

Kashtin Woodhouse

Gypsumville, MB

Changing the World, One Child at a Time

"Kashtin, you're a top student in this class." Kirby Russell told me. The two of us were on our way to the city for an MTC Workshop in Winnipeg.

"Well, I don't think I am. What about Dana and Isis?" I asked, knowing he would tell me something that I normally hear from all the adults around.

"Well, first off, you're a great writer. I've seen what you can write. Secondly, you're a great artist. You have much talent, Kashtin. That's why I am taking you to these Workshops to help you get into acting, or at least interest you in what you want to do with your life." He told me. Kirby's my favourite teacher; he really knows how to get to my good side and make me feel so great about myself. Though having a heart-to-heart conversation with another man is not my sort of field.

"Thanks, I guess, I see how much you see in me. I just don't think I can offer that much to people. I'm a Native you know." I told him, hoping he'd see that being a Native in Canada can be just as rough as being African American in the United States.

"Kashtin, you got a lot to learn, my friend," he said. He called me his friend which warmed my heart.

"Well, how many Native figures do you know that have made a difference in history, how many have changed the lives of other Natives to help and changed the image of us?" I asked, hoping to get a real positive answer to help my look upon my Native Culture.

"There's a lot Kashtin, for instance, Elijah Harper," he said.

"Oh right, the Meech Lake Accord in Canada. Didn't he say 'No' and that entire political Act went downhill because he said No?" I said, thinking I knew what it was about.

"No, but he did see that the Meech Lake Accord didn't seem to have anything to do with the First Nations." He told me, giving me a history lesson in the car as we passed Eriksdale.

"Okay, any other Native people?" I asked.

We named a lot of Native people and talked about it such as Adam Beach, Tina Keeper, The Oka Crisis and The Bill C-31. He seemed to know a lot about Native people, more than I had expected. Finally we had gotten to our destination, Winnipeg. He was done giving me a whole history lesson on how some Native people had changed some people's lives in Canadian history. It was very early in the morning, so we grabbed some breakfast at McDonalds. Over breakfast he told me something that will stay with me forever.

"Kashtin, you have to know, that it doesn't depend on your color to make a difference. It depends on your character and your own image to help others see that they too can change. This world is changing everyday Kashtin. I'd say, oh, fifty years from now it won't matter if you're African or Native to make a difference. It only matters to your identity." He spoke with passion and belief.

This was the best advice I could get from someone. I now understood why he has spent so much time talking with me about image and building character. He seemed to know a lot more than I really knew about him.

This was the fourth time I had come to the workshop. Mr. Russell had been taking me to these workshops for seeing Theater and Acting because I volunteered for it. He wrote a very good reference for me to get into this thing. I was honored to have gone to this workshop; being the first Native from the West Interlake in Manitoba to have gone to the MTC Workshops.

We had a tour of the giant MTC Theater in Winnipeg. Seeing how the Theater operated and worked had fascinated me. Well, after I saw the play, Mr. Russell picked me up and it was time for some lunch and we headed back to Fairford; a small reservation about 300 kilometers from Winnipeg.

"Well, what did you learn this time?" he asked me.

"We had a tour of the theater. It's pretty cool and large; I never expected it to be that big." I told him.

Two hours into our drive back, we had another conversation about how some people can make a difference.

"It's Black History month; I am going to have you do an assignment. An essay on how some Black people have made a difference in their surroundings." Kirby Russell told me.

"You're giving me a heads up? Well, in that case. I don't know any famous black people that changed history except for Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr." I said.

"Kashtin, you're a smart guy, I'm pretty sure you can think of something," he said.

"Fine, I'll do Martin Luther King, I don't know him but it'll work out," I replied.

Two days later, my aunty had told me of this contest on prescription drugs contest.

"I could win an Ipod for drawing a simple poster on prescription drug safety?" I asked her.

"Yes, my boy. I know you're a good artist. You can do it. It will help your community and it will be in the newspaper. You'll be helping the community." My aunty Cynthia had told me.

I thought about this and remembered about what Kirby told me about how I could help my image and possible help other images as well. Though what will I draw? My aunty had dropped me off at school. I decided I could ask Kirby. He usually gives me the answers and ideas to help me.

Also, my aunty had helped me finish my essay about Martin Luther King, Jr. It was a success. In the hallways at the school I met up with my friends and cousins then headed to class. In class I present that last statement in my essay,

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be

judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. This concludes my essay about how Martin Luther King Jr fought on civil rights."

After the other students were done presenting their essays, I decided I should discuss about that poster contest coming up.

"Poster contest eh? You do have the skills for it. Do it, an iPod in it too for doing something you're great at." He said trying to give me another *"you're a well talented man and you can do anything when you put your mind at it"* speech.

"Yes, it's due this month. So I wanted to know what I should draw," I asked quickly interrupting him so he wouldn't start that lecture.

"Have a motto, and try to reach out and tell what happens in some households on the reservation." He said looking at me. I wondered then just thought of the idea. It just hit me. Usually this happens, I think of something and then a great idea occurs to me. I looked at him and began illustrating from my mind and hands, the image I'll present.

A few days later I submitted my drawing showing a young kid at the table with his head down and pills everywhere. Saying Prescription drugs can kill youngsters if left around. *Children See, Children Do*, was my motto.

The day came when I had seen my name in the "Interlake Spectator." Proud of my work, my aunty had congratulated me on my effort in making this poster and said I finished helping the community.

"Six young people living in the RCMP's Hwy. 6 catchment areas were rewarded for showcasing their creativity while conveying an anti-drug message for the Prevent Prescription Drug Abuse Poster Contest. Grade 11 students Kashtin Woodhouse (Pinaymootang School in Fairford), Jennilee Sveistrup (Ashern Central School), Clark Lindell (Lundar School), and Grade 9 students Camille Amber Kayseas (Lake St. Martin School) and Desiree Ida Sumner (Little Saskatchewan School), were selected as winners."

-Interlake Spectator

I was proud reading of my accomplishment and decided to help my aunty on poverty project she had been working on. She asked me to make a video about it. We both assembled a lot of pictures of the reservation and put them into the video. The

video was a complete success and I had gotten paid \$600.00 because of it. I have helped my community and have felt very good in doing this. It does not get much better than this!