

The Making of the short film *Homecoming Song* [2019, 21 min.]

Daniel Janke – producer / director

January 17, 2019

I first met Pete Sidney in Yukon in the fall of 1981. I had not been in Yukon very long, and had become involved in the Baha'i community of which Mr. Sidney was a member. We became friends, and in some ways Pete sort of adopted me. I was a young man, new to this part of the country. And he was an elder with stories to tell and knowledge to share.

During this time I also became acquainted with other members of the family including Pete's sister Ida Calmegane, narrator on our film, and Pete's daughter Sandra Johnson who has helped me immensely in making the film.¹

Over the years I got to know some of the extended family, like Annie and aunt Dora, and Mark Wedge who eventually became chief of Carcross -Tagish First Nations. I also became acquainted with Doris McLean, also a past chief of Carcross -Tagish F.N., and her daughter Shirley, currently a producer for APTN.

Over the following years I saw less of Pete. I was travelling a lot, and was no longer part of the Baha'i community. But we still kept in touch. Occasionally he would call on me to help him pull net down around Teslin or at Johnson Crossing. On these occasions I would often help him deliver fish to relatives. I also travelled with him on numerous occasions out to Millhaven Bay, just off Bennet Lake, where some of his extended family had a camp. Pete and his wife Kay were honoured guests when I got married to my wife Susan Alton in August, 1993.

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In the mid 1990's I had a short-term producer position at NEDAA, the current affairs program that was produced by Northern Native Broadcasting, Yukon, and aired weekly on the APTN Network. This position was fieldwork for my graduate thesis in ethnomusicology. During the course of this I had the opportunity to interview Pete for some pieces I was working on for NEDAA. As far as I am aware these pieces are still available in the NEDAA archives, which are managed by CHON-FM, the radio branch of NNBY.

At his request, I also recorded songs that Pete sang. We recorded in the old United Church in Whitehorse for its acoustics. The songs included a mixture of traditional songs he had learned from his father and other relatives, and some popular western songs and dittys.

¹ Letters attached

It was during this time that Pete first told me about the Kwakach'kook story and the significance it held for him and his family, and for the larger Deeishita'an clan, of which he is a member. At one point in our discussions Pete told me I should make a film about the story. While it is true I was involved in producing current affairs programming with NEDAA, I had not yet begun making my own films. That pursuit for me would not start for another 10 years.

I did, however, feel compelled to tell the story of Pete's service in the 2nd world war. In 1999 I wrote a play entitled 'Time Pieces,' which included in its structure a video narrative of Pete's service years, and highlighted the contribution made by First Nations veterans. The play was not very good. But at the time it generated a lot of interest in Pete's war story, and in the issue of First Nations' often overlooked contribution to the war effort.

The Canadian Legion requested copies of the video. At the time, I was reluctant to release it because the video component was hastily put together and never intended as a stand-alone film. When I shared this concern with Pete's sister Ida Calmegan, she agreed, and expressed her support for undertaking a proper telling of the story through film. Ida also explained to me again about the Kwakach'kook story, how the Deeishita'an clan came to have the story, the parallels with Pete's life, and the how her mother sang the song for Pete all those years ago when he came back from the war after being away for six years.

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In 2013 we began work on the film. I received a modest amount of funding that enabled me to conduct on-camera interviews with Ida. I enlisted the help of Shirley McLean, a niece of Ida's, and a story producer for the broadcaster APTN in Yukon. I wanted to involve the family and was hoping that as we proceeded, Shirley would pick up the role of producer of the film.

I also hired a researcher, Vivian Belik to help me put together archival footage. During the course of her research, Vivian spoke about the film with some members of the Keek's'edi clan in the Sitka area of south-east Alaska. This served to stir up a negative reaction from some associated with the clan. The Kwakach'kook song is originally a Keek's'edi clan song. And many living today don't know the history of the song, or how it came to belong to the Deeishita'an clan. We found ourselves in the middle of a possible clan conflict.

Understandably, Ida was upset by this. As Matriarch of the Deeisheeta'an clan both in Yukon and Alaska, she was especially sensitive to clan relations. Her daughter Gorgiana was particularly upset with me for stirring up this hornets nest, and sticking my nose into business that was not my own. For my part, I tried to explain that it was probably a good thing we stirred this up now, as opposed to finishing the film and then finding this problem.

Unfortunately, this also put Shirley in a difficult position as she is Dakl'awe'di clan and realized right away that she had absolutely no place getting involved in an ancient event that took place between the Keek's'edi and the Deeishita'an clans. Naturally, we had to stop work on the film, I returned the funding I had received, and thought that would be the end of it.

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In spring of 2016 I received a phone call from Ida one morning asking if we could meet for tea. She told me that she wanted me to go ahead and make the film. She had done some research of her own and had determined, like her mother Angela Sidney before her had done, that the Kwakach'kook song had indeed been given to the Deeishita'an people by the Keek's'edi clan many years ago in exchange for Kwakach'kook's brother who was being held prisoner in an ancient clan dispute. Ida had essentially repeated the investigations that her mother undertook 70 years earlier when she chose to sing the song for her son Pete.

Naturally. I was a bit hesitant. However, it became very clear to me that it had become quite important to Ida that we make this film. She was upset with the reaction we had initially received from individuals only peripherally involved in the Keek's'edi clan who were too young to know their own history. Furthermore, Ida felt strongly that this was her family's story to tell. Finally, Ida reminded me of my relationship with her brother Pete, and the fact that he had asked me many years earlier about making this story into a film.

It was around this time that I consulted again with Sandra Johnson, daughter of Pete Sidney. Sandra was also very enthusiastic, and agreed to become involved.

We began again working in earnest on the film in early 2017. It was completed in January, 2019. A trailer for the film can be found at the following link.
<https://vimeo.com/310896747>

Ownership of the film *Homecoming Song* is to be shared by members of the Sidney family, as represented by executive producers Ida Calmegane and Sandra Johnson, and the production company Northern Town Films.

For more information about the film, and to inquire about screening copies visit northerntownfilms.com

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October 1st, 2013

Dear Daniel and Shirley,

On behalf of my family, I am writing to say that I am supportive of your efforts to make the short film *Homecoming Song*.

This story about the song my mother sang to my brother Pete when he came home after the war is very important to me and to my family. You have my blessing.

I am pleased that the story will be shared in this way for future generations to see. I look forward to consulting with you, and to working with you as narrator on the film.

Best regards,



Ida Calmegane

Sandra Johnson (Sidney)
1702 Centennial Street
Whitehorse, Yukon
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To Whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my support and enthusiasm for working on the film Homecoming Song with director Daniel Janke.

This film tells the story of my dear departed father, Pete Sidney's experiences in the second world war, and the song my grandmother, Angela Sidney sang for him when he returned. As such it represents a bridge between contemporary and traditional culture.

Homecoming Song tells one small part of a very important story about the contribution that First Nations war veterans made to the second world war effort. This story is often overlooked in history.

Homecoming Song also points to the relevance of First Nations traditional culture in contemporary society. The parallel story of the song is brought alive again in this film for future generations to know and understand.

I am hopeful for a positive response and that we will find the support we need to make this film.

Sincerely,



Sandra Johnson