
Featuring
Margaret Ireland & Misty Ireland

MATRIARCHAL MESSAGES V.2



WATER CARRIERS PROJECT

Written by Hannah Patrie

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA



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For this edition of Matriarchal Messages, I had the opportunity speak with **Misty and Margaret Ireland (Dehcho Dene)** – an inspiring mother-daughter duo from Ttsets'éhk'edéłi [Jean Marie River First Nation](#), located in the Northwest Territories. Like many northern communities, their landscapes and waterways have been drastically affected by climate change; and in addition to such turmoil, their community has had to endure conditions of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and many other disparities of today's colonial tainted world. Yet, despite such hardships, the community has persisted in the face of challenge.

The Ttsets'éhk'edéłi nation is an incredible example of a community who took initiative on climate change in a self-determined way. Margaret Ireland helped develop an Elders Council, and through it, they have been independently studying climate change since 2005. They established respectful and trusting relationships with scientists who helped conduct climate research, which equally employed Traditional Knowledge to understand the conditions of their environment. And through such work, they have been able to achieve resolutions that ensure the long-term wellbeing of all life forms.



Misty Ireland



Margaret Ireland

They remind us that as Indigenous women, we have the innate means to be water carriers, matriarchs, and revolutionaries. We hold so much ancestral resilience, value, and sacred connections to Mother Earth. If we all recognized these incredible qualities which we embody – there is no mountain we cannot climb; there is no challenge we cannot overcome; and there is no era which we cannot prevail.

Margaret and Misty shared an abundance of knowledge and stories with me, and I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from such Indigenous Matriarchs. While this edition is only a small fraction of the wisdom they offered, this piece is a collection of messages for young Indigenous women who are both experiencing water crises and are working to overcome them.

- ▶ Dehcho
[*Tłtsets'èhk'edéłi First Nation*](#)
[*Jean Marie River*](#)



Warm Waters

“I was about 14 years old, when my late father would say that there were changes happening in the land around us. At that time, he would say, *the change was so subtle it's hard to know what is happening. But if you're very observant of the environment, you can see it.* That was some 60 years ago.” – Margaret

“I once was explaining to my late mother, that the water in the Mackenzie River is warming up considerably, and how when fish were caught, they had soars on them. I told her to visualize the Mackenzie River like a bowl, and that the water in that bowl is warming up but the fish themselves are not aware... it is as if they are slowly being boiled alive.” – Margaret

“Now, the climate is changing very fast. It's making access difficult. It's changing the behavior of animals and aquatic life. The landmarks you could once rely on are changing. There are lakes where there never were lakes before, and other lakes that are now gone. Everything is changing.”

– Misty





“In response, our community started to study permafrost, and from that we noticed that along with the warming water and the changing of our land, the fish and animals were behaving differently. We learned that some of the spring thaw and permafrost thaw was flowing into the waterways, and what was contained in those frozen pieces of water were different layers of carbons, mercuries, and all these different things which accumulated in the environment from a long time ago, and were now being re-released into the environment... When the elders were sitting around reviewing the science, they realized that we were not traditionally fishing in our lakes the way we used to, and that was a contributing factor to the mercury levels bio accumulating up the fish hierarchy.” - Misty

▶ Aerial photo of the Mackenzie river delta and the Beaufort Sea

“We started those climate studies in 2005 and have continued on. While we were able to address a good portion of those environmental impacts, the climate is still changing...There used to be a time when you could dip a cup into our rivers or creeks and have a good deep drink. You can no longer do that. We live on the banks of the Mackenzie River with the Jean Marie River running into it. We're surrounded by water, yet we cannot drink from it...

I have since lost all of them [original members of the Elders Council who studied climate change], but I continue to go on and work. It's difficult to work with my community now, because I'm living in a different area, but I still make a lot of trips over there and try to keep their interest in what is going on environmentally. My saying is, **I'm good until to the last drop.**” – Margaret

“There used to be a time when you could dip a cup into our rivers or creeks and have a good deep drink. You can no longer do that.”

– Misty



The Bridge In-Between

“There were several things that had happened to the native people. A major one, was residential schools. They tried so hard to take the Indian out of us, and unfortunately, majority of us lost our language, culture, and most importantly – lost how to parent traditional Indigenous ways. As a result, many of us did not pass along Traditional Knowledge to our children, grandchildren, and so on.” – Margaret

“I often tell my peers that we're kind of the lost generation because we weren't taught traditional knowledge. Some of us have our language, and others don't. I'm doing the best I can to carry that torch or the basket of water forward to help share stories to young people; and I know that there are women in my generation across Canada that are doing the same in their communities. – Misty



“We are bridging the knowledge between our aging elders and the younger generations. By learning everything again from everyone around us, we carry the knowledge forward for those young ladies that are getting ready to take up matriarchal roles.”

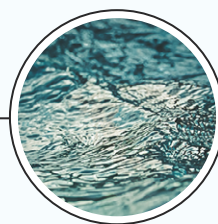
– Misty



“I remember when I was a girl in the eighties watching CBC or CTV and being so disappointed that there was no Indigenous culture present in the media. But now, you see culture and Indigenous pride everywhere. It is amazing to see these young matriarchs stepping forward and sharing teachings, encouraging connections between themselves, and uplifting one another.

I’m seeing a resurgence of young women who are reactivating their matriarchal ways – they’re stepping up with strength, courage, and pride. I applaud that wholeheartedly.”

– Misty



Ancestral Salvation

“If you can gather and spend time in your community to reflect on the old stories, you will recognize that the teachings your elders had left for you are like seeds, they hold everything you need for your area when certain times and certain hardships are happening...” That’s one piece of advice I would share to younger women – pay attention to the stories. If somebody shares a story or a lived experience with you – listen to it, because at some point, maybe 15 or 20 years later...that story will come back to help you because the seed was planted.” – Misty

“I think it has come to a time where we need to truly think about how our ancestors had been and relearn what had worked for them so we can make it work for us... One of the things I notice about people in general is that we seem to have forgotten our Creator... As life continues on, we will have a lot of challenges, but if you turn back to your Creator and work with him, you should be able to overcome any challenge. Pass on the teachings which come from long, long ago. They have been passed on generation after generation and are important for our people to survive...”

“Pray for water. Pray for the land. Pray for all living things that we continue to exist. Take care of the land. Take care of the water. Only take what you need from the earth – the animals, plants, and trees.’ This is how we were taught.”

– Margaret





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