

NAKUSET: QFHSA Fall Conference 2016 Keynote Speaker

Some people are born to empower others and some have it thrust upon them...

So seems to be the case of Nakuset, this year's QFHSA Fall Conference Keynote Speaker.

Nakuset has become one of the most visible spokespersons for the aboriginal community in Montreal, because she has been compelled to rise to the challenge, wherever and whenever it has appeared. She serves as the executive director of the Montreal Native Women's Shelter (MNWS), and co-president of the Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy Network. In addition, she hosts a community TV show **Indigenous Power**, a series that portrays urban Aboriginal Montrealers in a positive light by highlighting their strengths and leadership within the community as artists, musicians, scholars, and professionals.

Part of the "Sixties Scoop", she and her sister Sonya were taken without permission from their Cree parents' home in Thompson, Manitoba and adopted out. Although Sonya was eventually returned to their parents, Nakuset herself was adopted and raised by a Jewish family in Montreal. She struggled with her identity for many years until she could come to terms with being a Jewish Indian. She has since been reunited with Sonya by telephone, and very recently, both have been reunited with their youngest sister, Rose Mary, who had been living in Austria since she was 3 years old.

Estimates run to 11,000 and most likely many more, aboriginal children scooped up from family homes on reserves between 1960 and 1985 and sent to live with non-aboriginal homes across Canada. In some cases, newborn babies were literally taken from their mothers while recovering from childbirth in hospital and just given away.

Although an early childhood such as these women have experienced, both as children and as parents losing their children, seems unimaginable to us, as the executive director of the Montreal Native Women's Shelter, Nakuset is in a position to counsel other women who struggle with similar experiences. Although her resilience and that of other aboriginal women is an inspiration to us all it will be through knowledge of the truth of the Aboriginal experience in Canada that we can guard against families being torn apart in such a manner ever again.