

Younger generations turn to elders for history

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land base — you need a land base to begin the whole process." Without a land base, he added, it is very difficult to develop social, economic or political structures. And even though one faction of native activists calls for a sovereign Indian nation, "we can't really survive economically by not being part of Canada," said Christmas.

The First Nations Student Union hasn't yet garnered the membership Christmas had hoped for. A few native students I spoke to were not aware of the union's existence, a few more had thought it exclusive to Osgoode law students. The response is unfortunate; the union has great potential as an agent of communication and information for both native and non-native students.

"Canadians just don't know the whole history [of native peoples]."

This is a point that Christmas reiterates: "Canadians just don't know the whole history [of native peoples] — that's tory the problem. . . . Up until 1983 [a majority of the books written about native peoples] were written by non-natives." And if Canada's native people are not telling their own story, the story is not being told correctly. For instance, non-natives often make references to "native religion." Christmas argues that the European sense of religion has no parallel with the traditional native way of things; for Canada's first people, religion and day-to-day living are equal, because the two are so deeply entwined.

The union, Christmas said, could provide the university with the unified native voice it lacks, with a native perspective as varied as the ancestries of its individual members. "[We] don't want to force people into the group," he said. "But we're here if people need help."

Professor Nina De Shane has made a number of personal commitments to the York native student body, not the least of which was convincing the administration to approve the native art and performance class she teaches. A Metis herself, the Montreal-raised De Shane has just announced that Winters College and the fine arts faculty have just made an agreement-in-principle to establish a native research centre.

De Shane said she hoped that, eventually, the centre would host a native artist-in-residence for three to six

month periods each year, a position that would alternate between artistic mediums, such as playwriting, poetry and painting.

For Stong College resident Carolyn Hanrahan, these are times of rediscovery. Years ago, her mother, an Ojibway from the Sheshegwaning Reserve on Manitoulin Island, was forced to give up her native status after marrying a non-native. Recent changes in status laws made it possible for the Ojibway woman to regain her status and, for Carolyn and her brother, to regain theirs.

The psychology major reflected on the meaning of her newly-acquired status. "I think it means more to my mother," she said. "Mainly because it

was taken away from her, more than just given to me."

Some mornings, Hanrahan opens up the little door to her residence mailbox and finds the native information newsletter that is sent out to her

"Now that I have [native status], I want to know more about my background," she said. "I'd like to learn to speak Ojibway. I'd like to go to a pow-wow — I've never been to one."

the reserve. During our discussion, Williston recalled having been dressed up in traditional garb at the one pow-wow she attended as a young girl. One day, she hoped, she'd take her own children to their first pow-wow.

"My kids may or may not be status," she said, "but I'm going to make sure they know all about their background."

Hanrahan and Williston are proof that Christmas was correct in his recent analysis of the state of awareness among many young native people today:

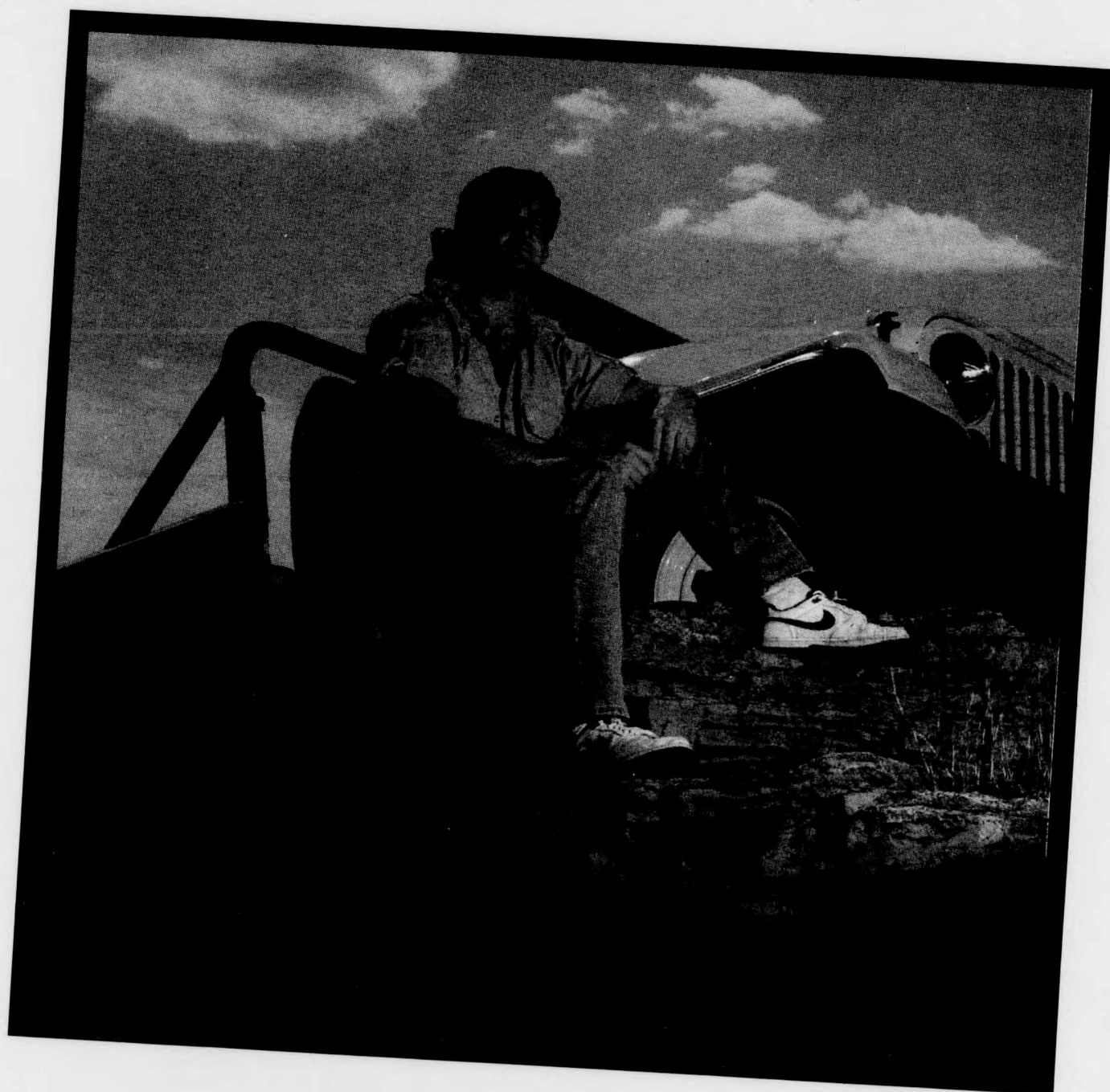
"It's starting to improve a lot now," he said. "Younger generations are starting to go back to the old ways. They're asking the elders questions."

"I'm saturated with tradition, regardless of where I am."

Kenn Pitawanakwat

by the Sudbury-Anishinabek Post-Secondary Counselling Unit. A whole new dimension of information has just opened up before her — a wide spectrum of issues that Hanrahan is just beginning to absorb.

Hanrahan's residence next door neighbour Christine Williston, an Ojibway from the Garden River Reserve near Sault Ste. Marie, also keeps up on news from home by reading the monthly newsletters mailed out to her from



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