

TELLING OUR STORIES

Jim Compton, also known as Sageeway Gheeshick or Rising Day, is an award-winning journalist, director, producer and television host in Winnipeg. Compton, 47, an Ojibway from the Keeseekoose (Little Sky) First Nation in Saskatchewan, was a long-time reporter and producer for CBC television in Winnipeg, worked as a consultant to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and for five years was program director of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network. He is currently a development officer for CHUM Television. He speaks to *Canada World View* about his efforts to maintain and preserve Aboriginal culture and language in Canada and internationally.

I have just returned from a trip to the Holy Land, as part of a tour that invited broadcasters and producers from Canada to have a first-hand look the media and film industry in Israel during the Jerusalem and Ramallah film festivals. Watching films and meeting producers and directors was the order of the day, but that did not stop our troupe from taking in the many sites of the most holy of holy places.

Just outside of Jerusalem is a long, winding valley that the River Jordan runs through. Our guide explained that this was the inspiration for the 23rd Psalm, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil." At the end is the very plateau where Jesus wandered into the desert to seek the visions he preached throughout the countryside.

Standing there reminded me that we have, as Aboriginal people, just come out of the desert ourselves, and we too have a vision for our people in Canada. However, at the close of the UN's Decade of the World's Indigenous People, many of us are still lost in the desert. The average age for our people to live is 48. We have the highest rates of diabetes and heart attack in the country. Our children are dying at ten times the

national average. Most of us live in abject poverty.

A ray of hope has emerged. It came from being recognized as a people in the repatriated Constitution and being added to the *Broadcasting Act*. Following the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the dream of an all-Aboriginal national network was realized, and in 1999 I became the first Aboriginal program director in the world. Our stories would be told. Our people would tell them. It is a glimmer of hope among the ruins of our communities, a reflection of who we are.

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Starting out in journalism writing stories for the university newspaper, I used to have a dream about an Aboriginal man reading the news,

just like the CBC's Knowlton Nash. Well, we have an Aboriginal man reading the news today. We also have an Aboriginal woman. I didn't know that it would be in the context of an Aboriginal network, but there you go. The key is seeing ourselves mirrored back to us on one of the most powerful mediums in the world, which is television, telling our stories and dealing with our issues.

When I've travelled to Israel, to France, to Baghdad, to Las Vegas and the Sundance Film Festival, people are astounded that we have an Aboriginal network in Canada. By being the first, we have inspired others. I was in New Zealand this spring for the launch of the Maori Television Network. The Aborigines are trying hard to launch their own service in Australia and now there's talk of a Native network in the U.S. We are finding ways to work together, to showcase what's happening in different areas of the globe, although budgets are small. There's still a long way to go. I would like to see more drama being produced, and co-productions and collaboration around the world. With the help of the broadcasting community in Canada and the inspiration of how far we've come, this vision will become a reality. 🍁



photo: courtesy of APTN

Journalist Jim Compton: a vision for Aboriginal people in Canada.