

Film, Fallen Feather, explores native history

By Melissa Jameson - Revelstoke Times Review - February 12, 2008

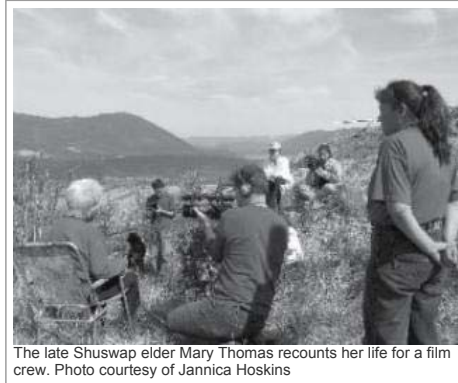


What began as a documentary examining an unturned stone of the history of Aboriginal residential schools became a discovery of culture for the film's host.

Jannica Hoskins — who along with partner Randy Bezeau spent three years filming *The Fallen Feather* — shares the history and speaks to elders about their experiences in residential schools, she begins a journey towards re-discovering her own Cree history.

"During the (filming) process I was working with Randy and at the same time I was sharing this information and it really evolved into *The Fallen Feather*," said Hoskins.

One of the elders interviewed on the film is the late Dr. Mary Thomas — meeting her was a turning point for the Revelstoke filmmakers.



The late Shuswap elder Mary Thomas recounts her life for a film crew. Photo courtesy of Jannica Hoskins

"She was an incredible woman who really started doing a lot of work with children and youth for her people as much as she could after 50," said Hoskins. "She was a pretty big motivational factor for us."

It was after meeting Thomas that *The Fallen Feather* began to truly develop its direction.

"It always had been going down the path of looking at residential schools and the economic link," said Hoskins.

It was that economic link that had inspired Bezeau to begin filming the documentary in the first place.

"One of the things that attracted me was while I was doing research I found that everyone was talking about the genocide and the abuse. No one was connecting the dots between the land grab, the treaty negotiations and how the schools were built exactly when treaty negotiations were being implemented."

Bezeau said the documentary is the only film that deals with the complete issue of residential schools.

"It takes you from the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the Pontiac War, the Riel Rebellions and how all those influenced the decision to create the residential schools," said Bezeau. "It's the only film that does that. It then takes you through the schools and the lasting effects."

The film also includes interviews with National Chief Phil Fontaine of the Sagkeeng First Nation, the Honourable Colin Mayes and others.

It was after speaking to Thomas, however, when Bezeau and Hoskins realized theirs was a unique story that had not yet been told.

"Most people blame the churches," said Bezeau. "Mary Thomas was very clear and the other survivors as well that she blames the government."

For the filmmakers, simply hearing the pain and suffering which First Nations have felt as a result of residential schools was not enough. The couple spent a year living on the Neskonlith Indian Band.

"It's one thing to read about the lasting effects, the suicides, the disproportionate number of First Nations who are in prison," said Bezeau. "It's another thing to live on the reserve and see that."

As the film developed, Bezeau searched for a title — something that didn't come quite as easily as the film's direction it seems. However, after pondering a few titles, he came across one that captures the film's spirit.

"While I was researching the film I was watching all the different ceremonies," said Bezeau. "One of the ceremonies is the fallen feather ceremony."

The fallen feather ceremony occurs when an eagle feather falls from a dancer's plume.

"Everything stops," said Bezeau.

"The whole powwow stops and a sacred dance, the fallen feather dance, is performed, usually by a veteran or warrior. You raise the feather back up to a stature and recognition of where it belongs and in the process you raise your whole community as well."

The film's title seems appropriate as the film ends with Hoskins and her dad taking part in a powwow in Squilax on the Little Shuswap Indian Band.

"In doing this film it really motivated my own family to be proud of our heritage," said Hoskins.

For more information about The Fallen Feather, or to purchase a copy, visit www.fallenfeatherproductions.com.

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