



**LORETTA TODD, directing
Native War Veterans**

Outside Stories

Making Movies in the Hinterland

Countless stories are collected in the struggle to get our images on screen. Here are some words of wisdom and inspiration from the trenches.

"At the Banff Television Festival, I spoke to a producer – a producer like many others in Canada, hardworking, male and white. He asked me why I would want to make drama. 'Because I want to,' I said, 'and for a myriad of other reasons which have to do with storytelling and art.' 'But drama is lying. Why would you want to lie?' he asked, adding, 'Native people can't lie.' Who told him that? 'A Native person,' he answered. Well, they lied. The breakthrough for Canadian cinema will come when the colonial store clerks put away their cultural ledgers and let us tell our stories in the way we see the world."

Loretta Todd
Director, *Hands of History*

"At times I ask myself, what am I doing here? Coming from China, I never had to defend my colour or my race. Even the subject of my current feature, *Little Saigon* (a Vietnamese and Chinese gangster film), is questioned on the issue of authenticity. 'Who's the audience,' they ask. 'Who wants to see this movie? Oriental boys? Who's the star? Give us a white guy and maybe we can sell it.' I guess I'm lucky to be here, but there are still obstacles to overcome. I'm glad I'm strong. I guess the Cultural Revolution prepared me for something."

Harrison Liu
Director, *Strange Dialogue*

"I've co-facilitated a course at EM Media in Calgary for the Women of Colour Collective. My latest gig was shooting corporate and educational videos for Educentres, a chain of daycares in Alberta. It was an empowering experience, since we were an all-women

crew. People don't expect a Black woman in this field, but they lose that attitude once they see me set up the lights."

Judy Grant
Camera Operator and Graduate,
Southern Alberta Institute of
Technology

"I was once told by an employer that most people would give their eye-teeth for my position. I felt like saying, 'Let them have it!' They were implying that I should be grateful for the program they had created to train people like me. If an employer offers someone a training opportunity, the needs of that person should be a priority, so the trainee doesn't become a gofer or the resident photocopier. The 'slave labour' syndrome can be avoided if the trainee is given some ownership of their program, and both parties fully meet their obligations."

Melanie Goodchild
Resident Program Apprentice,
Canadian Film Centre

"I was born in Japan, with a Korean birth certificate, an Australian passport and a Chinese mother. Culture isn't always what you see. Maybe moving from Vancouver to Toronto has made my politics more pointed. Maybe it's the weather. I've been working on a couple of film projects trying to deal with what people look like versus what they are. We don't always wear it on our faces: culture, experience. We adapt. We survive. I'm still trying to deal with my family, let alone the rest of the world."

Ann Marie Fleming
Director, *It's Me Again*

"In high school when I was a math whiz I used to be obsessed with critical points in calculus – the intersection of two tangents. I believe that the meeting points between two

people, two cultures, are the cornerstones of all human understanding. Without these bridges, people are often confined to parallel solitudes. I try to address sexist, racist and homophobic violence not by anger and bitterness, but by bridging solitudes and sharing our understandings of the world."

Paul Lee
Director/Producer, *Thick Lips Thin Lips*

"I work at a film institution whose manager was a well-respected, warm-hearted 'nice guy.' One day while we were standing around the reception desk, he jokingly said he wanted to make sure that I would be around during a visit by Chinese cultural attachés the next week. He wouldn't know how to communicate with them, he said. Then he began speaking fake Chinese, which cracked up the support staff, who also started to mimic Chinese."

"Government offices and corporations are aiming at 'zero tolerance' for racist and sexist slurs. I asked to speak to him privately in his office. We sat down and I told him that mimicking Chinese was racist behaviour and that it signals to the staff that it's okay to mock and ridicule certain people. He countered by saying that we laugh at all kinds of accents: French, Scottish. 'You're too sensitive,' he said."

"I explained at length how his behaviour feeds into a longer history of anti-Chinese attitudes and actions – colonialism, imperialism, racism, blah, blah, blah. He listened patiently, nodding. He mentioned how he had some good Chinese friends. He had wholeheartedly supported a recent documentary by a Chinese Canadian. We looked at each other for a moment, silent. 'Well,' he said, 'I'm really glad we had this talk. You're right. By the way, how's that little Chinese girl's film?' I checked his face. No irony was intended."

Name withheld by request ▶

◀ "Motorcycles and Sweetgrass originally came to me as an idea for an episode of *The Beachcombers* way back in 1988. I wanted to explore the idea of a character from Native mythology coming into the life of a contemporary Native youth. I was persuaded by producer Alan Collins to turn the concept into a movie because he felt the story was too powerful for a half-hour. I readily agreed. The idea was that I would direct. "As the film grew, we turned to James Cullingham at Tamarack Productions, who approached the CBC for additional funding. Unfortunately, the CBC was unwilling even to consider me as a director. I willingly dropped out to secure the future of the film.

"It's now more than four years later and we're still waiting for a production commitment. The novelty of the story is wearing thin for me, as the filmmaking process did long ago. There must be an easier way to make films in this country."

Drew Taylor
Screenwriter and Artistic Director,
Native Earth Performing Arts

"Six years ago, I submitted a proposal to a funding agency. After waiting a year I was told that my story was no longer a priority. Last year, a jury at another funding agency gave the project unanimous support. This isn't a unique experience, but it's worth keeping in mind when dealing with rejection."

Selwyn Jacob
Director, *Home at Last*

"Making my film was a three-year struggle. Some funding agencies considered the project ambitious (it was shot partly in Guyana), while others failed to grasp its fragmentary style and multi-layered aesthetic. My advice: don't give up if you are having problems with traditional funding sources like the arts councils. Try approaching community agencies, or even better, approach business and non-profit groups for services or donations in kind."

Michelle Mohabeer
Director, *Coconut/Cane & Cutlass*

"As first-time producers of colour, we turn to our friends, families and lovers to help make our dreams come true. But often we tend not to deal as professionally with our friends because we assume they're 'down with the cause.' HELLO! We have to treat our familiars with the same, if not more respect and professionalism as we treat our cast and



ANN MARIE FLEMING's New Shoes

crew. Take it from someone who inadvertently burned a bridge. Get those release forms signed, pay attention to the props that are loaned and send a thank you letter. A little respect will go a long, long way."

Glace W. Lawrence
Director, *D-E-S-I-R-E*

"Natsuko Ohama, our lead actress arrives from New York with a slight concussion from a taxi accident. Director Midi Onodera gets a nail in her foot and has an allergic reaction to a tetanus shot. First day of shooting, and our five-ton knocks down a tree in front of a prominent Toronto establishment. Dana Brooks suffers a minor eye injury from a four-inch false eyelash. Making a low-budget feature is a sure sign you've gone insane."

Phillip Ing
Co-producer, *Sadness of the Moon*

"The most difficult thing in my work is to find a voice that subverts conventional Hollywood narrative but still remains accessible to the audience I want to reach. It's important to have my work seen and understood by the Black community at large and by other people of colour, not simply by an exclusive group of artists and filmmakers."

Nadine Valcin
Producer/Director, *Mutations*

"Case history. Undifferentiated, accusatory delirium. Quebec: non-white anglophone video documentarist who works in both imperial languages. Rendezvous du cinéma Québécois – no, work not Uncle Tomish enough. No: Asian Film Festival – not Asian enough. No – Arab Film Festival: not Arab enough. Story continues... Curator of National Gallery: no, but yes to affirmative action for francophones. Canada Council film

section: no, I can't sit on juries because I haven't made a film in years. When I used to apply to make films, the juries were all white. Switched to video. Curator, Musée d'art Contemporain: no. Famous gay filmmaker who just makes films on his own community, on a recent jury: no. This issue of *Take One*, no articles on my work: no. Fuck you all. My work requires no passport."

Julian Samuel
Writer/Director,
Into The European Mirror

"As an immigrant I shouldn't be making the kind of films that other Canadians make, but it's too boring to just talk about minority or immigrant issues. Instead of 'multicultural' film, I propose a new *transcultural* film that requires one to grab the essences of one's own heritage and sublimate them to a larger coexisting community. This cinema refuses to work with stereotypes, but instead, archetypes."

Kal Ng,
Director, *Soul Investigator*

"...Some day somebody'll
Stand up and talk about me,
And Write about me –
Black and Beautiful –
And sing about me,
And put on plays about me!
I reckon it'll be
Me myself!
yes, it'll be me.'
Langston Hughes

"I have this piece posted by my desk as a point of inspiration, a breath of remembering for the times when things get real hard, and I plain forget why I'm doing any of this at all."

Djanet Sears
Writer/Director, *Abide With Me*