



Documenting pain: Six-year-old Kyler (left) and five-year-old Tyler have six siblings; their father, mother and stepfather have all committed suicide

Your movie's finally here, Tyler

A non-native filmmaker describes what it was like making a documentary on a native reserve

OCTOBER 2007: I'm on a 12-seater plane headed for Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation in Ontario, 600 km north of Thunder Bay, Ont. Below, boreal forests and lakes. On my lap, a box of Timbits I'm increasingly nervous about. When I called the band office, Sandra told me there were no "customary" gifts like tobacco, as in the south. I insisted: I had to bring *something*. She said, "Well, the chief likes donuts." I'm sure they're hard to get up here. When the plane stopped in a community en route, the "washroom" was an outhouse at the end of the tarmac. But Timbits—was she pulling my leg?

I don't want to make a faux pas. I'm a non-native hoping to film a documentary here, so I've done my research, visited many other First Nations communities. Still, I'm unprepared for K.I. When we land, it doesn't feel like we're in Canada anymore. I try to keep my expression neutral as a youth worker drives me around, but I'm shocked. This is one of the more prosperous fly-in communities, but it looks like a ghost town: plywood nailed over windows, peeling paint—yet apparently inhabitants feel lucky. At least they have houses. Two hundred people—in a community of less than 1,200—are on the wait list. Only two to four homes are built every year; with no roads, it's insanely expensive to transport building materials.

When I interview Chief Donny Morris—the Timbits were well-received—he explains that only a certain percentage of funding from the federal government can be spent

on housing. His own place is spartan. No bedroom door, just a blanket.

There's no evidence of the wild overspending you hear about, except on groceries. Early on, I come up with the bright idea of making dinner for two boys I'm filming. But at the northern store, I quickly realize I don't have enough cash. Milk is \$16, a box of diapers, \$43. Forget fresh veggies—I go for canned, and grab some pork and cheap cookies: \$36. No wonder the chief was out hunting when I first tried to meet him.

November 2007: Five-year-old Tyler is fascinated by my cameras, so I let him take as many photos as he wants. We're outside, setting up, and his brother Kyler, 6, is pulling my tripod around on his sled. They are laughing, wild dogs race past, the air is bracing. A surge of happiness—then, immediately, guilt. Happiness feels wrong. The boys have six other siblings; their father, mother, and stepfather have all committed suicide. Who is going to care for them? How can they stay together? It's a big worry in K.I., and a focus of my film. Earlier, the boys acted out how their father hanged himself. He'd locked them in the house with him. The tape feels like it's burning a hole in my coat pocket.

March 2008: My daughter, Camille-Sophie, 7, is with me this trip. She's having so much fun with the dogs and the boys that she

doesn't seem to notice the contrast between K.I. and home. Until, at the end of our stay, the leaders of the community, including the chief, are led away to prison for peacefully protesting a mining company's exploration around their ancestral lake. Two months later, the courts will set them free, but for now it registers in the community, and with Sophie, only as an injustice no one can do anything about. We say goodbye to the leaders, now in shackles. In 12 years of filmmaking, it's the only time I'm shooting through tears. Back at school, her friends talk about their trips to Disney World. Sophie tells the class, "Well, I went to prison with my mom for March break!"

October 2008: I used to believe that being respectful of Aboriginal issues meant remaining silent—I'm not native, what right do I have? But politically correct silence permits a kind of blindness to what's happening

Earlier, the boys acted out how their father hanged himself. He'd locked them in the house with him.

to kids like Tyler. Almost since we met, he's been asking, "You're not done that movie yet?" Finally, the answer is yes. I want to tell him I'll come back soon, but a ticket to Australia is cheaper. And the distance between First World Ottawa, where I live, and the Third World conditions of K.I., make it seem even farther away. **ANDRÉE CAZABON**

Third World Canada premieres at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto on Sept. 30