

# Circles of Light

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## Award-Winning Video Maker Draws Strength From Community

by Ruth McVeigh

**A**ward-winning video maker **Barb Cranmer** credits her community as the source of her strength, “and most importantly, my family. They have given me a strong sense of identity, of knowing who I am and where I come from.”

There’s no question that Cranmer is now giving back to her community. She’s making a big splash in the film world, winning awards, receiving grants and bringing First Nations stories to a wide audience.

Cranmer is a member of the ‘Namgis First Nation of Alert Bay, an island village just off the northern end of Vancouver Island. At 19, she moved to Vancouver, took courses in administration at Capilano College, then returned home to work in community economic development.

In 1980, a film crew from Chicago visited Alert Bay to record the opening of the U’Mista Cultural Centre. Cranmer and six other students took a quick course in making and editing videos. By the time they had completed a library of 200 oral histories from community Elders, Cranmer was totally hooked on video production. She returned to Capilano College in 1988 and enrolled in an intensive, 10-month media arts course sponsored by the Chief Dan George Foundation.



**Barb Cranmer** (centre) on location in Juneau, Alaska, directing “We Weave Our History,” with cinematographer **Rene Sioui Labelle**.

Photo credit: Teresa Marshall

“I was tired of seeing negative images of ourselves and I wanted to change that in some way,” she says.

She was a researcher, project manager and production manager for other people’s films until she felt comfortable going solo. Then, with veteran producer, **Cari Green**, Cranmer made her first film in 1993.

That same year, they formed Nimpkish Wind Productions, Inc. and produced *Laxwesa Wa: Strength of the River*, for Discovery Channel. Of this film, Cranmer

Aboriginal women across the country are founding dynamic businesses in fields as diverse as auto wrecking, business development services and training, fashion design and video production. According to the 1996 Census, 36 percent of the self-employed Aboriginal people in Canada were women. Aboriginal women entrepreneurs make vital contributions to their communities’ economies, and are inspiring role models for young people.

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Indian and Northern  
Affairs Canada

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Canada

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says: “To the Native people of Canada’s West Coast, the rivers and ocean are not just a way of life, but life itself. As the region’s original inhabitants, they have always respected the resources of their rivers and oceans, creating a society of great spirit, culture and economic wealth. But within the space of a single generation, they have watched governments manage the fishery into a state of crisis. Now it’s time for the government to listen to what Native Canadians have to say.”

This film won Best Documentary at the American Indian Film Festival in San Francisco (1995) and Special Mention in the Hot Docs Festival in Toronto (1996).

Cranmer then wrote, produced and directed *Qatuwas: People Gathering Together* — the story of the rebirth of the canoe culture on the Pacific Northwest Coast. This film, which won the first Telefilm/TV Northern Canada Award and Best Documentary at the American Indian Festival, was also invited to the 1997 Sundance Film Festival.

Nimpkish Wind Productions’ *T’Lina: The Rendering of Wealth*, about the traditional eulachon fishery, won Best Documentary at the 1997 American Indian Film Festival, as well as Best Videography, 2000 Golden Sheaf Award. **Doug Sjoquist** did the filming with Cranmer directing.

In 1999, Cranmer made a film about the opening of the new Alert Bay Big House which replaced the original centre that had been destroyed by an arsonist. *I’tusto: To Rise Again* was made with the participation of CanWest Global TV.

*We Weave Our History*, in which Cranmer documents traditional forms of Chilkat weaving among coastal First Nations, is currently in post-production.

Cranmer and Green now dream of establishing a second firm, Nimpkish Wind Interactive, Inc., to produce new media projects showcasing First Nations’ history and culture. ✨

## Sandra Bighead: From Baker to Auto Wrecker

by Michael Fisher

**S**andra Bighead says she started Adam’s Active Auto Wrecking with three basic ingredients.

First, learn everything there is to know about the business. Second, hire well-informed, congenial staff. Third, and perhaps most important, provide the best possible customer service. After 10 years in business, this recipe has proven to be a success.

“In the beginning, of course, there was a lot of uncertainty,” Bighead admits. “But I knew I could make things happen.”

Bighead has steered her business out of a rented .7 hectare (1.7-acre) wrecking yard into its permanent 3-hectare (7.8-acre) home in Saskatoon’s north industrial area. Since the move, Bighead’s sales have tripled. She has also doubled her staff, from six to 12.

Not bad for a former baker who says she didn’t know much about cars when she purchased the assets of an

existing auto wrecker. Bighead chose the “Adam’s” business name so that she would come first in the phone book.

“The market was there, and I knew I had the management skills to run a successful business,” Bighead explains. “Besides,” she jokes, “I didn’t know anything about baking and still worked my way from bread slicer to manager of a bakery.” Auto wrecking was just another challenge.

A member of the Beardy’s and Okemasis First Nation, Bighead also has an accounting certificate from the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology.

Today, Bighead’s company is one of the most reputable auto wreckers in the area, with customers province-wide and beyond. Although she can tell you almost anything you need to know about auto parts, she prefers to handle the business end of the operation from her office on the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation’s urban reserve. Her staff, whom she credits for much of her business success, take care of the day-to-day operation.



Photo credit: Michael Fisher

**Sandra Bighead can tell you almost anything you need to know about auto parts.**

“The staff are really important,” she confirms, adding that they contribute to the company’s friendly, relaxed atmosphere. The welcoming atmosphere, and employees’ automotive expertise, keep customers coming back.

In fact, business is so good that Bighead no longer needs to advertise, at least formally. Word-of-mouth endorsements have brought her more than enough business.

“If you go to the shop, the phones are always ringing,” she says. ✨

# Saskatoon Doggy Wash a Hit with Pets and Their Owners

by Jeff Campbell

When business is going to the dogs for **Patti Bird**, that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Bird is the owner of Saskatoon Doggy Wash, a unique service on the city's west side, which allows dog and cat owners to bathe and groom their pets without making a big mess at home. Through the self-serve dog wash, Bird, a member of the Montreal Lake Cree Nation and a long-time Saskatoon resident, has found an imaginative business niche. She can indulge her love of dogs and score a commercial success at the same time.

There are many unusual aspects to this small business, not least that it's one of the few around owned and run by a deaf person. Hearing people, especially those who haven't dealt with deaf business owners, are sometimes puzzled, as Bird explains through interpreter **Ed Smith**.

"Some people say, 'That person is the owner? That can't be. It's impossible.' That sometimes leads to a discussion of why can't I? The only thing I can't do is I can't hear."

"I hope this helps dispel the idea that 'deaf people can't.' Sometimes I heard that growing up and I always wanted to answer back that I could do it."

Pet owners sometimes lack the expertise or facilities for grooming their animals. That's where Bird and her assistant **Pearl Nightingale** come to the rescue. Their shop — the only one of its kind in Saskatchewan — has dog-sized bathtubs, where owners can wash their pets, and tables where pets can sit while they get a quick trim. Make no bones about it, dogs are indulged here. There are even paw prints painted on the brightly coloured walls, and cartoon dogs over the bath tubs.



Photo credit: Jeff Campbell

**Patti Bird** in front of one of her dog-sized bath tubs:  
"If I see the dog is happy, then I'm happy."

While the canine beauty shop caters primarily to dogs, it has recently opened up for cat washing. Mondays, the usual run of terriers, poodles and retrievers is taken over by cats — as mixing could have them fighting...well, like cats and dogs.

Bird, who owns a cat named Boo, has been crazy about animals since she was a little girl. The real impetus for choosing her unusual occupation came when she was considering her career options.

"I wanted something different. Something that would work well with my deafness and work with the skills that I have," she says.

"A really wonderful teacher I had said why don't I wash the dogs? I had never heard of anything like that. I checked it out in Regina and in Calgary and that was something I wanted to do."

Bird considered buying a franchise from a Calgary operation. Then she decided to strike out on her own.

"I thought it was possible, so I did the research and did the business plan and I thought, why not? So here it is."

Since her business launch in the fall of 1999, the number of dogs coming in for a spruce up has doubled.

Bird says the deaf community has been a great help to her, especially during the set-up phase of the business.

"There was a class of deaf students who helped me paint, and set up the bath booths and helped me make this cement floor," she explains. "We have a community of deaf people and we give each other advice...They're good friends." \*

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