



cold journey

a film by martin desjardes

no life for an indian

On the reservation they called him "apple" — red on the outside, white on the inside. For Buckley, 15, all it meant was that he didn't really belong anywhere. **Cold Journey** is the story of this young Indian's fight to claim his heritage.

For 10 months of the year, and for the last 10 years, Buckley has been at Residential school, 200 miles from the Reservation where he was born. The school for him is a prison of "don'ts", a hazy force molding him to take his place in the world — the white man's world.

Part of Buckley's search for a place in this world takes him to the big city, through the disco bars and jails, and inevitably back to school. Summers are on the reservation. This is the world of beautiful rivers, forests and sunrises, played against the haunting lyrics of Willie Dunn's music.

The scenes were shot on location in The Pas, in Northern Mani-

toba — the biggest Indian reserve in Canada, at Pelican Narrows in Northern Saskatchewan and at the Piopot Reserve north of Regina where the NFB crew filmed a Pow Wow.

But Buckley is a stranger to his native world. He doesn't speak Cree, he's not good at fishing or hunting. The lakes are polluted with mercury. Buckley's own father tells him "soon there will be no life at all here for an Indian. It's no good learning to be an Indian — learn to be a white man".

Back at school, Buckley is befriended by Johnny, an Ojibway a little older and wiser, working as a caretaker at the school. Johnny usually traps and hunts and fishes. He's more in tune with today's life. He's a link between the old and new ways but can't really help Buckley make the transition. He tells Buckley about his uncle, who becomes a kind of oracle. Buckley must meet Uncle John to find out

how to be an Indian. So Johnny takes him to a Pow Wow.

Uncle John, played by Chief Dan George, doesn't have the answer for Buckley, except to say "Buckley, there is no true Indian way for you. In desperation, Buckley "borrows" a skidoo and follows Johnny to go trapping in the north. In a prophetic scene of the upcoming ending, Buckley shoots and wounds a wolf, yet doesn't want to go in for the final kill. Johnny goes out after the wolf — "You gotta kill a wounded animal or he'll hurt someone". Finally Buckley is brought in for stealing the skidoo.

The verdict: "reform school" — just when Buckley says "I'm not running away any more — I'm not going to borrow anything any more — No I made up my mind. I don't need to go to reform school".

Buckley is trapped.

"A trapped animal has two choices — chew off his leg or... curl up and die".



"Cold Journey"

the crew

Directed by
Martin Defalco

Produced by
George Pearson

Original Screenplay
David B. Jones

Story Outline
Martin Defalco

Narration
George Pearson

Edited by
Tom Daly, Torbin Schoeler

Assistant
Lawrence Seligman

Consultant
Stanley Jackson

Director of Photography
Tony Ianzelo

Assistant
Andreas Poulsson

*Original Music Composed
and conducted by*
Eldon Rathburn

Songs: Composed & Sung by
Willie Dunn

Accompaniment
Bob Robb

Sound Editing
Bernie Bordeleau

Assistant
André Galbrand

Re-recording
Michel Descombes
Jean-Pierre Joutel

Assistant Directors
Francis Mankiewicz
Ashley Murray

Location Managers
Jean Savard
Eva Pearce

Art Director
Denis Boucher

Liaison
Mike Mitchell

Location Sound
Hans Oomes

Boom Men
Jean-Guy Normandin
Bev Davidson

Electrician
Guy Remillard

Grip
W.G. Bradley, Jr.

Continuity
Monique Gervais

Production Assistant
Morley Loon

Post Production Supervision
Tom Daly

Executive Producer
Colin Low

Produced by
The National Film Board
of Canada

Screening Time
75 minutes 29 seconds

Distributed by
The National Film Board
of Canada
35mm and 16mm
Color

With considerable assistance for distribution costs from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and the Office of the Secretary of State.



Tony Ianzelo and Martin Defalco

the cast

Johnny Yesno
Buckley Petawabano
Chief Dan George

Supporting Cast

On the Reserve
Alphonse Dorion
Noel Starblanket
W.G. Bradley
Mary Linklater
Gilbert Linklater

*At the Schools
The Teachers:*

Reg Gibson
Joseph P. Kennedy
Sharon Ann Ewens
Doreen Hayes-Bingham
Daphne Karol

The Students:

Morley Loon
Gordon Bear
Lilian Michelle
The Children of Guy Hill
Residential School
The Children of Margaret
Barbour Collegiate, The
Pas, Man.

In the Town

Guy L'Ecuyer
Jennifer Phipps
Sue Helen Petrie
Cliff Gardner
Les Nirenberg
Paul Fredette
Moses Bignell

In the City

Denis Lacroix
Billie Foley
Willie Dunn
Kirk McColl
Joe Plante

At the Pow-wow

The People of Piapot Indian
Reserve, Sask.

This booklet on the movie Cold Journey has been conceived and published by Premiere/En première: editors Jean-Pierre and Connie Tadros. Joan Irving was responsible for the research and interviews and wrote the articles. Louis Charpentier was the artistic director.

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a human problem

an interview with martin defalco
by joan irving

*You directed **Cold Journey**. Did you also conceive the film?*

It was actually Noel Starblanket who directed us to the issue of native education. At the time, around 1969, he was working here as part of the NFB's Indian training film crew. That crew, many of whom have since gone on to be important leaders in their community, made a little film about residential schools. They had all experienced what it was like to be taken away from home as youngsters and sent to the government run residential schools, and they wanted to examine that situation in a longer film. They asked me to work with them on it and I agreed.

Had you worked with the Indian film unit prior to that?

No, but I was familiar with the kinds of problems they were talking about. At that time I was finishing a sponsored documentary film, titled **Northern Fisherman**, that I shot in Northern Saskatchewan on the Indian reserve at Pelican Narrows. I was shooting there around the first of September — the village was full of life. One day I walked down to the dock and they were pushing the kids into float planes. From then on there were no kids in the village and I suddenly realized that they had been taken out, to school. That had really bothered me, so when the idea for **Cold Journey** came up, I was interested. George Pearson (who produced **Northern Fisherman**), and I went to work on a proposal. From there we hired a scriptwriter and the project mushroomed.

You went back to Pelican Narrows to shoot much of the film. How were you, your crew and cast received there?

Very well. Of course I knew of the people from the previous film. Also, Buckley Petawabano, the young Indian who plays the central character in the film, speaks Cree. He and Johnny Yesno, the other lead actor, cleared the way for us many times. We didn't try to tightly organize and set-up the shoot; we went there and asked permission to do things as the filming proceeded. Working in that way, with the people, the film became much more of a community thing. Whenever people told us that what we were shooting wasn't right, such as the handling of the animals or the ceremonies and that, we changed it.

So from the beginning you were concerned about the authenticity of the film?

I tried to stay within the truth of the real situation. It was a film with a fictionalized story line, but I wanted to stay within a documentary context. When I go into the trapper's house in the film, it's really his house with his wife and his children. The people shown in the film are in their own situations. We had to be accurate because it was *their* lives we were depicting.

*Did you decide to use documentary techniques in **Cold Journey** because of your background as a documentary director at the NFB?*

That was part of it I suppose, but in **Cold Journey**, the documentary technique allowed me to get into the environment, to really feel it, to be almost impressionistic about it. And I think it worked. To me,

the strength of the film is its documentary setting. The religious ceremony, the pow-wow, is real. The scenes showing Indians fishing and trapping are real. It's not a Hollywood thing. Also, there was the problem of actors. You can't make people who are not actors, act. So I eliminated that; except for Johnny Yesno, Buckley Petawabano, Chief Dan George and a few white actors, all the characters play themselves. Frankly, I don't think I could have made the film without using documentary techniques; I couldn't have cast it. There were two professional Indian actors in Canada — Buckley and Johnny. Luckily, we were able to get them to play the two lead roles. There was some suggestion at the time we were casting though, that other actors should take the parts.

You mean there was talk at the NFB about hiring non-Indian actors to play in the film.

Yes there was, and I think it was an honest concern. We were making a feature film. At the time, around 1970, there had never been a film made with Indians as the main characters, Chief Dan George had played in **Little Big Man**, but I believe he was cast as an afterthought, when they couldn't get Richard Boone or somebody. I'd worked with Indians and was absolutely convinced that not only could they do it, they would really make the picture. But it was a new thing, and as it turned out, we had problems. The fact that it is an inherently Indian film presented problems. The rhythms in the film

are Indian rhythms, the speech is slow, it doesn't peak. Before the film was finished and released, people around here were criticizing that. Once it was released, funnily enough, the audience accepted the slower rhythms.

That's fascinating. And it helps to understand the film because the film does seem slow. With Indian audiences then, it's not a problem.

No, not with Indian audiences. In fact, most people who are aware of those rhythms don't see it as a problem. With Indian audiences the film has a very strong impact. It's the first time they see an Indian in a lead role, not stereotyped, not apologizing. There's tremendous identification with the film. What surprised me was that when we screened the film in Seattle, it seemed that the impact of the film was greater in the States than it was in Canada.

In what way?

There's very much a feeling of religion about the film. It shows a very close relationship between the people and the land. The beautiful song Willie Dunn composed and sings in the film, "The seasons in their cycle sing their cycle song of love", describes that relationship. The first time I showed the film in the States there was a tremendous silence after the screening. I couldn't figure it out, I really couldn't. Then a woman came back to talk to me; she had tears in her eyes. It took me a while to understand this, but they are now an urban people. Their grandfathers had a religion that was based on a relationship to the land, but for them it had died out. They didn't know how to describe it to their children. The film shows Indians in Canada still living in the old way. Also, the American Indians identified very strongly with the

whole problem of residential schools. Seeing **Cold Journey** they could say to their kids, now see, that's what it was like.

The story in the film, the young Indian's search for his culture and his own identity, is a fictionalized account, but from what you say the Indian audiences accept it at a very personal level.

The story has a certain universality to it. Almost 90 percent of the native people in Canada who went to residential schools experienced the painful cultural adjustment that Buckley faces in the film. We wanted this film to be useful and we worked very closely with the native community to make it so. Some white people get defensive when they see the film; they say the prejudice we show can't possibly be true. I want it to be clear though that the attitudes and the facts presented in the film are accurate.

How closely did you, Martin Defalco, identify with the conflict in the film?

It's a human problem in the end, and I completely identified with it. That isolation of the child from his mother — it tears those people apart, particularly the women. A native family is generally very, very close. You take the children away for 10 months to send them to school and that closeness disappears. When the kids come back, they're strangers. Normally, of course, the kids are accepted back into their families. In the film Buckley doesn't fit in, isn't accepted. For many Indians it's the first time they've seen this thing played out. I think when they see it in the film they can talk about it and it makes it easier for them.

martin defalco

Martin Defalco, director of **Cold Journey**, joined the National Film Board as an assistant sound recordist in 1952. He has since then worked as a picture editor, writer, director and producer with the NFB.

Defalco has made five documentaries and two feature films. It was **Northern Fishermen** and **Trawler Fisherman**, two films for the Federal Department of Fisheries, that planted the idea of making a film like **Cold Journey**.

To research the fishing films, Defalco travelled for months across the Northern Prairies. He got a first hand look at the devastating impact of white man's culture on the Indian.

His involvement with the native people continued in the making of **The Other Side of the Ledger**, an award-winning TV documentary giving an Indian point of view of the Hudson's Bay company. Two years later, Defalco was back in the Northern Prairies, in the dead of winter, filming **Cold Journey**.

Defalco was born in Ottawa in 1933, attended Ottawa Technical High School and St. Patrick's College. After a checkered career as a shipper, a bank teller and a try at the Canadian Air Force, he decided to get into motion pictures... and stayed.

Defalco is married and has five children.

grass roots distribution

george pearson and anthony kent

Cold Journey is one of the few feature films ever made at the National Film Board. Why was the film made as a feature rather than the traditional NFB documentary?

George Pearson: When you think of feature films, you think of entertainment, mass audience, commercial. **Cold Journey** was given the go-ahead on the basis that it is within the NFB mandate to make feature films in the public interest, on some social or ethnic problem in the country — in this case the whole business of native education. It wasn't strictly a decision to make a feature film, but when we came down to it, the dramatic form and feature length seemed to be right for the material and for the magnitude of the issue we were dealing with.

The film was also unusual in that the NFB later became involved in the distribution of the film.

George Pearson: It was the first film we ever distributed. Normally we write a contract with a commercial distributor who takes care of all distribution arrangements. We didn't want to lose control of **Cold Journey** to a commercial distributor who would have invested money in the distribution and then locked up the film for a minimum of five years. The NFB wouldn't have been able to touch the film for non-theatrical release before that time was up. But, although we had said the purpose of the film was not to make it a commercial success but to do a job of public information on a certain critical condition, the finished film did look like it had some commercial potential. We just weren't sure how long it would last in theatrical release, through we wanted to give it a chance. With financial assistance

from the Secretary of State, we put together a whole promotion campaign and launched the film. It was doing well in the theatres where we opened. At the same time though, pressure was growing from other users of our films to release **Cold Journey** for non-theatrical distribution. Finally, we withdrew it from commercial release and started to concentrate on non-theatrical distribution.

Anthony Kent: We held special launchings in Regina and Edmonton, planned in collaboration with Indian Affairs, the Secretary of State and the local Indian organizations. In that way we were able to spread the word about the film before we started the grass roots distribution. Now the film is shown in church halls, mission and residential schools, council houses — virtually anywhere you can put up a projector. It has been shown on TV in the three Scandinavian countries and was recently sold to the CBC for Canadian television. **Cold Journey** is widely used to increase understanding in union situations, colleges and government departments across North America.

Mr. Pearson, I believe you attended some of these screenings. Can you describe audience reaction to the film?

George Pearson: There are different audiences and their reactions are fascinating. The native audience loves it every time. They see much humor in the film. A white audience by itself sees none of that humor and sometimes can feel quite threatened. They take the film as an indictment of themselves, particularly

Northerners, who live and work with the Indians. What really fascinates me though, is the reaction to the film when it's a mixed white and Indian audience. The white people begin to see what the Indians see in the film and begin to understand *their* reactions. To the Indians it is a humorous film, a meaningful film. White people see the Indians reacting, moving with the film and they begin to understand the film on a level which is not so threatening. That's the ultimate point of the film, to convey to the non-Indian audience better understanding.

Indian people are often the subject of documentary films, but this is one of the first feature films in which they can see themselves in a positive light. How do you assess their feelings about the film?

George Pearson: It was understood when we started discussing the film that it had to be a true documentary, albeit drama picture, of a true native condition. After we screened the film at the annual meeting of the Indian Brotherhood of Canada we were very aware that it didn't matter what we thought of the film — either the people at Indian Affairs, or the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister of Canada. It really was totally irrelevant what we all thought. The film was successful only if the native community of Canada would admit that it was a true depiction of a real condition.

Did they?

George Pearson: They passed two resolutions at that annual Congress, one saying it was a great film and two, urging the NFB to give it the widest possible distribution. They said it was the first time native people have been portrayed with sensitivity and accuracy in the media ... really, their support was overwhelming.

"helped me to understand"

an interview
with buckley petawabano
by joan irving



Buckley Petawabano

In the film you and the rest of the characters retain your own names. How close did you feel to Buckley, the character you play.

In a lot of ways I was acting out the experience I had at residential school. I spent eight years in a school in Moose Factory. That's why I speak English... The prejudice and that which existed at my school was something I learned to take in stride. But acting it out in **Cold Journey** helped me to understand it. My school experience wasn't bad, it's just that I had to live with a feeling of rejection lots of times. It's sort of funny — they asked me to go back to the school to speak at an assembly as one of the successful graduates. I suppose I would have gone, but I was busy.

Did your familiarity with the situation make the job of acting easier?

When I first saw the script I thought it was good, but I knew it was going to be hard to act. I was in almost every scene and I wasn't used to having so many lines. At first I was nervous about that, but when we started shooting I overcame it. I learned a lot about acting, and about filmmaking. At that time I was starting to be intrigued with the process of making films. Now I'd rather make a film than act in one.

*After your roles in **Adventures in Rainbow Country** and **Cold Journey**, you've become something of a star, certainly in the native community. How do you feel about that?*

People tease me about it and, in a way, it's a compliment. But it's really hard to get out of the star system. You come down with a crash. I joke about it; I don't take it too seriously. Now I'm trying to get an Indian crew together to make a film. There'll be other Indian films with Indian actors.

johnny yesno

His start in movies came when, tired of seeing white actors playing Indians, he went to the CBC casting office to try his luck at getting "one of those red man roles". He got the lead in the premiere episode "The Last Man In The World" of the popular *Wojeck* series and won the highly prized Wilderness Award for best actor in 1967. His work for the CBC continued, but with radio this time, as host-producer of **Our Native Land**.

At 36, he works now as a freelancer, sometimes acting, sometimes as a communications consultant to various Indian organizations, attached currently to the Nishnawobe Institute in Toronto, an Indian cultural organization. His latest TV role is in a Northwest Mounted Police Arctic documentary drama on CBC called **Lost Patrol**, which will be released this fall. In fiction films, Yesno had the lead in Walt Disney's **King of the Grizzlies** and more recently played in the Canadian Film **Inbreaker**.

Yesno was born in Fort Hope on the Albany River which flows into Hudson Bay, the oldest of 11 children. He went to residential schools at Sioux Lookout and Sault Ste. Marie and later studied engineering at the University of Waterloo but gave that up after 2 years in favor of acting.

And about that name, Yesno. It's for real. It came about when his great grandfather, an Indian chief, while dealing with Indian agents would say "yes" to part of a treaty (that was good for the Indians) and "no" to the rest (which were concessions to the white man). They dubbed him Yes-no.

buckley petawabano

Buckley Petawabano, star of **Cold Journey**, is a Cree Indian, born 27 years ago in a tent on the family trap-lines near Lake Mistassini some 400 miles due north of Montreal.

Petawabano's life history seems to have prepared him perfectly for his part in **Cold Journey**. At six he was sent away to residential school, first at Moose Factory and later at Sault Ste. Marie. And for the next 12 years he saw his family for only six weeks each summer. In 1969 he spent a year at McGill working towards an arts degree but then other things started happening and he abandoned that. He won the co-starring role in the CBC's television series **Adventures in Rainbow Country** and that in turn led to his movie part.

Petawabano spent two years working at the National Film Board, learning about the other side of movie making. For the last two years he has taught communications at Manitou College, a native school 125 miles north of Montreal. Making films is currently more interesting to Petawabano than acting in them.

He is now involved with the NFB's Challenge for Change unit, working on a series of films on Indian education, looking at how Indians are learning to adapt to white man's society, and at what alternatives there could be to Reserves.

chief dan george

Chief Dan George is probably best known for his role in Hollywood's **Little Big Man** for which he received an Oscar nomination as best supporting actor.

In his 70s, Dan George is a former chief of the Inlet people and an honorary chief of the Shuswap and Squamish tribes. He was born in 1899 on what is now Burrard Reserve N. 3, just northeast of downtown Vancouver. He has lived there all his life except for 12 years away at a Catholic boarding school. That's where he got his name — a teacher who couldn't pronounce Tes-wah-no called her five-year-old pupil Dan George.

In 1920 he began working on the Vancouver docks, starting at 40 cents an hour for a 10-hour day. He had to quit after 27 years when a swinging timber smashed all the muscles in one hip. He got no compensation and no pension.

His oldest son got him his first acting job — he was in the CBC's **Cariboo Country** series when they needed someone to play an old Indian. For Dan George, then 55, it was right up his alley. He appeared in seven episodes, several CBC Festival productions and the movie adapted from one of them, **Smith**, starring Glenn Ford.

Dan George now lives in a small white cottage about 100 yards from where he was born. And he expects to be around for some time yet — his uncle lived to 110, his mother to 95.

willie dunn

Willie Dunn is a folksinger, filmmaker, a Micmac Indian.

He was born on the Restigouche Reserve, on the border between Québec and New Brunswick in 1942. His mother was a Micmac Indian, his father a Scottish boilermaker. He made his first film, **Ballad of Crowfoot**, in 1969 under the aegis of the Challenge for Change Unit of the National Film Board. The project started when a group of Indians from the Company of Young Canadians wanted to make — or rather remake — the history of the Canadian West, reflecting the traditions, attitudes and problems of their people. Dunn directed the film, wrote the music and words for it.

In the same year, also for Challenge for Change, he directed a film called **These are my People**, reflecting the impact of the white man's arrival on the Indian way of life and a glimpse as what the future might bring. Dunn then wrote the music to **Who Were the Ones?** a film of dramatic color artwork showing the Indians' view of North American history after the white man's arrival. In 1972 Dunn co-directed the award-winning TV documentary **The Other Side of the Ledger** and wrote its songs. It's another film from the Indian viewpoint, this time about the Hudson's Bay Company.

He wrote three songs for **Cold Journey**, based on the Indian Theme. Besides writing music for NFB films, he writes for the CBC and is now writing for himself. With two albums cut and a Canada Council grant, he wants to perform, sing and make his own films.