

A MESSAGE FROM NWAC'S CEO

LYNNE GROULX LL.L., J.D. | CEO

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA



WELCOME TO THE NINTH EDITION OF KCI-NIWESQ, THE MAGAZINE OF THE NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA (NWAC).

In this issue we explore the difficult problem of sex discrimination in the Indian Act.

I am Métis, not First Nations. So the issue of status is one that has affected my community in a different way. And it has devastated the lives of so many of NWAC's members. It has ripped apart families and communities.

It has pitted leaders of First Nations, who must distribute the scarce resources of land, housing, medical services and others among their members, against women and their children who just want to belong to the places that their ancestors called home.

For so many decades, the federal government used sexist policies written into the Indian Act as a way of eliminating people from their lists of status Indians. First Nations women who married non-Indigenous men lost their status, while First Nations men who married non-status women did not.

This helped keep down the numbers of people who could claim status, and the meager resources and services that came with it.

It was also part of the genocide that has been perpetrated against Indigenous Peoples in this country since the early days of European contact. Like the residential schools, the sexist policies of the Indian Act have forced First Nations women to abandon their Indigenous heritage and to become part of settler society.

Now the question is, what to do about those policies.

Government after government has attempted to right the wrongs—generally on the heels of a court

decision demanding that a human rights violation in the Indian Act be eliminated.

The most recent attempt to eliminate the discrimination occurred in 2017 when the current federal government declared the job had finally been done through the passage of Bill S-3. But there is more left to do.

An NWAC examination points out that there are still discriminatory passages of the Indian Act to be dealt with. You will read about that in this issue of Kci-Niwesq in an interview with Adam Bond, our manager of legal services.

You will also read the stories of four families who have been profoundly affected by the discrimination.

Karl Hele had to go to court to ensure he could pass along status to his daughter. Deanna Laity's great grandmother lost her status and, as a result, her grandmother was ashamed of her Indigenous roots. Katherine Legrange is trying to reclaim the First Nations heritage that has been denied to her.

And Yvonne Bedard, who died just before Christmas, is a hero in this cause.

So thank you once again for opening the pages that follow. Thank you for reading the ninth edition of Kci-Niwesq. Please drop us a line and let us know what you think at reception@nwac.ca.

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