

BOBCAT GLOSSIAN

The Middle Generation



By Mark Emerson

Bobcat Glossian appears much larger than his just under six foot frame would indicate. Perhaps it is his stocky build or the massive features of his face, but in the presence of this fundamentally shy and gentle man, it is not difficult to imagine him as the hard fighting, hard drinking youth he de-

scribes. However, one senses that this combativeness was developed in response to a necessity to survive in a hostile world rather than out of a natural inclination for predation.

For Bobcat, the youngest son of Madasa Sapiel, the world has not been an easy place.

His goal since returning to the island, stated quite simply, is to make life as an Indian easier for the generation to follow him.

He remembers his younger days on the island as lean years but years that were pervaded by a feeling of community and sharing.

"We was real close to one another, all the families. If we needed sugar or bread, we could go to somebody else's house and borrow it. We left our doors open, and if we didn't have enough, we shared. If they got

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hungry then, they went up and got a deer. They always had something to eat.

"But in our family it was different. It was tough on my mother because I wasn't taught to hunt (Bobcat's father was drowned in the river on Thanksgiving Day about a week before he was born.) I did get a few rabbits once in a while. We did go up to the pond and spear fish, pickled them and ate them. But we always looked for someone else going up trapping and depended on them.

"When we started school over at Old Town, we were so poor we'd have holes in our pants and shirts and they'd call us 'dirty Indians'. They really give us a hard time over there at Old Town because we was so poor. And that may have turned people away from going to school—felt like they wasn't wanted.

"I started the first grade with 25 and three graduated (from high school)—me and two girls. I had to stay with two or three families in order to complete high school. In the summertime I had to work for my clothes, so I worked for the carnival. I traveled around the state of Maine, worked with the midget shows and ran the kiddy rides. I had to stay

with two different families and work for the Indian agent, but I stuck it out.

"I guess I had the desire. I thought of all our people not having an education—it was really tough on all of us. A lot of people are emotional and that's got a lot to do with it. I can cope with a lot of stress.

"But I got through high school and I was drinking. I drank before I got to high school. I probably started about ten years old and I drank about 30 years. I thought drinking was tradition. Everybody drank. Every house. Next door neighbors drank. So that's why I thought it was a tradition.

"In 1950 when they put that bridge up, the island really changed (Bobcat was 14 years old). People had to lock their houses and of course there was a lot of people coming over here and they didn't enforce the laws like they used to. I got into a lot of fights with a lot of kids. I wasn't as big then as I am now. I was only 145 pounds.

"I used to be a boxer—1950—that was when we had the Golden Gloves. I was runner-up in the state of Maine. But I went down there and I was drinking. We had four or five fights a night and in between I had a couple of beers. That's probably how I lost out.

"We used to have lots of fights with the 'Downstreeters' (another section of Indian Island). We used to put cans on our hands and go down there and fight. But we all got along afterwards. We always fought like that, but if it really came down to fighting with some whites, we all stuck together.

"There's still a lot of resentment in the whites. They still call us dirty Indians. I was kind of worried with the land claim because the KKK (Ku Klux Klan) had a meeting place up in Lincoln. We bought some of that land, so they've got to move out from there. There's going to be something. I really don't trust people like that. I got my rifles and my shotguns and my 22's ready in case it does happen—and it could. I've seen a lot. I've been in cities like St. Louis and Miami where it's

everybody for themselves and it's coming to Maine. It's coming right here."

When Bobcat finished his schooling, he left the reservation to seek employment. "I went to Florida. I was going to be a state police. I said no one's got any interest in me. They're not going to help me through life so I've got to do it on my own. There were no jobs here.

"I wasn't sure of going to college, 'cause when you go to college, you've got to have clothes, too. I had a chance to go to the University of Maine, but I had to support myself. So I went down to Florida, got married and got a foreman's job down there. Construction at night. About ten years. Most of the people I worked with were drinkers, so I had a problem there.

"When I got back to the island, it was the first federal program, Operation Mainstream and boy, what a job that was. I did a lot of drinking then. Then I worked construction and I drank there, too. Then the land claim came through and I got a two year term on the council—that was two years ago.

"I started thinking, 'My life's really straightening up now.' I got in the AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) program and I went to work for the people on the island. Last time you came up here (1979), I was just a bus driver. Now I'm chairman of Indian health, I run the museum and I'm a volunteer fireman. So I've gone a long way and it's through a lot of work and a lot of people I've met that's got me where I am today.

"I went through hell and I didn't want the people to go through what I went through. They say, 'Why are you hauling all those drunks around in your brand new car? They burn your seats, they burn your interior—real expensive. Well, that's therapy, too. Maybe someday they'll be like that (helping other alcoholics). Maybe they'll be able to depend upon themselves.

"See, the biggest problem here is alcohol. The rate is 80 percent. We're working on educating the key people. It's a big task. We've come a long way in 24 years. We've got

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AA, NA (Narcotics Anonymous), Alanon (spouses of alcoholics) and we've done all this within a year.

"Right here was the beginning, last fall, this drop-in center," which is a back room of



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By Lynn Kippax, Jr.

the Human Services building. "You hear a lot of Indians, whites, too, they got nowhere to go, nothing to do. So we got the council to donate (part of) this building. It's a community effort and that's what makes it so wonderful.

"Everything we're doing here seems to be falling into place. I've seen a lot of reservations from here to Florida out to Denver, the West, the Midwest. Of all the reservations I've gone to, I think Indian Island is about the best.

"I ain't saying that just because I live here. I'm talking about the violence we used to have and how peaceful it is right now. We can talk with the people. It's a good feeling. Peo-

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ple really cooperate and those programs are really helping.

"It's all going to take time. We're asking the people and the outsiders just to give us time to prove what we can do."