

Mongrel Media
Presents

EMPIRE OF DIRT

A film by PETER STEBBINGS
(99 min., Canada, 2013)
Language: English

Official Selection
2013 TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Distribution



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LOGLINE

Three generations of Native Canadian women discover that family can help them escape their past and provide a second chance.

PITCH

Going home was never an option for single mother Lena Mahikan (Cara Gee). But when her 13-year-old, Peekka (Shay Eyre) overdoses in the streets of Toronto, she is forced to return home to her estranged mother and face a life-long legacy of shame and resentment. ***Empire of Dirt*** is a story about second chances and summoning the power of family to soothe the pain of cyclical damage.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

As in many Native families, Lena Mahikan (Cara Gee) grew up in the cycle of abuse. Her father, a residential school survivor, was an alcoholic until he killed himself when Lena was 10. Her mother, only 14 years her senior, turned to the slots and was consumed. By the time Lena was 15, she was pregnant and, before giving birth, was kicked to the curb by her mom. For 13 years Lena has been living, poverty stricken in Toronto, struggling to make ends meet, being chased by her own demons. The cycle continues and Lena is now watching helplessly as her own daughter, Peekka (Shay Eyre) spirals out of control, landing herself in the ER following a drug overdose. As her final attempt at survival, Lena decides to return home and face her own mother and a past she's tried desperately to escape. ***Empire of Dirt*** tells the story of three generations of Mahikan women who are given a second chance to be family and put an end to the painful legacy that has plagued them.

LONG SYNOPSIS

When her 13-year-old daughter Peekka (Shay Eyre) is rushed to the ER after huffing aerosol, single mother Lena Mahikan (Cara Gee), 29, is forced to think fast and do whatever it takes to save her family, even if it means moving back home and facing the woman she resents most, her mother.

Lena's been on her own since she was 16. But her life sucked well before that. Her dad, an alcoholic residential school survivor, killed himself when Lena was only 10 and her mom relied on gambling to cope, leaving Lena orphaned. When she wound up pregnant at 15, her mom kicked her to the curb.

Since then, all Lena's ever wanted was a better life for her own kid - far away from the pain, the self-hatred, and the hardships that go with being an Indian. Lena lives in the poorest neighborhood but spends her days in the wealthiest part of Toronto, cleaning houses. But despite her best efforts to give her daughter a decent life, Peekka has fallen with the wrong crowd and is slowly taking a turn for the worse.

Lena's choice to go back home is riddled with anxiety, knowing that now she's got to come clean and tell her daughter the truth about her family... When they arrive in town, Peekka is blindsided by her new reality: a grandmother, a dad, a rich family history and a culture hidden from her for all of these years. Pressure intensifies on

Lena as she struggles to make amends with her mother, her daughter, and the past she tried to outrun. But the memories still haunt, resentment compounds, and Lena's demons overtake her. Desperate to free herself of all accountability, she runs away again, headlong into deeper tragedy. It's this tragedy that triggers a call-to-arms, handing these women a precious opportunity to pull together and become a family.

CAST

Cara Gee (Lena Mahikan) makes her feature film debut in ***Empire of Dirt***. Most recently, Cara has performed in *Arigato, Tokyo* (Buddies in Bad Times), *The Real World?* (Tarragon), *The Penelopiad* (Nightwood), *The Rez Sisters* (Factory) and *The Jones Boy* (surface/underground). Cara is an ensemble member of an independent company called Birdtown and Swanville. Credits with Birdtown and Swanville: *Settlers*, *The Physical Ramifications of Attempted Global Domination*, *36 Little Plays About Hopeless Girls*, *Dead Wrestlers*, and *Family Story*. Other theatre credits include: *Stitch* (SummerWorks-Spotlight Award), *Tout Comme Elle* (Necessary Angel), *Spirit Horse* (Roseneath Theatre), *Flowers* (Rose City Theatre Festival), and *Love's Labour's Lost* (Resurgence). Cara recently made her television debut in *King* (Showcase). Cara has a BFA in acting from the University of Windsor.

Shay Eyre, 13 (Peeka Mahikan, Lena's daughter) makes her feature film debut in Peter Stebbings' ***Empire of Dirt***. A native of South Dakota and member of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Shay is the daughter of acclaimed filmmaker Chris Eyre (*Smoke Signals*, *Friday Night Lights*)

Luke Kirby (Russell Carter, Lena's first love) has been performing since his teen years after he was accepted at this country's most respected conservatory, the National Theatre School of Canada. He graduated in May 2000 and after two auditions found himself working on two separate projects in major roles: the CBS/Alliance miniseries *Haven* and director Lea Pool's feature, *Lost and Delirious*. Luke's first feature film lead was the role of Jim in *Halloween 8: Resurrection*. Other film credits include lead roles in Peter Wellington's feature *Luck* and *Mambo Italiano* directed by Emile Gaudreault. Following on the success of *Luck* and *Mambo Italiano*, Luke ended up with a part that was written for him in the feature film *Shattered Glass* produced by Cruise/Wagner. In 2007, Luke played the lead role of Ray Dokes opposite Rachel Leigh Cooke and Keith Carradine in the Canadian feature *All Hat* and followed with a lead role opposite Lindsay Lohan in a feature titled *Labor Pains*. Luke was cast as the lead opposite Michelle Williams in Sarah Polley's *Take This Waltz*, which premiered in 2011, and as the lead opposite Samuel Jackson in *The Samaritan*, written and directed by David Weaver. Luke is currently shooting the feature *Mania Days*, opposite Katie Holmes.

Jordan Prentice (Warren Fensky – Lena’s childhood best friend) was born in London, Ontario in 1973 and moved to Toronto over a decade ago. Jordan’s various roles include a disgruntled roadie in *The Life And Times Of Guy Terrifico*, a hotheaded fraternity leader and quarterback in *American Pie 5*, a security guard and medieval enthusiast in Allen Moyle’s *Weirdsville*, a fast talking ratted and embittered actor in *In Bruges* alongside Colin Farrell and Brendan Gleeson. Jordan has filled his down time over the last decade with numerous television roles. Most recently, Jordan can be seen in *Mirror, Mirror* as Napoleon, for Relativity. Presently, Jordan is in Europe rehearsing his upcoming starring role in the feature *Petite* opposite Kim Basinger.

Jennifer Podemski (Minnie Mahikan, Lena’s Mom And Peek’s Very Young Grandmother. Also Producer) Jennifer Podemski is an award-winning actress and television producer from Toronto. She made her screen debut at the age of 13 on the CBC science show, *Wonderstruck*, hosting one episode. Her breakout role in *The Diviners* when she was 19 solidified her place in the industry and led to other projects including *Dance Me Outside*, *The Rez*, *Riverdale* And *Degrassi TNG*. Since 1999, she has spent most of her time working behind the camera as a producer, writer and director, creating and producing ground-breaking television series including, three seasons of the first all Aboriginal drama *Moccasin Flats* (Showcase, APTN), two seasons of the paranormal cop drama *Rabbit Fall* (Space, APTN), a factual series about Aboriginal ghost hunters *The Other Side* (APTN) and a host of lifestyle and documentary series. For the past 7 years, Jennifer has been the Co Executive Producer of the Indspire Awards, a live awards show (APTN, Global) celebrating outstanding achievements from Indigenous Canadians.

As an actor, Jennifer can most recently be seen in *Jimmy P – Psychology Of A Plains Indian* as the love interest of lead actor Benicio Del Toro (directed by Arnaud Desplechin), alongside Sarah Silverman and Michelle Williams in Sarah Polley’s *Take This Waltz*; and as Minnie, the matriarch of a dysfunctional family in her first feature film as producer ***Empire Of Dirt*** (Dir: Peter Stebbings).

Lawrence Bayne (Uncle Hank – Minnie’s Brother, Lena’s Uncle) enjoys a varied and busy life in the arts that encompasses stage, screen and voice, as well as writing music and lyrics and singing for his band, Simple Damned Device. Lawrence is currently working on his second screenplay as he tries to shop his first one. Of Cree, Icelandic, and Scottish extraction, Lawrence claims his lineage is the result of 'some very weird goings-on near The Bering Strait'.

Michael Cram (Minnie's boyfriend) The 2013 Canadian Screen Award nominee has been a fixture in Canadian film and television for over 15 years. Smaller roles, early on, in movies like *Tommy Boy* led to bigger parts on TV shows like *The X-FILES*, *Millenium* and *Stargate: Atlantis*. He is best known as Kevin 'Wordy' Wordsworth from the hit television series *Flashpoint*, popular in Canada, the United States and over 70 countries around the world. Recent credits include *Repo Men* with Jude Law, *Defendor* with Woody Harrelson, and *Be My Valentine* with William Baldwin. Look for him in the new season of ABC's hit *Rookie Blue* and in the much anticipated indie film, ***Empire of Dirt***. Michael is also a musician playing in and around the Toronto area.

CREW

Peter Stebbings (Director)

Peter's first feature film, *Defendor*, which he wrote and directed, and stars Woody Harrelson, Elias Koteas, Kat Dennings and Sandra Oh, debuted at the 2009 Toronto International Film Festival where it was picked up by Sony Pictures. Other projects are afoot, with two original screenplays *Le Boobytrap* written by Peter, *Torrence*, written by Australian author Matt Nable, and a feature film adaption of *Charlatan*, based on the New York Times bestseller by Pope Brock. He splits his time between LA and Toronto.

Shannon Masters (Writer)

The first International participant of the 2008 Tribeca All Access program in New York, recipient of the Spring 2007 Praxis Centre for Screenwriters Fellowship, graduate of the Canadian Film Centre's 2005 Film Resident Writer's Lab, and two-time recipient of the Canada Council for the Arts grant, Shannon Masters is a mixed Native Canadian screenwriter. Shannon uses comedy to tackle such tough issues as identity and spirituality while seamlessly weaving the magic of traditional stories into contemporary tales. Her work, while comical, shows real people finding their own place in a modern and multicultural world with universal themes that reach out to an international audience. ***Empire Of Dirt*** is her first produced feature film.

Geoff Ewart (Co-Producer)

When Geoff was a child he met Christopher Reeves on the set of Superman II. Obsessed with Superman, Geoff was disappointed that his hero was unable to fly without the aid of a crane and a stunt double. It was at that moment Geoff realized what he wanted to do with his life, and he has been learning about the mysteries of movie magic ever since. He has worked in production on various projects including TV series, MOW's, documentaries, and feature films. Recent projects include the feature documentary *They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children*, with White Pine Pictures and the

feature film *Empire of Dirt*. He is currently in pre-production on a high-profile feature documentary with White Pine Pictures and he also has several television and film projects in development. Geoff still dreams of being able to fly.

Heather K. Dahlstrom (Co-Producer)

Heather K. Dahlstrom was born and raised in Thunder Bay, Ontario and is the owner of The XY Company in Toronto. She graduated the Confederation College Film Production program in 1999, and has had her films play world wide at festivals, including Sundance in 2009. *How to Rid Your Lover of Negative Emotion Caused by You* produced with Daniel Bekerman, had it's world premiere at the 2010 Toronto International Film Festival, and has since been accepted to play at many other festivals, including the 2011 Cannes Shorts Corner. Heather is currently in development on the feature film *The Day Santa Didn't Come*, directed by & starring Jason Priestley (*Call Me Fitz*) & Jessalyn Gilsig (*Glee*), with Frantic Films. She is also developing the feature film *My Thermonuclear Family* with Circle Blue Films (Producer: Amos Adetuyi, Director: Doug Karr). She was nominated in 2011 for an Ontario's Premier Award, for Outstanding College graduates, and was selected for the 2012 Toronto International Film Festival Talent Lab.

Avi Federgreen (Executive Producer)

Avi Federgreen's nearly 20 years of experience in the Canadian film industry feature many highlights, from music videos to TV series to full-length feature films. Federgreen's current releases include *Still Mine* directed by Michael MCGowan, *Random Acts of Romance* directed by Katrin Bowen, the first ever Canadian fully financed 3D feature *Dead Before Dawn* directed by April Mullen and the documentary *30 Ghosts* directed by Sean Cisterna.

Federgreen's other producing credits include the opening night film at TIFF 2010, *Score: A Hockey Musical*, *Moon Point*, *I'm Yours*, George Ryga's *Hungry Hills*, *One Week*, *High Life*, *Leslie My Name is Evil* and the documentary *As Slow as Possible*.

David Greene, CSC (Director of Photography)

Since receiving innumerable accolades (Genie, Gemini and CSC Award Nominations) for the stunning feature *Century Hotel*, David has accumulated an impressive body of work. Among his credits are the critically acclaimed feature *Rhinoceros Eyes* for Madstone Films (Toronto Film Festival 2003/Discovery Award), *Platinum* (co-created by John Ridley and Sophia

Coppola for UPN), the poignant Fox TV Movie and Sundance darling *Redemption* and the feature *Siblings* starring Sarah Polley. In 2007 David shot the limited series *Across the River to Motor City* (Devine Entertainment) to glowing reviews, and the feature *Tennessee* with Lee Daniels Entertainment. David shot the action mini-series *XIII*, for which he received a Gemini nomination, the feature *Defendor* (Darius Films), starring Woody Harrelson, which premiered at the 2009 Toronto International Film Festival to much acclaim, the MTV feature *Turn the Beat Around*, the TMN comedy *Call Me Fitz* and the series *Lost Girl* for Showcase. More recently, he shot the feature *Entitled* (Foundation Features), *XIII* (Prodigy Pictures/Showcase), the third season of *Lost Girl* for Prodigy Pictures/Showcase and Peter Stebbings' new feature ***Empire of Dirt***. David just finished shooting the new CW series *Beauty and the Beast* (CBS/Take 5/Whizbang).

Jorge Weisz (Editor)

Jorge Weisz is a Mexican editor based in Toronto. A graduate from the Canadian Film Centre's Editors Lab, he has edited the features *The Pin* (Naomi Jaye) ***Empire of Dirt*** (Peter Stebbings) and the sci-fi thriller *Debug* (David Hewlett). As well as working on features, Jorge has edited numerous short films such as *Always Sideways* (Steve Mitchell), *Spin the Barrel* (Svjetlana Jaklenec), *100 Musicians* (Charles Officer) and *DREEMER* (Laura Dawe)

Naz Goshtasbpour (Production Designer)

Naz has been a production designer since 2006. In 2007, Naz designed the independent feature *Rock, Paper, Scissors* which won the audience choice award at Cambridge Film Festival in 2008. She also designed a short film titled *A Small Thing* that won Best Canadian short drama at the imaginative film festival in 2008 and the feature film titled *You Are Here* starring Tracey Wright. *You Are Here* was

the official selection of TIFF 2010, The Locarno International Film Festival and the Rotterdam International Film Festival. In 2009, Naz designed the feature comedy, *Running Mates*, starring Henry Winkler and Graham Greene. In 2010, she production designed the feature *High Chicago* starring Colin Salmon and directed by Gemini Award nominee Alfons Adetuyi. In 2012, she production designed Peter Stebbings' second feature ***Empire of Dirt*** and Emanuel Shirinian's first feature *It Was You Charlie*. She was also nominated for the 2012 DGC award for her work on *Flash-point* and *Dave vs. Death*. In 2013 she worked with Bruce McDonald on a PSA and *Smoke-bomb's* two upcoming series *Inhuman Condition* and

Backpackers. She is currently in preproduction on Vincenzo Natali's latest series *Darknet*.

Marie – Eve Tremblay (Costume Designer)

Marie-Eve Tremblay is a Toronto-based Fashion Stylist with over a decade of experience in the industry. Originally from Quebec, her portfolio ranges from fashion editorials to advertisements, feature films, music videos, album covers and celebrity styling and more. Before working as a Stylist, Marie-Eve traversed the world as a flight attendant, which further exposed her to a variety of unique styles and cultures.

As the world unfolded, she saw beauty in everything. Her deep love of travel, art and fashion continue to serve as constant inspirations. Marie-Eve understands how important fashion can be to one's character. She has an uncanny ability to develop instantaneous connections with her clients and to elevate their style. She is able to create a custom style for each of her clients, thanks to her keenly trained eye and unique aesthetic. She strives for each of her projects to reflect her passion and dedication to her career and her clients.

Justin Peroff and Liam O'Neil (Composers)

Justin Peroff and Liam O'Neil met when their bands (BROKEN SOCIAL SCENE and THE STILLS) toured together in 2004. They continued to be friends and to play together throughout the years (Peroff joined The Stills on drums for a couple of shows and O'Neil played several shows with Broken Social Scene on saxophone) culminating in their starting a band together in 2010 with fellow ex-Stills member David Hamelin called Eight and a Half. Both have made several forays from the "band life" as well (Peroff has 2 solo tapes out under the moniker Junior Pande on the LA based Tape label SpringBreak Tapes - O'Neil recently engineered and co-produced the Metric album SYNTHETICA). EMPIRE OF DIRT is the first feature film either has scored.

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CAST AND CREW - ABORIGINAL ANCESTRY

Actor/producer Jennifer Podemski – Saulteaux/Israeli – Mother is from Muscowpetung First Nation in Saskatchewan. Father is from Bat Yam, Israel.

Actor Cara Gee – Ojibway from Bobgaygeon, Ontario

Actor Shay Eyre (Peeka) – Oglala Lakota, Cheyenne/Arapaho and French – From *Pine Ridge Reservation

*Pine Ridge Reservation, located in South Dakota, is home to the Oglala Sioux Tribe and is 2,000,000 acres large with an estimated population of close to 40,000. The reservation is large, and its needs immense, commensurate with grinding poverty. Unemployment is over 80%, the weather is extreme, and families struggle mightily with crushing financial, housing, health, educational and social issues.

Actor Lawrence Bayne – Cree

Writer Shannon Masters – Cree/Saskatchewan

PRODUCER COMMENTARY

I am the product of a teen mom. As it was in the 70s, if you were Native and single, your babies were automatically taken away from you and put up for adoption. That was my story. But fortunately for me, after 3 weeks my mother got me back. It was a miracle. That very action changed a very traumatic family legacy of having children taken away. Many of the issues I grew up with were specific to the fact that my parents were too young and that my mom was Native. Growing up Native in Toronto was a strange and lonely experience. I spent many years in this multi cultural metropolis as the only Native in school, even while attending high school. In a sea of 2500 students, I was the only Native.

Those experiences informed my worldview and provided the foundation for my career in storytelling. When it was first brought to me, ***Empire of Dirt*** was a very different film. It was called *Sight Unseen* and the only thing that it had in common with the film today is the rich cultural perspective and the portrayal of three generations of women, two of which were teen mothers. I was very attracted to those elements. It was the characters that spoke to me more than anything. I could relate deeply to these women, it was as if they were a direct reflection of my own experience.

My whole life I was acutely aware of the lack of Native faces on television and, as a burgeoning actress, I made a promise to myself (in grade six) that I would change that.

Yes, it took many years. I wanted to learn everything I could learn about making movies, television and telling stories. As I look back, I am proud to say that I have done it all. From third assistant wardrobe, craft assistant, props assistant and

peon, to writer, director, producer and actor. I have trained hundreds, if not thousands, of aboriginal youth in film, television and media in an effort to increase our visibility and impact on the Canadian television and film industry.

I have won awards and have been nominated for Gemini's as both producer and actor. But nothing has come close to the effort and focus I have given this movie since the day I optioned it.

There is a reason I have not made a film prior to ***Empire of Dirt*** is that I wanted to make sure that my first feature film was done right. No compromises and little sacrifice. It had to be the right story at the right time with the right people. I wanted to invest my time into a film with strong Native characters and a good, engaging, relatable story. A story that didn't wear its culture on its sleeve but told a meaningful story with a strong Aboriginal perspective.

Today, I have a great film, made possible by a committed and passionate team, and a director whose vision and compassion supersedes his cultural affiliation.

I believe that this film has the potential to strengthen the image of Aboriginal Canadians. It is a challenge to make a culturally relevant film without alienating the mainstream. It is also difficult to share a cultural perspective without being specific. I think we have found the balance. This film only begins the conversation; it sets the stage. I hope that if anything, people will walk away feeling like they've witnessed a new perspective that speaks to them on a deeper level.

SHANNON MASTERS – WRITER COMMENTARY

My inspiration for ***Empire Of Dirt*** was to create an authentic world in which real people live. I wanted to give a peek behind the curtain at the road that stretches beyond the apologies and now closed doors of residential schools without making a film about residential schools per se. To show that there are pieces left to be picked up and that it is possible to put them back together in a new way. We are all less than perfect and if we can give up on the idea of perfection or idealism, we can find some semblance of happiness.

Being involved in the part that comes after the writing has really informed my process as a writer. It gave me insight into what both my strengths and weaknesses are as an artist. It was tremendously exciting to see my characters and the world they inhabit come to life and blossom through the voices of the actors and the vision of the director. Great experience.

PETER STEBBINGS – DIRECTOR COMMENTARY

Who do I want this story to appeal to? People who enjoy Mike Leigh And Andrea Arnold films. People who see humour and absurdity everywhere, even in the face of despair. People who want relief from their own troubles with family. Single moms. Native women. Native girls who probably don't see enough of themselves represented in film. And in this way I think this film deals more subtly with issues of race than yet another film about what it means to be nonwhite in a white

society. For me, the discussion about race is advanced when we get beyond questions of identity, stories defined against the Caucasian paradigm. This is where the politic running through *Frozen River* was so refreshing. Native, white, it didn't matter. It was just the world straddling a US-Canadian reserve, people simply bound together by the need to improve their lives. That, in my mind, does more to advance Aboriginal issues than any film that tries to address the issues head on, with earnest liberalism and furrowed brow. In a film like ***Empire of Dirt***, the issues facing Aboriginal people in Canada are inherent. This movie is proudly Native and yet it feels honest and real without ever bonking us on the head. Any movie that advances the issues of our shared humanity, what it means to be a working poor single mom trying to make ends meet, that's a movie that interests me. And I believe it's what isn't said in this script that will speak louder than the words.

When I was approached by Jennifer to direct ***Empire of Dirt***, the project was teetering. The script had gone through a lengthy development process and its backers, the CFC at the time, were looking to shore up their confidence in the project. As it happened, my own confidence was teetering too. I had just sat in on an early screening of *Defendor*, next to a woman who didn't know I had directed it, and she said "I wouldn't wish this movie on my worst enemy." Now, granted, test audiences can be fickle, but it raised the spectre of doubt, "what if it's no good?" I had never entertained the idea that all my energies could amount to a flop. I glommed to Shannon Master's script shortly thereafter... it was as if we needed each other. I think I could have walked away

honourably from this picture on a few occasions. Each time the picture wobbled with funders, each time we deemed ourselves not ready to make it... by this point *Defendor* hadn't flopped, I had options, but I heard my mother's voice, "you shalt not walk away from this!" Because this was her story too. A single mother, alone with her children, trying to make ends meet, flirting with poverty, and thinking of home. She considered her choices; picking up the family and moving them back to England was a tempting one. So I focused on the universal themes, and trusted that between Shannon, Jennifer, and myself, we'd get the nativeness right. But even with this triumvirate, we were questioned; it seemed everyone wanted the film to be something different, something it wasn't. We heard - more than once - that our film wasn't Native enough, and this was from non-Native people. I thought, what does that even mean...? All our characters are Native, what could be more Native than that? I suspected we were on the right track. I thought it meant that we were making a movie that avoided the cliches of quote unquote "Native films." And that's a tightrope to walk, one that Shannon was forced to tip-toe... with pressures from all sides, pulled in every direction, the weight and expectations of Canada's Native community watching. I'm willing to concede a lot of this pressure was internalized, but it felt that way. I asked my dear friend of 30 years, a PhD from NYU in African-American studies, what kind of blowback I might expect from doing this picture. Just one, he said, "you're white." I asked a filmmaker friend the same question, he said "it's a chance to improve your skill set, dude." In the end there is no altruistic reason, there's only that - to make my second feature, to challenge my skill set, make something that reflects my taste, and to let the chips fall where they may. It wasn't a journey

without doubt, but I'm proud of the result and the team that got it here.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL - From the early 1830s to 1996, thousands of First Nation, Inuit and Métis children were forced to attend residential schools in an attempt to assimilate them into the dominant culture. Those children suffered abuses of the mind, body, emotions, and spirit that can be almost unimaginable.

Over 150,000 children, some as young as four years old, attended the government-funded and church-run residential schools. It is estimated that there are 80,000 residential school Survivors alive today.

Today, healing initiatives are taking place in every region of the country, in cities and small towns, on reserves and in rural, remote and isolated communities. Sharing circles, healing circles, smudging, Sundances, the Potlatch, Pow-wows, and many other ceremonies have been revived in the last few decades, providing a multiplicity of positive models not only for healing, but for people to reconnect with their cultural roots. Reconnecting with culture provides an empowering focus in life. People who have a strong sense of their culture have a strong sense of self.

FATHERLESS HOMES

- 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes (US Dept. Of Health/Census) – 5 times the average.
- 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes – 32 times the average.
- 85% of all children who show behavior disorders come from fatherless homes – 20 times the average. (Center for Disease Control)
- 80% of rapists with anger problems come from fatherless homes –14 times the average. (Justice & Behavior, Vol 14, p. 403-26)
- 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes – 9 times the average. (National Principals Association Report)
(FATHERLESSGENERATION.COM)

FATHERLESSNESS

Researchers have stated that one of the single most powerful contributing factors to societal problems is fatherlessness. Violent crime, drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, suicide—all correlate more strongly to fatherlessness than to any other single factor. Census figures show that Native American children are much more likely to be living in a single-parent household or with grandparents than their mainstream counterparts. Over 75 percent of white children live with married parents compared to only 53 percent of Native children. About 10 percent of Native American children live with their grandparents, compared with 5 percent of white children. Clearly, when fathers are absent from the lives of their children, it leaves a gaping hole in the fabric of family life.

Native American families today are at risk. Indian children are twice as likely to be living in poverty than the general population, less likely to finish high school or

have parents who did, and much more prone to experience violence, either in the home or outside of it. (INDIAN COUNTRY TODAY)

ABORIGINAL CULTURE

TOBACCO - In Woodland Indian rituals, ceremonies, and religious observances, tobacco is the unifying thread of communication between humans and the spiritual powers.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSFERENCE - the effects of experiencing trauma are transmitted within and across generations, and how whole communities can be affected by a single experience of trauma by a single member of a community.

POVERTY

(CBC 2013) Half of status First Nations children in Canada live in poverty, a troubling figure that jumps to nearly two-thirds in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, says a newly released report.

"The poverty rate is staggering. A 50 per cent poverty rate is unlike any other poverty rate for any other disadvantaged group in the country, by a long shot the worst," said David Macdonald, a senior economist at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and co-author of the report.

The study released late Tuesday by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Save the Children Canada found that the poverty rate of status First Nations children living on reserves was triple that of non-indigenous children.

In Manitoba and Saskatchewan, 62 and 64 per cent of status First Nations children were living below the poverty line, compared with 15 and 16 per cent among non-indigenous children in the provinces.

Poverty rates among status First Nations children are consistently higher across the country.

Co-author Daniel Wilson cautions that for many of them, "the depth of the poverty ... is actually greater than the numbers themselves tell you."

LOCATIONS:

Empire of Dirt was shot on location in Toronto (Kensington Market, North Toronto) and Innisfil, Keswick, Sunderland, Ontario.

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SHANNON MASTERS

PRODUCED BY
JENNIFER PODEMSKI

CO-PRODUCERS
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JENNIFER PODEMSKI

INTRODUCING
SHAY EYRE

With
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MICHAEL CRAM

TONYA LEE WILLIAMS
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JORIS JARSKY
SHANNON KOOK

SARAH PODEMSKI
RAOUL BHANEJA

SARAH MANNINEN
KATE CORBETT

JEAN YOON
TONY NAPPO

BARBARA GORDON
DOUG BEDARD
JAIDEN MITCHELL

And
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AVI FEDERGREEN
LOIS JACOBS

PRODUCERS
BOB CROWE
WALLY START

CAST
(order of appearance)

| | |
|------------------------|----------------|
| CARA GEE..... | LENA MAHIKAN |
| SHAY EYRE..... | PEEKA MAHIKAN |
| BARBARA GORDON..... | MRS. ARMSTRONG |
| JEAN | |
| YOON..... | TESS |
| SHANNON KOOK..... | ANGEL |
| JAIDEN MITCHELL..... | LITTLE WING |
| DOUG BEDARD..... | DOUG |
| TONYA LEE | |
| WILLIAMS..... | SANDRA |
| RAOUL BHANEJA..... | DR. GAFFNEY |
| JORIS JARSKY..... | NEIL |
| JENNIFER PODEMSKI..... | MINNIE MAHIKAN |
| JORDAN PRENTICE..... | WARREN FENSKY |
| SARAH MANNINEN..... | ANNA |
| MICHAEL CRAM..... | DOC BAKER |
| KATE CORBETT..... | WENDY |
| LUKE KIRBY..... | RUSSELL CARTER |
| LAWRENCE BAYNE..... | UNCLE HANK |
| SARAH PODEMSKI..... | CHARMAINE |
| TONY NAPPO..... | FISHERMAN |

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KEY MAKEUP
JULIA ND CARTER

LOCATION MANAGER
DEBORAH TIFFIN

ON SET DRESSERS
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KATIA OSTAPENKO
DANIELLE SAHOTA
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TYSON THEROUX
JORDAN CURNER

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SUZANNE SMOKE

LEAD TUTOR
ANDREA EISEN

ON-SET TUTOR
MAX WIEDERMANN

CAST DRIVER
KIRE PAPUTTS

EQUIPMENT DRIVER
ZEV LAVENDER

DAILY DRIVERS
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MICHAEL SCRIVENER
NIGEL JOHN

ANIMAL WRANGLER
RICK PARKER

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BLAZING KITCHEN
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UNIT PUBLICIST
MARIO TASSONE

MUSIC

"THE TRUTH"

Written by W. Kinsella

Performed by SFH

Courtesy of Sudden Death Records

"DEMONS"

Written by Doug Bedard and Brandon Lussier

Performed by Plex, featuring Brandon Brown

Courtesy of URBNET

"LET'S MAKE LOVE AGAIN"

Written by Matt Murphy and Michael Mabbott

Performed by Matt Murphy

Courtesy of Darius Films Inc.

"TWELVE STEPS TO FREEDOM"

Written and Performed by John Rowley

Courtesy of John Rowley

"THE TURN AROUND"

Written by David Hamelin, Justin Peroff and Liam O'Neil

Performed by Eight and a Half

From the album Eight and a Half

Courtesy of Arts & Crafts Productions Inc.

SPECIAL THANKS

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Atkinson Housing Cooperative

Artspace

Geoff Ashenhurst

Dennis Austin

Stu Aziz

Christopher Baptista

James Battiston

Steve Beatty

Shannon Beckner

Doug Bedard

Yvonne Bedard

Daniel Bekerman

Adam Bocknek

Matthew Boeckner

Greg Bottrell

Billy Boyd

Erin Burke

Café Unwind

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Taylor Dahlstrom
Donald Delorme
Brian Dennis
Diane DeSousa
Russell Diabo
Rolf Dinsdale
Amanda Doble
Helen Du Toit
El Gordo Latin American Food Court
Rob Eklove
Carol & Gary Ewart
Chris Eyre
Film City Rentals
Flindall's Freshmarket
Foxfires Bar & Grill
Illana Frank
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Brian Gibson
Ian Gibson
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Linda Hynnes
Nick Ianneli
Kish Iqbal
Daniel Iron
Lois Jacobs
Cindy Janvier
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Leah Jaunzems
Christina Jennings
Ronit Jinich
Rachel Katz
Rene Haynes
Ketura Kestin
King Dragon Marina
King Edward Hotel
Warren Kinsella
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Jennifer Levine
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Terry Marshall
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Kevin McKewan
Laurie & Craig McLean
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Morrison Family
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Jennifer Mesich
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David Nahwegahbow
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Duane Scott
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Raylene Stromberg
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Sean Sullivan
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Mark Taylor
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