

Saskatchewan

'Resilience and strength': Photos show the untold history of Indigenous people

Blanket Toss Under Midnight Sun an extension of Paul Seesequasis's Indigenous Archival Photo Project

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Oliver Rupert, in sunglasses, and other young Cree men in Fort George, Quebec in 1973. Paul Seesequasis says the archival photos he has collected for his book *Blanket Toss Under Midnight Sun* illustrate an alternate, more positive version of Indigenous history than the narrative that is usually shared. (George Legrady; Supplied by Penguin Random House)

Author Paul Seesequasis says he's sharing a mostly untold history of Indigenous people in Canada.

He has spent years collecting photos of Indigenous people that picture resilience, strength and humour.

Seesequasis said he was inspired by comments his mother made. She is a residential school survivor and she was a witness for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

"Obviously, a lot of the awful things that happened in residential schools came out during the commission but she also made the comment that there is another side, which is the strength and resilience of family and kinship and of communities during the hardest of times," Seesequasis said.

"Without that resilience and strength what we see today, that sort of renaissance in Indigenous writing and language and culture, that would not have survived."

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For several years Paul Seesequasis has been seeking out intimate archival photos of Indigenous people and sharing them via social media. Along the way, he's heard so many stories of resilience about the people whose lives are captured in those frames. This fall Paul turned the project into a book, and he shares some stories with host Shauna Powers 11:20



Cree women Beatrice Gilpin, Josephine Mayappo and Laura Moses in Eastmain, Quebec in 1973. Paul Seesequasis says he hopes his project honours the Indigenous people of Canada. 'I hope it gives them a sense of continuity through the hardest of times to today so that communities can sense the strength that they have,' he says. (George Legrady; Supplied by Penguin Random House)

He dug through online archives looking for photos that illustrated this alternate reality, posting his findings online.

People responded, recognizing family members and telling stories about the people pictured.

In one case, a photo he posted helped locate a long-lost family heirloom.

The photo was taken in 1951 and showed Emma Alfred holding a beaver foot purse she and her mom had made.

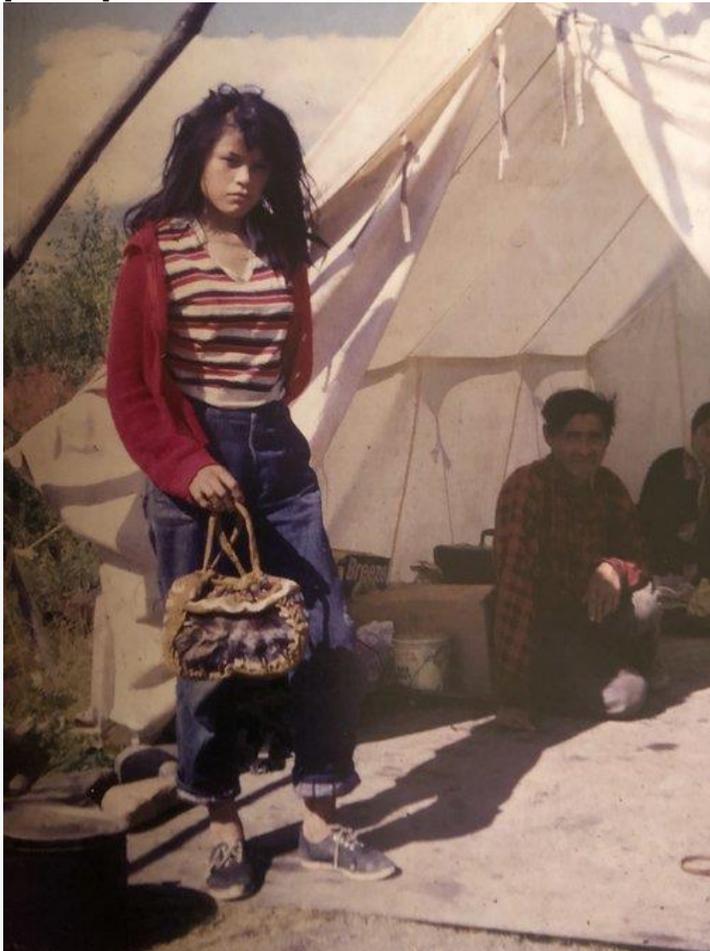


paul seesequasis
[@PaulSeesequasis](#)



'Emma Alfred with beaver foot purse' ~ (Northern Tutchone) ~
Pelly Crossing, Yukon 1951

Photo: Catharine McClellan
[CMoH]



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That purse disappeared sometime after the photo was taken but no one knew how it was lost.

Using the photo as a reference, Alfred located the purse in the Canadian Museum of Natural History in 2015 and was able to bring it home.

Now, he's collected many of the photos in a book titled *Blanket Toss Under Midnight Sun: Portraits of Everyday Life in Eight Indigenous Communities*.



Cree fiddler Bobby Georgekish plays after a wedding in 1973, photographed by George Legrady and included in Paul Seesequasis's book *Blanket Toss Under Midnight Sun: Portraits of Everyday Life in Eight Indigenous Communities*. (George Legrady; Supplied by Penguin Random House)

He said he's learned a lot from the project.

"My framing of what Canada is, or what Indigenous reality in Canada is, has certainly widened since I began researching this book," Seesequasis said. "I've developed a real deep appreciation for how people lived off the land, how people kept languages alive when it was not an easy thing to do."