

Gimli festival featuring Turtle Mountain Trapper film

by **PAUL RAYNER**
Recorder staff

A heritage project, a sudden memory and an important story to be told combined to make a short film that will be featured at a prestigious festival this weekend.

“Precious Load: Tales of a Turtle Mountain Trapper” was created by Boissevain-based filmmaker Julie Watt. It tells the story of Lake Metigoshe area trapper Phillip (TT) Racine and was filmed about a year and a half ago. This weekend, it will get a spot at a competition in the Interlake.

“So, we do have a film in the upcoming Gimli Film Festival,” Watt said, “I say ‘we’ because the film was a collective project spearheaded by David M. Neufeld of the Turtle Mountain Souris Plains Heritage Association.”

Neufeld said they initiated the project with Watt because the group, which focuses on keeping the history of the region alive, was noticing students and young adults were increasingly using the video format for both entertainment and education. They had started with maps and stories in written form in books like “Vantage Points”.

“We felt it was time to venture into the world of videos to have broader reach,” he said.

Watt said she was a bit reluctant when Neufeld contacted her about doing a history film for use in schools, as she was not too interested in history. After working on the story of Phillip Racine, however, that interest has developed more.

It also might have something to do with the personal particularities between Watt and Racine and a bit of local history.

“It’s important to note that about a month before I met Phillip,” she explained, “I had this memory pop into my head, which is kind of crazy because I never thought about it ever – I remembered that



Phillip Racine on his trap line in “Precious Load”. In the film, the story of when he rescued three girls lost in the Turtle Mountains 25 years ago was re-enacted with his family members.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JULIE WATT

about 25 years before, three of my friends were found by a trapper in the Turtle Mountains in the winter time.”

Watt was introduced to Racine by his nephew Barrett and she told him this story, asking if he knew anything about it.

“TT looked directly at me and said, ‘that was me.’”

Racine remembers it well. He said he was out on his trap line out in the Turtle Mountains when he took a turn he did not usually take. He found the three girls, around 12-13 years old, who were walking around in the park.

“They had stolen one of their dad’s sleds,” Racine recounted. “There were three of them on one. They weren’t supposed to even be there. They crashed their sled and they walked into the park. I came back on my trap line and happened to go that way and came across them.”

As it was starting to get dark and it was 35 or 40 below, they were cold and scared. Racine took them over to the

West Cabin to warm up. He found their snowmobile and was able to fix it and went with them to Lake Metigoshe, following the shoreline taking them to their cabin.

“I’m sure glad I found them. Their parents were looking for them for about 10 hours. I dropped them off and didn’t even go in.”

He recently met one of the girls and may meet one or both of the others again in the future.

Watt said she went to convince the heritage group that this was a story that needed to be told. The film focused on the traditions of Metis trapping and how they had to fight to keep trap lines. If they did not, perhaps the girls would not have been found.

Watt went out with Racine before shooting to learn a bit about trapping.

“He taught me all he knew about beavers,” she said, “and he also showed me his connection to the land – I really got a sense of why he loves it so much. It’s a part of him – in

his blood.”

“She came out for a couple of weeks straight,” Racine explained, adding Watt was good luck, “and we got some beavers. She did well.”

Shooting happened in

January of 2019. There is plenty of footage of the trap line, the Turtle Mountains and information on the Metis tradition of trapping. There is also a re-enactment of the rescue. Barrett Racine plays the young TT, with Racine’s nieces playing the girls. Transportation was coordinated by TT and his friends. The subject of the film enjoyed the experience.

“It was awesome, lots of fun. She is very good at what she does.”

The 14-minute film packs a lot of punch in a short time. As it was ready for release at the time the pandemic hit, it was released first on YouTube this spring. It can be seen there now.

Watt said Neufeld suggested she send it on to the Gimli Film Festival and now it is a part of their Short Film Competition. The competition begins on Saturday, July 25, and Precious Load is to be shown around 7:20pm. It can be seen at the festival website. Watt and Racine will also take part in an online interview after the film’s completion.

Neufeld said TM-SPHA feels the film achieved its objective of telling the area’s

history in an informative and entertaining way. He was able to attend a shoot and was impressed by the main character and filmmaker.

“Phillip is an excellent subject,” Neufeld stated. “Modest, comfortable in his element, skilled and able to speak about his passion. Julie has the skill of allowing her films to take on a life of their own. I and the rest of the TM-SPHA board are very pleased with the film.”

He added as the film was designed to be used by schools, they would like to see it go that route when the pandemic settles down. They are planning to start with Boissevain once it is introduced to teachers.

Racine said he wants to continue trapping and passing it along to new generations. Not only is it his heritage and passion, it is something that brought him one of the most important moments of his life, one that would give the film its name.

“I hauled a lot of stuff out of that bush,” Racine said, “but that was the best I ever had. It was the most precious load I ever brought out.”



Boissevain-based filmmaker Julie Watt recently released the short film Precious Load, which tells the story of trapper Phillip (TT) Racine. The film, initiated by the Turtle Mountain-Souris Plains Heritage Association, was shot in January 2019.



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