

THE STORY OF 39 BOXES

Once upon a time I had an ex business partner in Redmotel Films and in a lousy story that was the end of a ten year partnership, he got custody of 39 boxes of negative, and the right to do market the imagery as stock footage, as per the agreement his lawyers had drafted up.

He had no intentions of marketing the content and instead he just put the boxes in a storage locker and then over time stopped paying. That storage locker was in Kelowna BC and after so many months of lack of payment the day had come to cut the locks and either sell off the contents of the locker or throw the contents in the garbage.

That's when a First Nations man named Dan McGonigle, a Dene tribal member who had spent his early childhood on a river in the NWT in a log house with his mother and father and four other siblings, drove up to that storage locker not knowing the part he was about to play in what was nothing short of a miracle, for me.

There's an even deeper part to this story because Dan is also one of those kids who was taken from his family and from his reservation and sent to be raised in one of those infamous 'charter schools' we now hear so much about.

Both him and his sister, and were put through years of abuse at the hands of that same system that still has yet explain or investigate the recent discovery of the remains of 328 children, found in a mass grave behind one of the charter schools.

Dan never learned though in that charter school how to read or write. But later he learned how to be a rock star welder, so good a welder that he got hired to work pretty big jobs, bridges, big projects, all over B.C. despite his never getting his official welding papers.

Anyway, the story goes, he was driving with his wife through Kelowna and they saw a sign that said, Storage Locker Auction Today. He was like 'damn my favorite show is Storage Wars, lets go'

Hed been welding all day and was in his dirty work clothes, but whatever, so he pulls his truck up to the doors just as some white man pulls up in a nice mercedes Benz. He said they both get out at the same time, him in his work clothes, the white guy in a nice silver grey suit, and the white guy looks at Dan, looks him up and down with a look that says, 'What the f%&K are doing here you dirty Indian'.

That look didn't settle well with Dan and so Dan says to his wife, you know what, f%&k him, and because welders make pretty good money he decides hes gonna go in and out bid this rich white man on everything the white man bids on.

The first locker opened that day had 39 cardboard boxes in it. Dan's got no clue what's in the boxes but jumps right in. 1000 dollars later he owns my movie.

He said to his wife later 'I don't know what's in those boxes exactly but it looks important'. It took him almost another five years to finally find me. And then it took another four years to find the money to transfer close to 60 hours of footage to brand new raw Netflix friendly 4k editable files.

Anyway it's a brilliant story especially how his history ties into the themes of the film but even more profound, my partner, KJ McKusker, a First Nations guy as well, it turns out both him and Dan are both from the same Dene reservation way up in the NWT.

KJ was taken as well but he was adopted out to some white Canadians and grew up in Calgary. He always tells me he was raised by the back hand of an Irishman.

Finally this last year a producer named Grant Harvey found the financing, nearly 140,000 dollars and with his editor Ken Filewych and almost five months of effort we have our movie back.

Now we are in the watching all our footage again and figuring the best approach to finishing the Project, with our main idea to drive the route I took with Jordie and Troy some 30 years ago, maybe with a new dog I'll name Rooster, but stopping at every place I filmed at on the original journey and reconnect with each reservation, film new interviews, candid conversations with maybe some people who will remember me and our crew of cowboy filmmakers when we met them 30 years earlier.

I know that Goerge Takes A Gun, who's on the website, an elder whose father was actually at Custers battle, and was almost 80 years old when we filmed with him, his grandson is Supaman, the Eminem of Native Rappers. google him, hes super talented.

So in how the circle of life comes around and around, well he wrote to KJ awhile ago and wanted to thank us because he said never would have known anything about his grandfather if we hadn't filmed him. He says he'll even do music for the film if we want.

So, I would start in Alberta and start where it all really began on that ranch just south of Black Diamond where I lived for five years with Jordie while we made our film MOON OF THE DESPERADOS, and where so much of everything that influenced my life began.

It's a beautiful story, but it's pretty heavy as well, because I lost two of the best friends I ever had with both Jordie and Troy committing suicide, two super f%&ked times in my life.

So thats my new dream, my number one bucket list item, and if I do nothing else, well, it'll be a pretty special day when I can sit in a theater and watch the credits roll:

UNDER THE WHISPERING SKY A FILM BY JETH WEINRICH