

An Interview With Free-Lance Broadcaster Kim Kopola

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L'interview qui suit donne un aperçu d'un des plus anciens programmes télévisés du Canada sur les affaires amérindiennes. Son titre, "Between Two Worlds," insiste sur un point particulier du mode de vie des amérindiens dans le contexte canadien: d'une part, leur culture traditionnelle et, de l'autre, l'adaptation à la société possédant une technologie avancée. C'est là un avantage appréciable. A mesure que l'interview se déroule, on constate que les stéréotypes s'estompent et que les amérindiens du Canada représentent un groupe à la fois diversifié, éloquent et dynamique, engagé activement dans toutes les formes de l'activité du pays.

The following interview describes one of the oldest native affairs television programs in Canada. The program's title, "Between Two Worlds," conveys the viewpoint that native life in Canada presently combines aspects of traditional cultures and a larger, technologically-advanced society. This is portrayed as advantageous. As the interview proceeds, it breaks down stereotypes and demonstrates that native Canadians are a diversified, articulate, and dynamic group of people who are actively participating in all areas of Canadian life.

"Between Two Worlds" is a weekly, half-hour television program of personal interviews and other material devoted to native Canadians. It is produced by station CFRN in Edmonton, Alberta, an affiliate of Canadian Television (CTV), as part of CFRN's commitment to public service programming. This television show can be seen at 8:30 a.m. on Sundays in both Edmonton and northern portions of Alberta. Since it has been on the air for over five years, "Between Two Worlds" is now one of the oldest native affairs programs on Canadian television. If the show's budget, as described by its host, Kim Kopola, seems limited, it should be remembered that CFRN is not specifically required to make commitments to native people in Alberta. Other activities, such as filming commercials, are much more profitable than public service programming.

Kim Kopola, the host and producer of "Between Two Worlds," is one of the few Métis free-lance broadcasters in Canada. Now in her late 20s, Kopola is also a part-time history student and Program Coordinator of the Native Educational Service at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. Although she was experienced in radio and print journalism and had previously worked for native organizations in Edmonton, Kopola had no experience in television production when she began hosting "Between Two Worlds" in 1982. Both the basic format of the program and its title were established by her predecessor. Kopola's own contribution was to make the program more contemporary. She believes that her guests tend to be younger than those chosen by the previous host, and that as the title of the pro-

gram suggests, her guests are more likely to be successful in both native and non-native environments. Symbolic of the changes that Kopola has introduced are alterations in the set used as a backdrop for interviews. The original set was designed to suggest that the interviews were being conducted in the kitchen of a log cabin. Kopola substituted a backdrop of pictures blending images of the city and countryside.

The following interview was conducted by Carl Urion in June 1984. Urion, who is a Métis from Montana, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Foundations and Director of the Office of Native Affairs at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.

Kim Kopola: When I first began working on the program, "Between Two Worlds," it was a half-hour interview with usually only one guest. Someone pointed the camera at me, pointed their finger at me, and I started the interview. In twenty-eight minutes, I closed the interview. Now that I'm more familiar and more comfortable with cameras and the whole procedure of a television show, I've tried to alter the format a bit.

In the beginning when I first started, I found interviewing difficult. It was easy for someone to stump me or put me on the spot. I'd be all tongue-tied and embarrassed because the show is supposed to be live, or at least to imitate a live show. We can't say, "Cut! Take that out. She looks embarrassed. Start over again." We have to keep going.

For the first year and a half that I did the program, I was really nervous about it. Since I wasn't happy with the quality of the program or with my own abilities as an interviewer, I didn't flaunt the fact that I did the program. I was very closed-lipped about the whole thing.

But every once in a while someone would come up to me and say, "Aren't you the girl who does that television show?" A lot of older people at the Friendship Centre would come up to me and say, "I feel like I know you—I get up with you every Sunday morning." It's very flattering. Mostly older people do that.

Now that I'm more familiar and more comfortable with cameras and the whole procedure of a television show, I've tried to alter the format a bit. Each show now usually has two interviews, which means that I spend approximately ten to fifteen minutes with each guest. Now that I'm more comfortable with interviewing, I feel I can extract the best out of a person within ten to fifteen minutes, depending on the subject.

The program must be done in the studio, and it's all pretaped. Because each show is presented twice in one season, there are limitations on the subjects I can deal with. These shows must not be too time-oriented, or they will quickly become dated. If we interview a native politician, or for that matter any politician, we must be careful that we don't televise the program too close to an election. Also, by the time a show is rebroadcast, that person may no longer be a politician. These are the kinds of things that limit the subjects I can deal with.

Not too long ago, a mother said to me, "I saw your program by accident one Sunday morning when the cartoons were over. My kids were flicking the televi-

sion dial around when I saw you, and I said, 'Stop. Turn back to that station.' The kids turned to me and said, 'Oh Mom, all they do is talk, talk, talk!'"

After that, I thought to myself that I'd better change the format of the program so it's not all just "talk, talk, talk." I've tried to create variety. There have been contemporary country singers on the show and the Cree senior citizens' choir from St. Albert for a Christmas special. The senior citizens were very popular because a lot of people who watch the show when it is aired at 8:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings are, of course, older people.

Carl Urion: The thing I find remarkable is that most of the people who have commented to me about the show are non-natives.

Kim Kopola: I've been surprised by that too. My audience is quite varied and isn't all native. The non-native audience includes professional people. We usually find out about different parts of the audience after doing a show that attracts people with special interests in a particular area. Teachers and people whose work is somehow related to native people are interested in the show.

I did one program on the provincial museum where Trudie Nicks, a curator at the museum, came in and talked about birchbark baskets. She talked about where to gather the materials and all the intricacies of making a basket. We showed the entire process of gathering the materials, drying them, and getting them ready. Everything was shown step by step. Teachers wrote and said, "Can I get a videotape? My students don't realize how much work goes into something like this, and I want to show them."

Carl Urion: That pattern fits my impression of how non-natives generally learn to appreciate native things and native issues. Native issues are usually very complex, but other people's exposure to these issues is almost always in simple terms through political pronouncements from government and native politicians. There isn't much opportunity for non-natives to hear native people who are specialists in an area, or even just ordinary native people, talk about something that's important to them.

Kim Kopola: One program which stirred up a lot of comment was about Section 12.1b of the Indian Act, the membership question. People came up to me and said that they had seen the show and wanted to talk about it, and I also received mail. I tried to show both sides of the coin. Every non-native I talked to about the membership issue said, "Well, I can't understand how anyone could deny native women their rights. I mean, those native men are so chauvinistic. They don't have to worry about membership, but if it was happening to them, then they *would* worry about it." Native people have difficulty deciding the issue because there are two sides. That's why we have a problem. If the membership question was cut and dried, it wouldn't be an issue.

Carl Urion: That's a good example of the complexity of native issues. When somebody sees only a four paragraph notice in a newspaper with pronouncements by the Minister of Indian Affairs, a couple of Indian chiefs, and a couple of leading women, that doesn't explain the complexity of an issue like the membership issue.

Kim Kopola: The greatest applause I got was from people who said, "I didn't

know there were two sides to the membership question. Now, at least I know there are." That was rewarding because it showed we gave enough air time to both sides. That, I hope, is what the show's all about. It isn't just waving banners and saying "Indians are great people."

I use the name "Between Two Worlds" to state that we are in between the advanced, technological world and the semi-advanced world; that we are in between being highly-educated and being undereducated. We fall in between two cultures, the non-native and the native. We're somewhere in that "never never land" between everything. I don't think this is a disadvantage. Instead, I like to show how it is an advantage; how being in the middle gives us the opportunity to go both places and know the best of both sides. My program stresses this point because there are a lot of non-native viewers.

I try to explain things that don't appear to need explanation to native people. But that's not fair to say either, because even native people are not clear about all of the issues. They've made that abundantly clear to me. It's embarrassing to say that you don't know what a treaty is when you're a treaty Indian, but a lot of people don't. But then, how many Canadians really know what a constitution is? **Carl Urion:** Sure. Why should it be incumbent on anybody to know all the laws that affect them? It isn't possible to be completely aware of all the issues that our political leaders set up for us.

Kim Kopola: I find political leaders difficult to interview. It's not my place to criticize them too much, and I don't like to give them a half-hour format for campaigning. I prefer to show viewers that native politicians are human beings with strengths and weaknesses. Viewers are given an opportunity to see why native politicians might feel and act the way they do. I like programs where you get to know the person behind the politician, and I hope I've done this when I've interviewed politicians.

Carl Urion: Can you tell me what you mean by "politicians?" Does that mean presidents of associations?

Kim Kopola: Yes, it does.

Carl Urion: Provincial associations, I would think. Do you ever interview national politicians?

Kim Kopola: I've interviewed Harold Cardinal on the program. And of course Sam Sinclair, and Elmer Goskeeper when he was President of the Métis Association of Alberta. I've also interviewed Milt Pahl, the Alberta Minister responsible for Native Affairs. There have been a variety of politicians—not just native politicians, but non-native politicians as well.

Carl Urion: Can you give me an example of some of the other issues you've covered besides those already mentioned? You've discussed the constitutional issue, and I know you've discussed educational issues.

Kim Kopola: Yes, I've tried to concentrate on education because it's of interest to me as a university student. I think education is of value, and I try to look at it in different perspectives. There was one program about the Native Affairs Office at the University of Alberta, one program on native university students, and one on the Sacred Circle, which is a native program in the Edmonton public schools.

I try to do things that are fun, too, and not just heavy-duty, serious stuff all the time. One program that I thought was just delightful was an interview with Gilbert Anderson about Métis fiddling. I loved that program, and the reason that I personally loved it is because Gilbert and I are such good friends. I've seen Gilbert interviewed before where he's been stiff as cardboard, but because we know each other and have done so many things together to promote native music, he was very comfortable, very animated, and so completely at ease that it became, I thought, a really good show.

There have been other shows with budding native artists in the areas of fine arts and music. I've interviewed Kathy Sewells, who is a young Métis singer. My intention is to show that there are native people doing a multitude of things and pursuing dreams and career ambitions while doing the necessary work. These people are not just saying that they want to be something without being willing to put in the technical and academic work that's necessary to achieve their goals. I've been fortunate to have people on my program who are so dynamic and so delightful that viewers come to like them as they see them on the show. People have said this in letters, and in comments on the street.

Carl Urion: How does your show complement other native media such as the native newspapers?

Kim Kopola: Because I'm a freelancer who works independently, that makes a big difference in my program. But I think, too, that live interviews mean that I can't really manipulate the program. To a certain extent I can manipulate the kinds of questions that I ask, but I can't manipulate much beyond that. If somebody says something that I don't like, I can't snip it out of the program and refuse to deal with it. It's happened, you know, that things were said on the program that I didn't like.

Carl Urion: There are 14,000 native people in Edmonton. Would you say that you are documenting our diversity and our times?

Kim Kopola: I think so, but not because I did this intentionally. It's damned difficult, let me tell you, to come up with fifty new ideas a year. There are thirteen programs in a series, so two series make a total of twenty-six programs. Since we try to have two guests on every program, that means over fifty people or fifty interests. A lot of little things get covered, but a lot of topics get left out because I can't deal with them in the depth that I'd like.

Whatever I do must be really clear and can't suffer from the effects of time differences. A program broadcast this week must be just as fresh six months from now as if it happened this week. Really timely topics are left to current media such as newspapers which can come out every day.

I like to think that if you took the best of my programs, you'd have an idea of the diversity of native people in and around Edmonton, and that you'd see a caliber of people that you wouldn't expect to see. I'm always amazed at how articulate people are, the multitudes of areas they're involved in, their educational levels, and their professionalism. This is really quite surprising, even to me, and even though I've worked with native organizations for a long time.

Carl Urion: You wouldn't think we'd be surprised, would you?

Kim Kopola: No. And that, I think, is what is so surprising.

Carl Urion: Yes. And really gratifying.

Kim Kopola: Yes. When I first came to Alberta and started working with native organizations, I worked for one that was related to unemployment. I don't know how many times non-native people said, "My goodness, you're such an inspiration. You're so bright. You're so articulate. Such a young native girl!" As if they expected me to speak poorly and look funny.

It's gratifying to know that there are so many people about whom I can say, "You are an excellent example of a native academic, or a well-qualified native person." This reconfirms my belief that native people are moving into all kinds of areas. If someone gave me the challenge of finding native people in twenty areas where they least expected to find them, I could probably meet that challenge and find those native people.

Carl Urion: That's an indirect answer to my question about how your show complements other kinds of media. Except for obviously human interest stories, pictures of children, and so on, newspapers are crisis-oriented, problem-oriented, and policy-issue-oriented. You show people a considerably more positive point of view in a format that allows a personal viewpoint. That's a very important distinction between other native media and your program. You allow people to see us, to hear us, and to get to know that we're human beings.

Kim Kopola: I had no idea that the program would get as much attention as it has. You have to remember that it is broadcast at 8:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings. Though I make apologies for that, I don't really need to apologize because I have an audience. I know I have an audience because people come up and talk to me, and I get letters from viewers, so they're there. People seem pleased with the program, and so far no one has thrown any bricks. We have no trouble getting guests for the show. People are quite delighted to be on it.

Carl Urion: Because we know about it.

Kim Kopola: Yes. Guests also know I'm not going to bite their head off, put them in a corner, or ask embarrassing questions. If they've watched the show before, they know they'll be treated with dignity. But this is also a program for native people, and guests are really happy about that because there are so few programs for us.

Carl Urion: How does your program compare in general terms with the other network's native-oriented program?

Kim Kopola: There is a difference. The only other program in Alberta that I'm familiar with is the ITV (Independent Television Network) program, "Our Native Heritage." In the two years that I've hosted my program, the ITV program has gone through transitions. It started with Tantoo Martin, who was familiar to people because she's an actress. People were familiar with her face. There have also been other hosts for that program. The difference is that ITV spends a little more time in production and can shoot on location. For example, when they do a program on Louis Riel, they film riverboats and capture the right atmosphere because they're willing to do more production work outside the studio.

But I'll tell you what I think the real difference is—and maybe Tantoo and

the other hosts will pin my ears back if they hear me say this—but I think that as a “host-producer,” I have more control over my program. I don’t have to live up to anybody’s ideology of what “Indian-ness” or “native-ness” is all about, and I have flexibility. It’s me deciding those things, and if what I portray isn’t “Indian,” then that’s my fault. It’s not the fault of some non-native producer who suggested what he thought would be a good subject, or what would be a good way of asking a question, or saying “we’ll edit this,” or “we’ll edit that.” Other programs may do a lot of editing.

Personally speaking, I sometimes find it easier to watch “Our Native Heritage” because it’s more glamorous. I like to see the green grass, the blue sky, and all the things that we can’t have in a studio. I like to listen to guests being interviewed without any “uns,” “ers,” and “ahs.” My program has got it all, you know; it’s got both the good and the bad.

Carl Urion: Well, it’s conversational.

Kim Kopola: Yes, with the little talking heads (shots of people talking without other visual effects).

Carl Urion: Can you use still photographs?

Kim Kopola: Yes, I can. I create a lot of versatility in the program by using slides, stills, and anything else that is visually attractive. I’ve used creativity by going down to the museum and begging to borrow things that you and I never get to see because they’re locked away in back rooms. I’ve also spent time at the archives getting old photographs of what native settlements and reserves used to look like. Dancers have come on my show dressed in their outfits.

Carl Urion: Who pays for your program? Is it a public service?

Kim Kopola: Yes, it is. It’s considered part of the requirements for the station’s license from the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission. CFRN is providing community television programming in a minority area. My show has practically no budget, and I’m paid an honorarium through the station. That’s the only money devoted to the show; all the other expenses are absorbed. They just use the news staff to come in and film the actual show. There is no production money available for my show.

Carl Urion: You’re doing a lot with very little.

Kim Kopola: Yes.

Carl Urion: Is there anything else you would like to say about “Between Two Worlds”?

Kim Kopola: Just that we have very limited resources and I had little training in broadcasting when I began, as did the person who hosted the show before me. We had so little knowledge that we didn’t know what we could demand from the station. Since we didn’t know what was reasonable and feasible to ask for, the show has been a real learning experience. We try hard to do the best that we can with our limited resources. I don’t think we’re doing such a bad job. People who watch the program are gaining a little knowledge, and are coming to realize that native people are not just moosehide and feathers.