

# Indigenous Portrait Project



**Stories Collected & Photography by:  
Alexandra Jarrett**









**Dedicated to my love,  
Roberto, for his passion  
and to my children  
Ryker, Ronin & Everlily  
for their light.**



# ***Indigenous Portrait Project***

I want to keep this project positive and empowering. I feel strongly that real change happens from within an individual. This project is something I feel strongly about. I feel that each of us have a lot to learn about ourselves and our culture. I believe that true change can only happen if we are an example of what we want to see in the world. I want the stories you share to challenge ourselves to seek positive change.

*If you are choosing to speak about a struggle you've encountered in life, please make sure to **HIGHLIGHT** how you overcame this challenge.*

PLEASE ANSWER ALL OF THESE:

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) Where are you from (town/ reserve/ village)?
- 3) What is your heritage (tribe/ band/ ancestral history)?

PLEASE CHOOSE **AT LEAST** ONE OF THESE TO SPEAK ABOUT

- 4) What does your culture mean to you?
- 5) How would you describe your visual identity?
- 6) What are some stereotypes you've experienced?
  - a) Do you agree with stereotypes and why?
- 7) How have you broken through negative stereotypes?
- 8) Tell us a story!
- 9) What kind of future do you hope for indigenous cultures?
- 10) What word would you use to describe your indigenous integrity?
- 11) What kind of example do you want to pass on to the next generation?

# ***Table of Contents***

***Page 6 - Amelia B.***

***-Model, Actress, Student, Activist, Speaker and Role Model***

***Page 8 - Helen Oro***

***- Mother, Role Model, Mentor, Designer and Entrepreneur***

***Page 10 - Tala T.***

***-Mother, Spoken Word Poet, Designer, Social Worker***

***Page 12- Kealy H.***

***-Actress, Model, Writer, Speaker & Activist***

***Page 14 - Lindsay I.***

***-Actress, Model, Role Model & Speaker***

***Page 16 - Justin B.***

***- Writer, Poet, Student and Performer***

***Page 18 - Emma H.***

***- Visual Artist, Activist***

***Page 20 - Acknowledgments & After Thoughts***

***Page 22***





Name: Amelia Boissoneau

From: Grew up on a farm near the Town of Blaine Lake. Registered member of Garden River First Nation.

Heritage: Ojibway, French and Russian.

How do you practice Indigenous Integrity? By embracing my heritage respectfully and not using it as a crutch for my actions or behaviors.





**What does your culture mean to you?**

My culture means a lot to me. When I was younger I didn't know much about my culture. I grew up in a non-indigenous community so I didn't have access to teachings or knowledge. I eventually became a little frightened to even express my culture since I experienced racism and I wanted to blend in as much as possible. But now I have realized how beautiful and rich my indigenous culture is and I learned to embrace it and it means most to me more than ever.

**How would you describe your visual identity?**

My visual identity is unique, many people are unsure of my ethnicity and I am often questioned about it. When I was younger I used to be made fun of for my features but now I realized how great it is that I don't have a particular look, instead I am versatile with my appearance.

**What are some stereotypes you've experienced?**

Throughout my life I have experienced many stereotypes. Such as not doing well in school or going to Post Secondary, that I am dishonest, won't show up on time or that I have children. I do not agree with stereotypes because they are a negative depiction that is put upon others to bring them down. I however have not let these stereotypes define me and I have broken through them. I take pride in my education, I am going to University, I am an upcoming successful model, I play sports, I play piano, I practice my culture and embrace it, I am honest, I am punctual, I do not have children and do not have any addictions.

**What kind of future do you hope for Indigenous Cultures?**

The future I hope for our indigenous cultures is that they expand and remain rich within our people and others. As indigenous people we have been through a lot and for our culture to last this long after everything we have been through I strongly believe it will last a very long time. I want our culture to be spread throughout the world and for others to be aware.

**What kind of example do you want to pass on to the next generation?**

The example that I want to leave for next generations is that I am a role model, leader and successful indigenous woman. I want to show people that you are capable of anything, to set no limits for yourself, to listen to your heart and to follow your passions.

**Tell us a Story!**

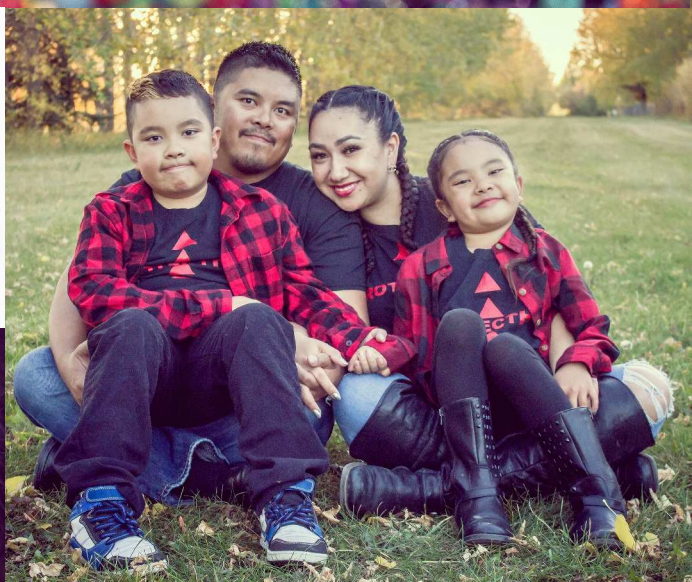
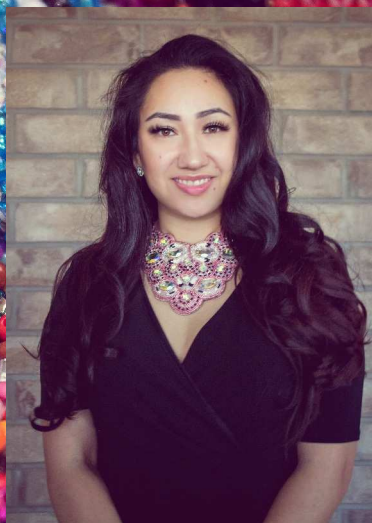
I would like to share the story of my modeling career. When I was younger I always had an interest in modeling. I loved watching fashion shows, looking through magazines and looking at campaigns in the mall. But I suffered from low self-esteem at the time and never thought I had what it took to become a model. It wasn't until April 2016 that I decided to gather up the courage to do it. So I joined modeling and acting classes in Saskatoon. Within a few months I got my first photo shoot and from there many more came my way. In June there was a model call for Global Indigenous Runway, which was a collaboration with a model management from Australia. I luckily was selected and was so excited to be a part of it. September 2016 is when the show took place. There is where I met Native American designer Jolonzo Goldtooth, who I modeled for. After the show he approached my parents and I. He asked if I would want to come model in New York Fashion Week! It was so surreal and of course I said yes. This February I traveled to New York and had an amazing time. I met some great people and got to enjoy a beautiful city. After I returned from New York I was contacted by We Day. They asked me if I would like to speak at the We Day show in Saskatoon. I was so honored and happy I got to share my story in front of over 15,000 people. Recently they contacted me again and invited me to speak at Parliament Hill in Ottawa at the first We Day Canada show on July 2nd. I am blown away at where my modeling career has taken me and I am excited to see where I will end up next.

Name: Helen Marie Oro

From: Pelican Lake First Nation

Heritage: Plains Cree from the Bear Cree Clan

How do you practice Indigenous integrity?  
Innovating



**What does your culture mean to you?**

my culture means a beauty you can't see but feel. It means growth through teachings and identity of who I am as a person. It's who I am and who I've become because my culture has taught me things I can't learn in school or through books. It means the world to me.

**How would you describe your visual identity?**

my visual identity, brown and down to take on the world.

**What are some stereotypes you've experienced?**

being called a poor mooch who lives off welfare. A thief and followed through stores. I've also found I get treated differently depending on how I'm dressed, my appearance plays a big part of my day if I get taken seriously or not.

**How have you broken through negative stereotypes?**

I would say breaking into a industry that doesn't have much of a Indigenous presence and changing there views on our people. Helping others see how much talent and creativity there is in our Native community. Traveling and sharing my story behind my pieces and what bead work means to me to non indigenous people who've only saw natives on movies. I had a man ask if he was to call us "squaws" and have no idea how inappropriate that it was to say that. This was in Europe where he said there isn't much depth when it came to Indigenous History or culture. We were able to educate him a little which was nice because he was fascinated and loved what he was learning.

**What kind of future do you hope for Indigenous Cultures?**

I hope we continue to find innovated ways to keep our language, art and creativity flowing when it comes to sharing with the next gen. it's about adapting and what can we do to keep something alive, this is where being innovated comes in.

**What kind of example do you want to pass on to the next generation?**

I wanna show them that it doesn't where you live, what you've been through, or what your going through that you can do amazing things. I want to help others pull that wall that blocks us from believing in ourselves and what we're capable of down. If we simply change our way of thinking we can go and do anything we put our minds to. Believing in yourself, in your talent or skill can take you to places you couldn't even imagine going to.





**How would you describe your visual identity?**

My visual identity is my tattoos, I feel like they are a map to my story, to my soul, to my spirit, to the trauma and to the resilience. I feel like the different colors of my hair that I have had tell stories of how I have grieved and let go and held on and been trapped and escaped. My skin color changes to very light in the winter and I feel like it's a representation of some of the colonial roots to my Irish heritage that exist. In the summer time I go a very dark brown and that's a closer representation of my native roots that beat with my blood red heart.

**What are some stereotypes you've experienced?**

*Indian princess* (just because I was wearing a ribbon skirt and beaded earrings expected to be submissive quiet and kind, but when I yelled and swore and spoke against rape culture I was frowned upon)

*Gangster* (just because I was wearing all black and running for fitness but got stopped by the cops)

*Shoplifter* (every damn time I go shopping anywhere at anytime, I've only shoplifted once when I was 14 I got caught I got scared and never did it again. I now have a social work degree and I still get followed, I have never stolen since that one time, but get treated like I do...)

**Do you agree with stereotypes and why?**

No never, stereotypes are preconceived ideas, white people don't get them, ever...

**How have you broken through negative stereotypes?**

I speak up, I speak out and I speak against.

My ribbon skirt workshops are how I break out of the negative stereotypes of "Indian Princess"

**What kind of future do you hope for Indigenous cultures?** To be woke

**What word would you use to describe your Indigenous integrity?** Authentic and raw

**What kind of example do you want to pass on to the next generation?** Real raw and unapologetic





**Name:** Tala Tootoosis

**From:** Sturgeon Lake First Nation

**Heritage:** Nakota Sioux, Plains Cree and Haudenosaunee (Mohawk) Bear Clan from Akwesasne Longhouse)

**What does your culture mean to you?**

My culture is my identity, my identity is connected to the land, the land is my lifeline and my bloodline. The songs, the dances, the ceremonies of each tribe are connected to the land, the language is depended on the surface of the earth on that specific territory. The songs are sung about the animals in that territory, the ceremonies honor those animals. The places ive lived, the place I was born, its all connected to who I am. My culture is my history, it's the residential school, the fur trade, the metis people, the resilience movements, idle no more, no dapl, it's the ribbon skirts and church mingling grandmothers still singing the church choir while growing their long hair free trying to feel good about being Indian. It's the young men and women in gangs trying to remember the tokala societies, the young men and women on the frontlines in activism, we are all trying to stay awake stay alive stay free stay safe, WE ARE ALL STILL HERE, regardless of how we are doing it, we are surviving and we are trying.







Name: Kealy Cheyenne Heeg

From: One Arrow, SK, Canada

Heritage: Cree Treaty 6

How do you practice Indigenous Integrity?  
By being impassioned for my culture



**What does your culture mean to you?**

My culture means a lot to me. My history, the stories my elders have passed down to me and the amazing things that we have accomplished as indigenous people is part of what makes up who I am as a woman today.

**How would you describe your visual identity?**

I wouldn't describe my visual identity at all, as it doesn't describe me. I am a lot more complex than any of my identifiers. I do have my late little granny's eyes, which means a lot to me. She was a very special woman.

**What are some stereotypes you've experienced?**

Growing up I experienced some stereotypes and bullying. I had been called names once in a while, I'd had a little girl call me a "Squaw" during soccer when I was young, I didn't even know what that word meant at that time. I think the one stereotype that really stuck with me was the concept of being a "dirty Indian" as though as a people we were unclean. There were others that I recall but I remember that having a big impact on me.

**Do you agree with stereotypes and why?**

I don't believe in stereotypes at all. I've worked in the automotive industry for the last decade and I've met people of all walks of life. One thing you learn early on in sales is you can never tell who's a "buyer". This is true for every day life. And to be successful in your interactions with people whether it is in business or in every day life you need to throw out anything you've heard about a group of people before because more often than not it is completely wrong.

**How have you broken through negative stereotypes?**

I've just stayed focused on being a good example through my own lifestyle and actions. I also make sure that I promote and shine a spotlight on those that I believe are breaking through barriers and knocking down stereotypes.

**What kind of future do you hope for indigenous cultures?**

I hope that we can regain a lot of what has been lost culturally. I think through education, art and storytelling we can show the beauty of our cultures and share it with the rest of the world.

**What kind of example do you want to pass on to the next generation?**

I want to show the youth/next generation that they can not only overcome the hurdles set before us; that we are not born to just survive. We are empowered young men and women and we are destined to flourish and become leaders.

**Tell us a story!**

This is not a story that I like to tell, but I think it's one that needs to be told. I have had a lot of friends, coworkers, etc that have said some broad generalization about indigenous people. Sometime it has been an outright racist remark, sometimes it's a poor taste "joke" that they actually believe. I am lighter skinned, like to dye my hair an assortment of colours and I was born with stormy blue/grey eyes. So for them to realize that I am not someone they should be saying these things in front of, about or to I have to pipe up and say. Well I'm not "\_\_\_\_\_". (Examples I've heard about my culture; "all unemployed, all drunks, dirty, thieves" etc) To this I've heard the WORST responses imaginable and I've heard it more times than I could possibly count "Well Kealy, you're the exception." "Well Kealy you're not 'full' native, are you?" "Well you don't even look like 'one of them'." This is often the hardest thing to respond to as it is difficult for me to suppress the anger/hurt that bubbles up inside me. I then inform them that what they've said is painting an entire culture of people with the same brush, and that I am NOT the exception actually I am one of many hard working, healthy happy indigenous people that I know; not only know but am also related to. I point out to them that my family spans over four hundred members and we are breaking barriers left right and centre. And we are not unique; this is the case all across Canada. Often this is met with silence or a "oh you don't know how to take a joke." But I hope that I will have helped stop a few to think before they speak next time, before they blurt out a senseless stereotype or generalization. I hope that as positive media continues to be shared, indigenous accomplishments continue to be highlighted that people will recognize that mainstream media has painted a rather bleak inaccurate picture for many years.





**My name is Lindsay Isbister (White Wolf Woman)**

I am a Cree woman from Mistawasis First Nation and a descendant of the residential school system. I live in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

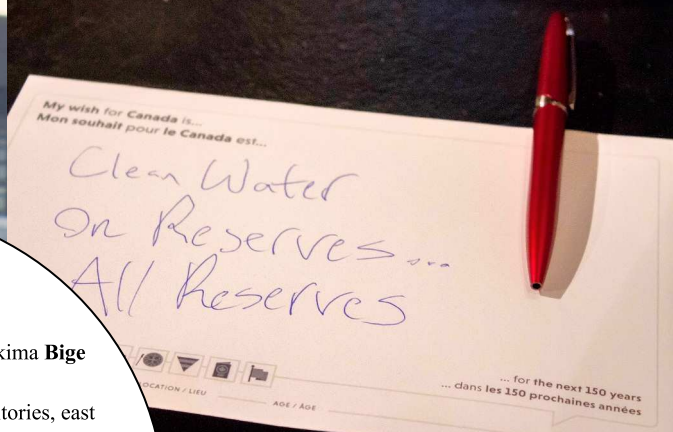
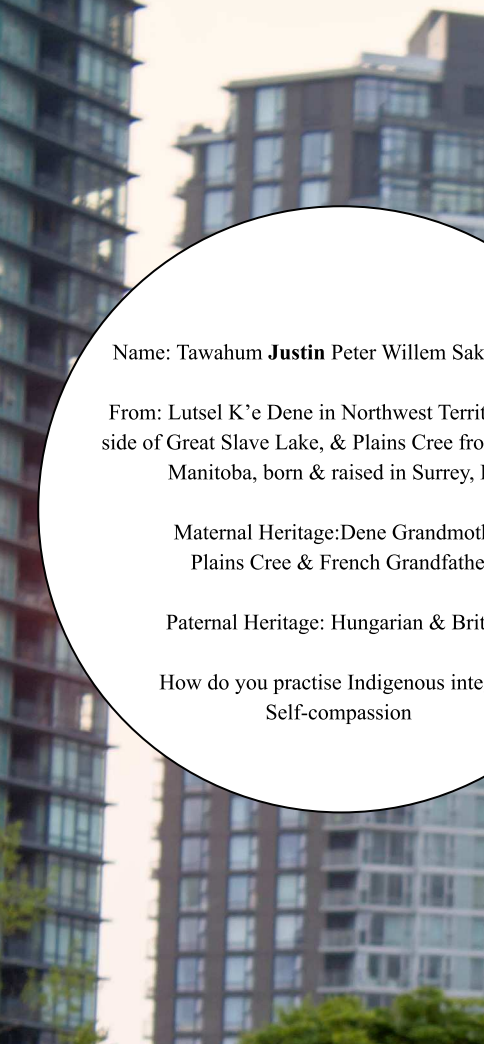
**What kind of example do you want to pass on to the next generation ?**

I want to instill pride in our heritage and culture and strengthen our youth. I want the next generation to know that Empowerment comes from within and with that Empowerment comes spiritual freedom. Reconciliation and being apart of answering the calls to action, is the legacy I want to leave to the next generation.









Name: Tawahum **Justin** Peter Willem Sakima **Bige**

From: Lutsel K'e Dene in Northwest Territories, east side of Great Slave Lake, & Plains Cree from northern Manitoba, born & raised in Surrey, BC

Maternal Heritage: Dene Grandmother  
Plains Cree & French Grandfather

Paternal Heritage: Hungarian & British

How do you practise Indigenous integrity?  
Self-compassion



## **What does your culture mean to you?**

For me, my culture means practices and traditions integral to sustaining communities for countless generations. Means spirituality, connection with the land, connection with each other. And sharing this vision and practice with my family, friends, and when appropriate, the world. It also means ancestral ties that go back thousands of years and the wisdom and responsibility that come with that. And going back to those ancestral threads, the pride I have for how my people have existed through the generations, our penchant for innovation and so much more. My Dene and Cree culture mean the universe to me.

## **How would you describe your visual identity?**

Militant comfy. Intensely cozy. It took me a long time to be okay with my body, and now that I am, I like to show off a little bit and stand out. My hair is so important too, and I used to get a lot of flack for having long hair, for “looking like a girl” whatever that means like boy’s hair just stops growing after an inch or something.

## **What are some stereotypes you’ve experienced?**

I’ve grown up in an urban setting, and there was so much racism and it was projected through stereotypical jokes, “angry Native” or like this assumption that we’re all stupid, or alcoholics or addicts. I’ve heard Listerine jokes a lot growing up. When I was around non-Indigenous kids (mainly white people) making these jokes, if I didn’t laugh along with them, they would try to tell me I’m “the exception”. Whatever the hell that means.

I think stereotypes are inherently problematic. A community may decide to do certain things together. Knowledge might be passed down ancestrally. The “truth” attributed to stereotypes is an illusion. Putting enough people in the same environments or practicing the same culture is obviously going to mean there are certain things that many of those people do or share in common.

## **How have you broken through negative stereotypes?**

I’d like to think that I began a process of intergenerational healing from intergenerational trauma. This is what I mean by stereotypes as an illusion, since the trauma was something Indigenous people were put through individually and as a whole, that becomes a problem for the next generations to heal those traumas.

I grew up in poverty and a chaotic home environment and didn’t succumb to my trauma. I’m moving forward and succeeding in a colonial environment that doesn’t actually want me to and I’m going to bring that success back to my home community one day.

## **What kind of future do you hope for Indigenous cultures?**

A decolonized future. One where we are empowered by our own sovereignty to be the best we can be, healing our trauma together and moving toward a sustainable future. We’re already heading that way. We’ve all descended from very important, resilient human beings who survived attempts at genocide.

## **What kind of example do you want to pass on to the next generation?**

One where we depend on ourselves and the community in a healthy way, not using substances to dull the pain, that shows if you put enough work into your passion and do it in a good way, you will always make it closer to your goal.



Name: Emma Theresa Diane Hassencahl-Perley I carry both of my grandmother's names and both family names; this has always been important to me.

From: I am Wolastoquey (Maliseet) from Tobique First Nation (Negootgook) in New Brunswick. Wolastoqiyik means, "People of the beautiful, bountiful river" and Negootgook means, "where the rivers flow underneath". Home sits between two rivers: the Saint John River and the Tobique River.

Maternal Heritage: Wolastoqiyik

Paternal Heritage: Wolastoqiyik & German

How do you practise Indigenous integrity?

I am a visual artist. My work focuses on the relationship between Canada as a state and First Nations people, it is a relationship I am critical of. Other themes in my work include Legislative Identity and my own identity as a Wolastoquey woman.







In regards to culture and identity, I have lived my whole life on reserve but I went to school in the nearest town: Perth-Andover, New-Brunswick. It wasn't "cool" to be Native growing up and I believe that many of us struggled with our identities. Native students in my high school were often subjected to racism and discrimination from other students and staff and because of this I felt the need to blend in, although I felt a lot of pride in who I was. With that said, there was lateral violence in our circle. If one showed too much cultural pride, they were bullied for it from other native students. I remember one student in particular that cut his long hair because people teased him for it. Our hair has so much cultural significance.

Everything turned around for me after I went to university, I often joke about university teaching me to be Indian but what it did was teach me to be unapologetic. In fact, I did most of the work. I also had people in my life who challenged me to do better and to be better. When my education gave me confidence I stopped feeling the guilt and shame that so many of us feel. I stopped allowing people around me to make harmful jokes and comments and I started to educate others as I was educating myself and I do that through art. Art has been healing as I have been relearning my history. It wasn't until I left home that I began to see all the problems in Indigenous communities in Canada as well as their root causes, mainly Colonialism. I have so much to share with people and I think that is what keeps me going. I don't speak my language fluently but it is something I want to learn. I want to go to grad school. I want to be an artist forever. I can't summarize what my culture means to me because it means everything

– I found myself when I learned to fully embrace it.



## **Acknowledgements & After thoughts**

**I'd certainly like to take the time to fill this space with gratefulness to Jennifer, Nigit'stil and the rest of the team at Taking It Global. This project wouldn't have come to fruition without their support through the Connected North Youth Leadership Fund.**

**I found this particular project inspiring. It is something I'd definitely like to continue doing. I'm looking forward to watching the Indigenous Portrait Project evolve. There are so many applications to the stories I have heard and begun to collect. There are so many Indigenous Peoples**

**I've yet to meet and ask for their stories. I feel it is important in our journeys as individuals and as a group to acknowledge each others stories. I have personally utilized this project as a way for me to gather some of the answers I was seeking for myself. I am an Indigenous Woman and it is my responsibility to have compassion. I will remain rooted in my love of self by continuously seeking the good in the world. Please find me on my Social Media Platforms making noise about things that are important to Earth.**







Photo by: Tenille Campbell  
Sweetmoon Photography

**Name:** Alexandra Louise Jarrett

**From:** Eagles Lake First Nation

**Maternal Heritage:** Cree & Metis

**Paternal Heritage:** Mixed European

**How do I maintain my Indigenous integrity?**

By Pursuing my Purpose with Passion.

**What kind of future do you hope for  
Indigenous cultures?**

Im hoping for inclusivity of Indigenous culture within schools and communities. I want self-reliance to take a forefront in communities. From Gardening, Eco-Friendly Homes, Proper Recycling Practices, etc. I'm looking forward to pioneering the way for Canada towards a more sustainable future for all people.



In a picturesque view I'm a graphical delinquency  
A mother, a student, a minor negativity  
To the contrary I'm driven ambition  
The world needs heroes and I'm a solution  
-Axis







