

Patrick's Story



Patrick Bird was "a casualty of colonialism," having walked a dark boy-hood journey of sexual abuse, neglect, foster homes, detention centres, loss, abandonment, drugs, alcohol and self-mutilation. Through no fault of his own,

Patrick was disconnected from his family, his childhood and his Cree culture and left with few resources to cope with the pain and powerlessness.

Patrick's Story explores what brought a young man to attempt suicide and what turned his life around. With the help of friends and his loving adoptive mother, Patrick begins the search for his identity and spirituality as a Cree man, while discovering his talents in music and acting.

This story offers us all a message of inspiration and hope.

Director: Doug Cuthand

Producers: Lori Kuffner, Jennifer Torrance

A co-production of Cooper Rock Pictures and the NFB.

24 minutes

Order number: C9199 286



Closed captioned. A decoder is required.

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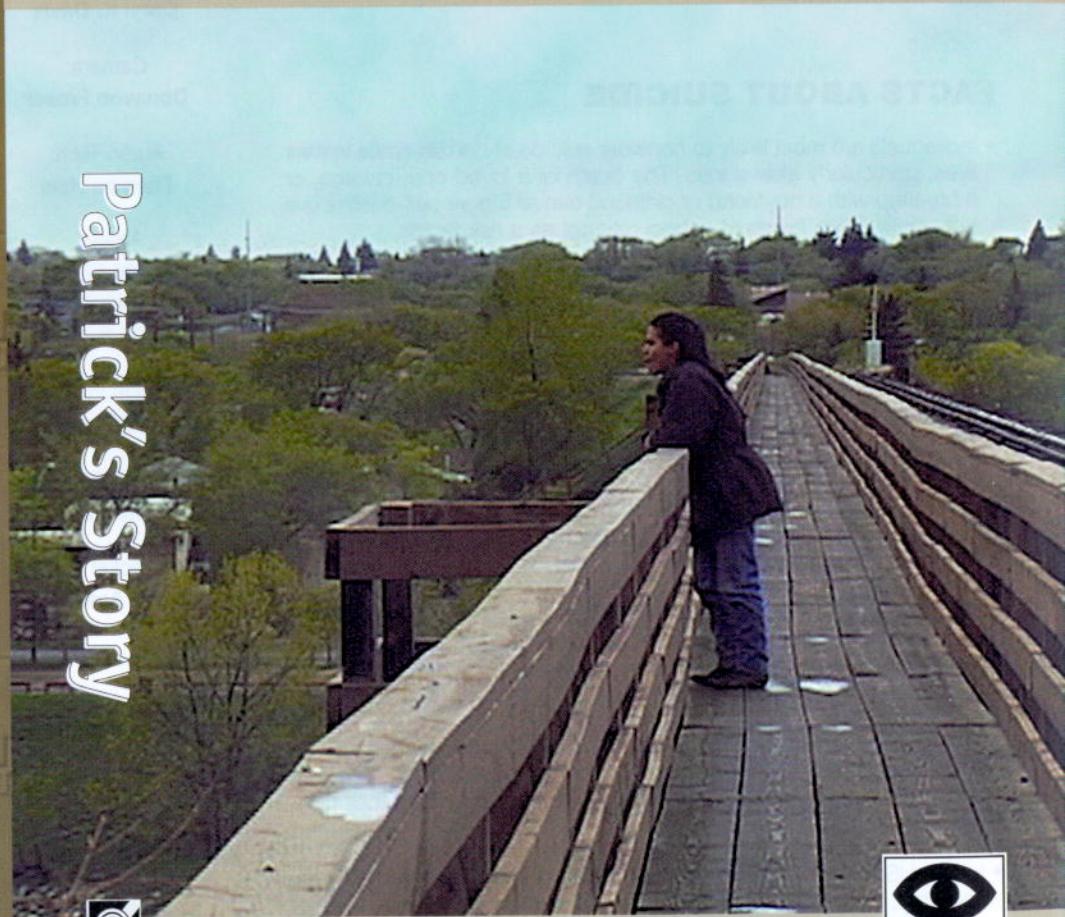
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Patrick's Story



VHS

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A National Film Board of Canada Release

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This video underscores the major contributors to suicide, as well as some factors that engender hope. Suicide is a relevant and significant topic since this tragedy affects every economic, cultural and social group. For many young Aboriginal people, suicide has reached crisis proportions.

The video can be used with high school, college and university students; with parents and teachers; and organizations working with youth and their families.

FACTS ABOUT SUICIDE

- Individuals are most likely to consider suicide at certain times in their lives, particularly after a loss. The death of a loved one, divorce, or a breakup with a boyfriend or girlfriend can all trigger self-destructive behaviour. Even failure at school can act as a risk factor.
- There were more deaths from suicide (3,803) than from motor vehicle accidents (3,419) reported in Canada in 1993.¹
- In the US, suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people aged 15-24. More than 13 of every 100,000 people aged 15 to 24 committed suicide in 1990. Experts estimate that each year nearly 5,000 teenagers commit suicide. (American Psychiatric Association)
- Suicide is the leading cause of death for Canadian males between the ages of 20 and 39 and one of the three leading causes of death for males between 10 and 49.¹
- The prevalence of suicidal behaviours among teenagers is of serious concern. According to a 1988 Ontario study, 5-10% of boys and 10-20% of girls aged 12-16 had thought about or attempted suicide within the previous six months.²
- The suicide rate in all age groups is 2 to 3 times higher among Aboriginal Canadians than among non-Aboriginal people. The rate is 5 to 6 times higher among Aboriginal youth than among their non-Aboriginal peers.¹
- In the US in 1997, white males accounted for 72% of all suicides. Together, white males and white females accounted for over 90% of all suicides. However, during the period 1979-1992, suicide rates for Native Americans (a category that includes American Indians and Alaska Natives) were about 1.5 times the national rate. There was a disproportionate number of suicides among young male Native

Director:
Doug Cuthand

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(Cooper Rock Pictures)
Lori Kuffner

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Naugon Associates

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Americans during this period, as males 15-24 accounted for 64% of all suicides by Native Americans. (Center for Disease Control)

- Common warning signs include changes in personality or habits, depression, hopelessness, helplessness, inability to enjoy life, substance abuse and statements about ending life.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- The video may elicit strong feelings, so pre-screening preparation is as important as post-screening discussion.
- Don't make assumptions. Suicide and suicidal thoughts are all too common, especially among young men and women between the ages of 12 and 24.
- Consider team teaching this topic with an experienced resource person, e.g., someone from the local police, crisis centre, family or women's shelter, mental health association, board of education, crisis team or a spiritual counsellor.
- Identify community resources that can be of assistance. Circulate brochures with phone numbers for the local crisis line in the region; facts including suicide indicators etc.
- In discussing the video, first establish some ground rules:
 - Caution the group that they may experience disturbing feelings and thoughts. This is normal.
 - Emphasize confidentiality. If someone is afraid that others in the group will talk about them, they may not want to share.
 - Respect each other's feelings, experiences and viewpoints. Do not offer quick solutions. Be mindful of your own feelings.
 - Information and support should be readily available to connect a person in distress with safe and helpful resources. Disclosures concerning suicide may require immediate intervention.
 - Give learners permission to leave the room with someone designated to assist or talk privately after the session.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Before viewing

- Have the group list some ways to help somebody experiencing suicidal thoughts and behaviour.

After viewing

- Discuss viewers' feelings, thoughts and images.
- "Suicide is not chosen; it happens when pain exceeds resources for coping with pain." Explore this idea by discussing what happened in Patrick's life that contributed to his attempted suicide.
- Discuss the resources and factors that helped Patrick move away from suicide and forward on his healing journey.
- The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Affairs (1996) dedicated a special report to the issue of suicide among Aboriginal people, entitled *Choosing Life*. Here is an excerpt:

"Commissioners concluded that high rates of suicide and self-injury among Aboriginal people are the result of a complex mix of social, cultural, economic and psychological dislocations that flow from the past into the present. The root causes of these dislocations lie in the history of colonial relations between Aboriginal peoples and the authorities and settlers who went on to establish 'Canada', and in the distortion of Aboriginal lives that resulted from that history.

"We believe that suicide is a special issue. It is first and foremost a matter of life and death for that minority of Aboriginal people whose inner despair threatens daily to overwhelm them. But, like other forms of violence and self-destructive behaviour in Aboriginal communities, it is also the expression of a kind of collective anguish — part grief, part anger — tearing at the minds and hearts of many people. This anguish is the cumulative effect of 300 years of colonial history: lands occupied, resources seized, beliefs and cultures ridiculed, children taken away, power concentrated in distant capitals, hopes for honourable co-existence dashed over and over again."

- Discuss colonialism as a source of stress and anguish in many Aboriginal peoples' lives today.

RESOURCES

- Kids Help Phone. Tel: 1 800 668-6868 or online at kidshelp.sympatico.ca.
- "Your Life! Our future! Suicide Prevention Resource Kit": For this free kit, write to Health Programs Support Division, Medical Services Branch, 20th Floor, Jeanne Mance Building, Postal Locator 1920A, Tunney's Pasture, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0L3. Fax: 613 954-8107. Order online at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/msb/fnihp/order_e.htm.
- The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: *Choosing Life* (1995). Visit www.inac.gc.ca/rap.
- Suicide Information and Education Centre (SIEC) Alberta is the largest English-language suicide information resource centre and library in the world. Visit www.siec.ca.
- The video *Balance Healing Through Helping/Équilibre guérir en aidant* can be obtained free from Publications, Health Canada. Tel: 613 954-5995, fax: 613 941-5366.
- American Association of Suicidology. Tel: 202 237-2280. Visit www.suicidology.org.

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Also, visit the NFB website at www.nfb.ca.

REFERENCES

1. *Suicide in Canada: Update of the Report of the Task Force on Suicide in Canada*, Mental Health Services Division, Health Canada, 1994.
2. Joffe, R.T., D.R. Offord and M.H. Boyle, "Suicidal Behavior in Youth Ages 12-16," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 145 (11), pp. 1420-1423.