugs, alcohol the whole nine yards. So any chance I get, I donate my work to help raise funds for local organizations that work with youth, especially organizations like Council Fire and Native Family Services that work with native youth. In my own way, I help young people by creating opportunities for them to plug in to all the wonderful organizations that are around here that are willing to help.

Thank you Lyn, I had no idea that you were doing so much stuff and so involve with youth. It really is inspiring.

Interviewed
By Michelle Cho

(Lyn Swinamer has donated a small collection of her work to the Regent Park Media Arts Program. These print copies are on exhibit and available for purchase at the Regent Park Focus Drop-In. A larger collection of Lyn's work is scheduled for city wide tour by The Spirit of the People, an organisation dedicated to serving native exoffenders. See back page illustrations of Lyn's art.)

TO CUBA ANDBACK

Troy was the lucky person who was sent to represent Regent Park in the International Youth conference, which was held in Cuba. Here are some of the things that Troy had to say about Cuba. "One thing about Cuba is that the people there are really, really nice." "You smile to the people and they smile back, you say Ola they say Ola back." "I was amazed at some of the things they have achieved in Cuba. First of all, there is no racism in Cuba. If there is it is pretty low key." "There is no such thing as an African-Cuban or a Hispanic-Cuban, everybody is just Cuban, you become part of the family regardless of race, creed, or color, that's something that I'm very envious of."

Troy had nothing but nice things to say about the people in Cuba. He was also amazed in how the children wanted to learn and experience new things. He recalls "there were these eight year old kids who were giving us a tour of a sugar cane factory, telling us about machines and everything. It was really amazing." "I met two kids, one was nine the other twelve and they were performing surgery on a rabbit, and I think kids here (Toronto) are playing Nintendo all summer and these kids (Cuban) they just get up and do whatever they want to do."

Troy on the far right with a customary Cuban cigar, with the wrapper stilll on of course!

Troy had discovered that the Cuban education system is quite different compared to the education system of Toronto. This is what he had to say about that. "Education is free in Cuba, so they can basically learn anything they want and if you're top in your class, chances are that you'll find a job. One thing I really liked about Cuba is the government has to find you a job when you graduate. It's the government's job to find you a job when you come out of an education system that they paid for." As you can see Troy benefited a great deal from the trip. One piece of advice that Troy wanted to relate to other youth was the importance of learrning a second language. Troy is now taking a Spanish language course. Good luck Troy!

By Lisa Drover