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KATIE RICH IS IN TORONTO TO LAUNCH A BOOK

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*Host: Pringle, Valerie**Interview: Rich, Katie; Innu Chief, Davis Inlet*

Pringle: You remember these pictures. You saw them back in 1993. These are teenagers in Davis Inlet high on gasoline, wanting to kill themselves, thrust this community into the national spotlight and people finally became aware of the appalling living conditions there in an Innu community that was plagued by poverty and alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence. Promises were made of changes to come. You probably remember several many times hearing from the Chief Katie Rich talking about where they wanted to move and what they wanted to do and how they could move forward. Katie Rich is in Toronto for the launching of a book called "Gathering Voices" to which she wrote the introduction. It's very nice to meet you.

Rich: Thank you very much.

Pringle: What's the situation now? I mean you were going to move to Shango Bay, there was discussion about, if it was possible, or who would pay, the federal government or the Newfoundland government or if it was really advisable to move. What has changed?

Rich: Well, in the last couple of years, the last three years there has been a slight improvement in the conditions of the Innu people, for example. We set up a (inaudible) treatment program in the country where we said all along that that's what we wanted.

Pringle: To treat the kids and to treat the people..

Rich: Exactly.

Pringle: Who are suffering, what? Who abuse alcohol and drugs.

Rich: Exactly yes, yeah. And also we were in Ottawa last week to lobby for support for relocation. Hopefully within the next three weeks a decision will be made by the capital to relocate Davis Inlet.

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Pringle: So you still want to move.

Rich: Exactly yes, yeah. We met with Minister Irwin last week and he's sticking to his commitment to relocate Davis as long as certain studies were done. All of the studies that are required by the government are all done. And whether (inaudible) will be involved with place and that sort of thing but everything that we were supposed to do, we did it. And now we're waiting for the decision.

Pringle: You write in this introduction to the book that they're launching today, "Gathering Voices", that the turning point, you thought, for your community was a fire that happened on Valentine's Day in 1992. Horrible fire in which how many children died?

Rich: Six.

Pringle: Six children died and no one could help.

Rich: We, we, I live next door to them and there was nothing we could do. There was no water to put the fire out and it was minus 40 degrees outside and the winds are very high and there was nothing we could do. We just stood there and watched helplessly as it burned to the ground. Nobody knew who was in the house. It wasn't until later that we knew that the children were in the house.

Pringle: Until the next morning when you were looking at bones.

Rich: Exactly.

Pringle: So what happened then? I mean, horrible things had happened at Davis Inlet, horrible things have continued to happen at Davis Inlet, why is that fire in your mind what galvanized you and the community?

Rich: Well, it shift the community and, well, it was a great loss for everybody in the community and we felt, you know, it was time for us to act 'cause our children doesn't have to live like that. And we pulled together and said, well, let's do, first of all we asked Minister (inaudible) to do an inquiry why all these things are happening and of course he refused. And then we said, well, let's do it together. And that's how we did to gather new voices by getting the community and it was the first time that the whole community has ever talked about why all these things are happening to them and, you know, to the children.

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- Pringle: Well, 'cause it was a year after that fire that, you know, that that video was released which was, you know, as you know incredibly effective at bringing attention to, you know, what you wanted to pay attention to except two and a half years later.
- Rich: We attempted many times to address it. For example we attempted many times, we sent faxes, wrote letters to the government and we, you know, wouldn't hear or didn't listen to us so we said, well, there must be some other thing that we can do. It just so happens the video wasn't an isolated incident. It so happens that the video camera was there, well, we'll try this and take it to the media and that's when you saw the videotape of the children.
- Pringle: Yeah. Well people were horrified. You're a really interesting case study of this though. As I read about your life, you're 35 years old, you've got 4 kids aged 10 to 2, grew up living a very sort of migratory life, traditional life in Labrador, didn't speak any English until you were 13, witnessed abuse, or part of it, you know, abused alcohol yourself until you gave it up and then you decided you'd become a leader. And this was, you know, not against opposition within your own family and the community that you've taken this on.
- Rich: Well, I think, well, I thought the decision to do something about the, really one day I was at the store and there was this couple there that I, they asked me to take their groceries home. So I took the groceries home and when I entered the house, you know, it really shook me because I saw 5,6,7 year olds huddling together around the stove. And it was really freezing in the house. There was no water, there was no wood and the scene really struck me and I said, well, this has got to change. And that's when I started becoming involved in the human politics and the community and trying to do something about the conditions and even though we still go a long ways to go, we got to push forward and (inaudible) leaders in my council, for example, they're all sober. Fifteen years ago I would have said this was hopeless. But now the leadership of the community, that's what we wanted. That's what the people recommended is that they have sober leadership and that's what we're working on.
- Pringle: But, you know, it must still feel like an enormously up hill battle. Do you get tired, you know, kids are still sniffing and still trying to commit suicide, you still have no sewage, running water.
- Rich: Well there are times when I feel like quitting and, but the more, whenever I have to travel, you know, I feel guilty about leaving the children but the

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more I think about it I say to myself well, we've got nothing to feel guilty about because we're doing this for them as well for the other children in the community. And hopefully we will do more and we still have a long way to go.

Pringle: Well, good for you, and congratulations on your work so far.

Rich: Thank you.

Pringle: And the book.

Rich: Thanks.

Pringle: "Gathering Voices". Katie Rich from Davis Inlet.