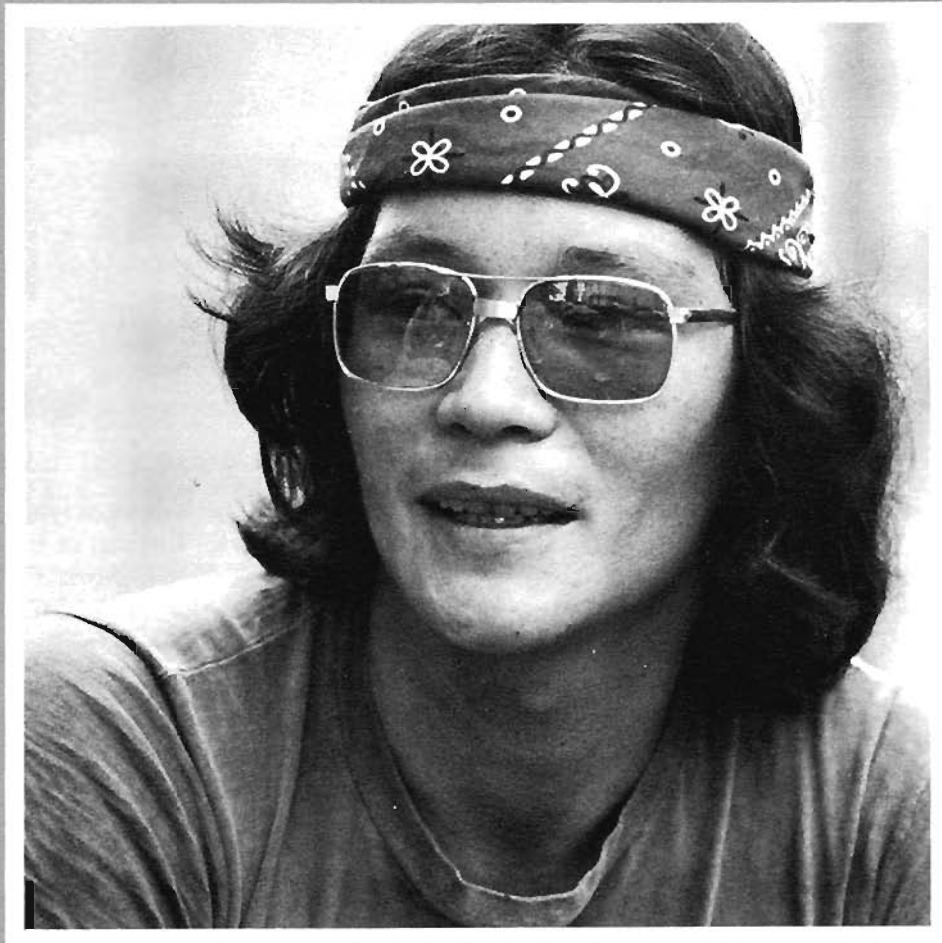


JUNIOR PEHRSON

The Younger Generation



By Mark Emerson

Junior Pehrson carries his body with the easy grace of an athlete. His long black hair and headband give him a distinctly Indian appearance, though his features and coloring are less Indian than those of his grandmother, Madasa Sapiel, or his uncle, Bobcat Glossian. Junior's father, Wally Pher-

son, was governor of the Penobscots from 1978 until shortly before he died in October, 1980.

At 22, he is a pleasant, friendly young man without pretensions. It is hard to imagine that anyone as clean and well groomed and handsome as Junior has ever been called a

"dirty, ignorant Indian" at Old Town High School, as his grandmother and uncle were before him. And indeed, it would seem that Junior (a few years younger than Carol Dana) has had to endure considerably less prejudice in the white world than the two generations before him.

His comments on the island, the culture and the land claim settlement indicate a young man who has given these subjects considerable thought without becoming entangled amidst the more perplexing questions they arouse.

Junior was able to graduate from high school with a positive attitude about his experience. "I enjoyed it. Sometimes I wish I was still in school. I had a lot of fun. People would work together and I thought it was a lot better process of learning. There was only three of us in the sixth grade (on Indian Island) before we had to go over to Old Town. Over there, it was something like 400.

"It was a big change. Adjusting was difficult for me. I got into trouble and stuff. I didn't know how to act around all them people. But after the first couple of years, I settled right down and kept to business.

"As far as prejudice is concerned, between the kids I don't think there was any, but their parents would tell them not to hang around with this guy, because he was an Indian. That's the way I felt it most.

"I could get along with most anybody over there, but their parents—some of them listened to their parents. But most of them, if they were really close friends, just overlooked it. And after I got into sports, I started going over to these people's houses and they found out that I wasn't a big bad Indian.

"Now I don't really think it would be a good idea to build a high school on the island, because there's so much you can get out of being over there—growing up with people and seeing how other people act. There's a lot of stuff you can get into over there, like sports and chess and all kinds of other ways you can grow and use your talent."

After he graduated from high school, Junior found more prejudice in the work world than he had found in high school among people his own age. He describes walking off the job when a foreman yelled at him, 'Put that in there the white way, not the Indian way, you s.o.b.' He walked off the job.

Later he tried living off Indian Island. "I lived in Skowhegan for seven months and I didn't get to know nobody, not my neighbors or nothing. I just knew the people I worked with.

"It seems like people are more friendly around here. They know me and if anything happened, they'd be right there to help me.

There's more talent comes off this island than any other place I've seen."

That's one good thing. Friends, family—my family's pretty close." So he returned to Indian Island.

"I'd like to stay right here on the island. I'm setting up proposals with the island right now. I want to set up a business."

Although Junior may ask for a small tribal loan to start his business, other results from the land claim settlement are less to his liking. "Since the land claim, this island has almost doubled in population. I can remember when I knew everybody on the island. Now I see people running around and I don't even know who in the hell they are."

The tribe's money is not being used as Junior would like it to be used. "I'd like to see it work out, but the way they're going about it—they ain't going out and using the land like the Passamaquoddys on the other reservation. They (Passamaquoddys) bought blueberry fields and they went out this year



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and made a big profit. Our money is still sitting right there. They ain't using it proper.

"They should get into wood harvesting, things like that. Another thing would be to buy land along the coast or a ski place or something, set up a resort place and have it run by Indians. We've got to get the Indian people jobs and keep them working instead of just sitting back and waiting for the per capita. I'd like to see them get rid of the per capita. People who lived without the money before could get along without it now.

"One thing that is good about the per capita is for the senior citizens. I'd like to see them get it, because they put so much into the island, and a lot of these people do need

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it. Their houses needed fixing up and they went right out and did it. That was pretty good.

"In general, the progress has been good for the island since I've been growing up. It's been giving the kids a lot more chance. I've been to other places and person for person,

there's more talent that comes off this island than any other place I've seen. It's just getting the people motivated to go out and do it."

As he talked about the new tribal land that would be bought, Junior began to describe his feeling for the Penobscot River that surrounds Indian Island. "I'd like to see from here to Howland (25 miles up river) kept natural. That's where I paddle up to on the river. I go out in the morning and catch bass, watch the otters. It's one of our best resources.

"I like the woods. I just like being out there. It starts something going inside. Then you stop and think, especially up on the rock at Sandy Beach. I go up there and sit and watch the water and think about how it would be back then.

"I think tradition is nice, if it's done in the proper way, but you've always got to expand your knowledge. You can't just sit around and say, 'I'm going up in the woods and I'm going to live there and be traditional', and then come down and get help from the state.

"I don't think that's right. I think if you want to do it, that's your own prerogative, but just do it to a certain extent. You don't have to go all out. Just keep in touch with the other world.

"In a lot of ways, I think traditional, but if a better way comes out in my head, I'll do it the other way."