

BEING INNU
A documentary film

“The whole point of being in this film is to make sure the younger generation doesn’t go through what we went through.”

Theresa Andrew, 19, Sheshatshiu

For thousands of years the Innu lived off the land. They were nomads, sometimes also known as the Montagnais. In the 1960s, government policy forced them to settle and form communities in Labrador and Quebec. Ancestral ways collided with modern ones and gave rise to ongoing struggles. Now the grandchildren tell their own story.

Being Innu takes an unvarnished look at life in the village of Sheshatshiu, Labrador, population 1,400. Six savvy, gutsy young people talk to filmmaker Catherine Mullins about addiction, suicide, lack of jobs, hopelessness. They will grab your heart with their stories: *“I first thought about suicide when I was 7,”* says 16-year-old April whose father and brother died tragically. They will make you laugh with their wry humour: *“What do you do when you live in a shoe?”* quips Jimmy, 25.

When Theresa was 3, she chose to live with her grandparents. A spirited 19-year-old, she and boyfriend David wrestle with their relationship, their demons and their future. Michel, aka “Giant” was raised in the bush by his grandmother. Like many of his peers, he searches for ways to put his skills to use where they can earn him a living. Ecotourism is his hope for the future.

Interviews with Elders, grandparents, community leaders and teachers round out this portrait of a community in crisis – sadly a situation that will resonate with many aboriginal nations. Stunning archival photographs from 1890 to the 1950s illustrate a time when they still lived off the land. More recent photos show a people in transition.

What is remarkable about the youth of Sheshatshiu is their love of the land and of their native language. They seek to reconcile elements of a way of life that existed as recently as fifty years ago – and which is still in their blood – with the demands of living in the 21st century. This is their biggest challenge.

Being Innu was shot in HDCAM over a one-year period. It will be released in English, French and Innu-aimun.

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