

Discussion & Study Guide
for the film

Carved From the Heart

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Why We Made This Film

We believe this film has a far reaching message, and encourage you to share this story in a variety of settings: with young people, elders, and those struggling with substance abuse. Individuals coping with profound losses and Native and non-Native communities that are striving for understanding and better communication may also respond to the Healing Heart Totem story.

Stan Marsden (carver): "My boy died in 1991 of a cocaine overdose. This was a very hard thing for me to accept. A friend said, 'Stan why don't you make a totem pole?' At that time I didn't feel like making a totem pole. It was about a year later that I started. A lot of times I wondered why I started the Healing Heart Pole. After awhile, everything was so positive — the way people accepted and helped with the pole. They knew what it stood for. Now, this has reached farther than I really expected and people are beautiful working together."

Jan Marsden (daughter of carver Stan Marsden; sister of Jimmy Marsden): "Telling the stories within the story is how *Carved from the Heart* came to life. It is a beautiful story of healing brought to life. Pass the story from person to person; to learn from the past and move on from there... Telling all, not to shame, just in attempt to heal. If we carry our past with us and try to make sense of it, we can begin to grow."

Healing Heart Totem Committee: "Stan was talking about carving a pole in his son Jimmy's honor. He called together the people who wanted to help and the committee was born. Committee members included students, Alaska Natives, non-Natives, elders, youth, professionals and the self-employed. Stan carved the pole in memory of his son, but he wanted his loss to have greater meaning. He dedicated the pole to all the youth of Alaska, as a symbol of sobriety — of living a drug and alcohol-free life. It is also a symbol of healing from all kinds of losses. The committee assisted with making the film and is committed to continuing the vision of the Healing Heart Totem Pole."

Louise Brady (producer): "Throughout my career working in human services, I witnessed many non-Native care providers come and go within the Native community. I saw their frustration which came from working in a community that has often been defined by its pathologies rather than its strengths. The cultures in Southeast Alaska have historically been closed communities, with little participation from outsiders. This is extremely unfortunate because even though we, as Native peoples, experience high rates of social problems, to a great extent we still hold tight to timeless

traditions that nourish us and help us survive. I believe this film will give non-Native providers a glimpse of the strengths that lie within Native communities everywhere and will help those same people to understand that although there are many problems, there are also many strengths which are manifested through our traditions. I believe that ethically, it is the responsibility of these same care providers to seek out the people that are best able to heal our communities."

Ellen Frankenstein (director): "When Louise Brady heard about the Healing Heart Totem Pole, she wanted to document it and we decided to collaborate on this film. I was drawn to this project because it is rare to see so many people joining together for a positive reason. Participants found the answers in themselves and in their community. They used art to heal and come together. I wanted to help create a film that would carry the story of what happened in Craig, Alaska, to individuals and communities all over."

Background

Notes on Southeast Alaskan Native Cultures

Southeast Alaska is the setting for this film. It is arguably one of the most beautiful and remote regions in the world. It is covered by the largest temperate rain forest in the world and has been home for thousands of years to the Tlingit (Lingit), Tsimpshian, and Haida peoples. The Tlingit, Tsimpshian, and Haida make up 19% of the population of Southeast Alaska but are the majority population in the rural communities. Although the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimpshian share some similarities in artistic expression through carving, weaving, singing, and dancing and in their complex, traditional social structures, each tribe remains distinct in language and cultural nuances.

Notes on Totem Poles

Europeans named the carved, wooden pillars made by the Northwest Coast Native peoples "totem poles." However, totem poles depicted ancestral pride and never represented tribal gods. Generally the poles commemorated one's relatives, or told the story of a memorable event. Some were mortuary poles and contained the remains of the dead. Other poles were carved to honor a leader who had recently died. The carving and pole-raising ceremonies helped relieve the grief created by this loss. Poles were usually erected at potlatches; at this time the stories of the crests depicted on the poles were told. The meaning behind most traditional poles seen today died with the carver and the person who commissioned the pole. The people involved with the Healing Heart Totem Pole want to keep the story of this pole alive.

"We have all kinds of totem poles. Some are for history making. We had totem poles that tell stories about the clan family, but I've never heard of a healing totem pole — it's a good idea."

— Clara Natkong, Haida Elder

Notes on Grief

"Grief is a reaction to loss and while it is often associated with death, any loss can cause grief. We may grieve divorce, separations, and other relationship losses. Additionally we may grieve the loss of a job...Any transition, however positive, also may entail loss...a move to a new area or even a developmental transition can create a sense of loss...Grief is experienced in many ways — physically, emotionally, cognitively, spiritually, and behaviorally. Each person will experience grief in his or her own distinct way.

— Dr. Ken Doka, *A Primer on Grief and Loss*

"...how that tree rolled for a while on the waves.
Then when it drifted to shore
the sun would put its rays on it.
Yes.
It would dry its grief
to the core.
At this moment this sun is coming out over you, my grandparents' mask
At this moment
My hope is that your grief
be like it's drying to your core."

— Jessie Dalton, from *Haa Tuwunaagu Yis,
for Healing Our Spirit — Tlingit Oratory*

**"This is how our people were. They used to hold each other. Put our blanket
of love around you to help you through that grief time."**

— Willard Jackson, Sr., from *Carved from the Heart*

Using the Film

Suggested Settings

- High School Classes
- University Classes
- Grief Support Groups and Hospices
- Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Programs
- Correctional Institutions
- Youth Organizations
- Women's Organizations
- Veterans' Programs
- Crisis and other Counseling Services
- Cultural Competency Training
- Health and Human Service Organizations
- Tribal Services
- Museums
- Libraries
- Religious Organizations

Suggested Topics for Discussion

- Grief and Loss
- Ceremony and Traditional Practices for Healing
- Suicide
- Substance Abuse
- Family Violence
- Death and Dying
- Impact of Combat on Veterans and their Families
- Growing up in a Dysfunctional Family
- Institutional Racism
- Building Community Capacity and Finding What It Means to be Part of a Community
- Intergenerational Grief
- Disruption of Traditional Cultures by an Outside, Imposing Culture
- Role of Sharing, Forgiveness, and Acknowledgement in Healing
- Living and Working Cross-Culturally
- Historical Overview of Treatment of Alaska Natives, Native Americans, and First Nations
- Sovereignty and Need for Justice before Peace

How Groups & Communities have Used the Film

- In Sitka, Alaska, college students created an event around the film, including opening remarks by Stan Marsden, the carver. Other speakers talked about making the pole and the film, and about the screening itself. Intertribal drummers also performed. After viewing the film, there was a powerful round table discussion and a potluck. Facilitators included community leaders and Native and non-Native counselors. The evening ended with a candlelight march through town and a healing ceremony.
- In Kake, Alaska, health and family service workers, police, pastors, and concerned citizens formed a Healing Heart Council. The council organized screenings for elders, youth, and other Kake residents. These screenings also included potlucks, talking circles, and an "old fashioned game night." They also had the film aired on the local cable channel. An outcome of these activities was to improve the community justice system. To do this, community members received training in "peacemaking circles" — which take the place of a regular court system to solve judicial matters and disputes. The Kake Peacemaking Circle has become a national model of this system.
- At an Alaskan Statewide suicide prevention workshop, participants expanded on the idea of the rose ceremony and taped photos, poems, and wishes onto big sheets of paper. At the end of the conference they burned the paper outside in a fire — "giving loved ones up to God," as one elder explained.

Creating a Community Event

1. Contact local agencies, groups, and opinion leaders from the various communities within your community. Invite them to plan the event.
2. Meet and brainstorm ideas for activities to provide with the screening.
3. Decide, as a group, which activities you want to do.
4. Create an action plan and timeline; assign duties to group members.
5. Plan the logistics — a place to show the film, equipment, someone to run equipment, chairs, space for other activities, and volunteers to help carry out the activities.
6. Secure funding; many organizations offer mini-grants to communities for health promotion and substance abuse prevention projects. Local businesses and groups may also have small amounts of money available.
7. Promote the screening with the local media. Types of media will depend on your community, but may include everything from flyers posted around town and announcements on the CB radio to TV and radio promotions and PSAs.
8. Have a mental health professional at your screening to help people process their feelings. Also provide a list of local mental health resources, as the film may trigger strong emotional responses.

The Screening

Before Viewing

- Preview the film at least once before a group screening.
- Prepare discussion guidelines.
- Contact a mental health professional for information on followup referrals, or to attend the screening and facilitate the discussion following the film.
- Invite a representative or traditional healer from the local tribe and ask them to guide any presentation that follows the screening.

Introducing the Film

- Explain that the film raises the topics of death and dying, family violence, suicide, substance abuse, war and combat and the effects on veterans and their families, family relationships and parenting, cultural traditions and values and the healing process, and how communities can unite to provide support to its members.
- Tell viewers they will have a few moments to think, in silence, once the film is finished.
- Have a tribal representative from the area welcome participants to their traditional homeland.

After Viewing

- Set aside a few moments of silence for contemplation.
- Start discussion with open-ended questions that have no right or wrong answers, for example:
 1. What do you remember most vividly? Why?
 2. With whom did you identify? Explain why.
 3. What do you think the film's message is?
 4. What issues does the film raise for you? Explain.
 5. How is Craig, Alaska, like your community? How does it differ?
 6. How does your culture facilitate or inhibit mourning?
 7. How can people in your community, school, workplace come together to acknowledge the issues that cause hurt and to promote healing?
 8. Who is the uninvited guest?

Other Suggested Activities

- Break audience into small talking circles to discuss issues the film raises.
- Hold a healing ceremony after viewing. Ideas include creating a memorial wreath with roses, making small memorial boxes, creating plaster masks with a partner .
- Hold a drumming event.

- Offer a writing workshop using the questions listed above as a starting point.
- Discussion questions may include:
 1. With whom and what did you identify?
 2. How are other communities using what happened in Craig as a model?

Follow-up Activities

Schools:

1. Watch the video again and ask students to write notes or draw new perceptions that come from revisiting the story. Have them talk about these reflections.
2. Ask students to create scripts based on their lives and their reflections on the Healing Heart Totem story. Have them create performance pieces based on their scripts and put on a public performance of their work.
3. Ask students to create traditional art pieces in response to the story. These works might include a dance, story, beadwork, fur work, dolls, or other type of traditional art.
4. Assign a project in which students must create their own response video or booklet.

Groups:

1. In followup, hold a Talking Circle . The basic talking circle has a designated leader who opens and closes the circle with a prayer, meditation, or moment of reflection. The circle then runs clockwise with everyone speaking one at a time without interruption. Participants usually give their first name before talking and may pass on speaking, choosing just to listen. Confidentiality is respected— what is said in the Circle stays in there.
2. Create T-shirts, quilts, baskets, masks, in commemoration of lost loved ones.

"The Video shows what an impact just one person can have; what a difference you can make as an individual, a group, a family, or a community."

— anonymous viewer

Communities:

1. Assemble an Elders Circle; have the elders hold a talking circle on an issue raised in the film. An outer circle of participants sits and listens. This is a traditional way of teaching in some Native cultures.
2. Form a group to plan, organize, and carry out activities that promote healing. Draw on current community strengths when planning activities for residents. Choose activities that target all members of the community.
3. Encourage the local radio station, newspaper, or cable access TV station, to do a series about the issues raised in the video and what is being done in the community to promote healing and prevention.
4. Set up a teleconference or web based "chat room" where people from isolated areas can call in/sign in to discuss issues raised in the video and to give and receive support.

5. Put together a self-help collection of resources to be housed at the local library. Include videos, books, and magazines, on topics like grief, loss, death and dying, substance abuse, suicide, family violence, and healing from traumatic events. Make it available for community members to borrow.
6. Hold monthly lunch or dinner workshops and invite presenters to speak about the issues raised in the video. Provide free babysitting to encourage parents to participate.
7. Develop a community memorial service to honor loved ones who have died under circumstances depicted in the video.
8. Create a community quilt, garden, or other physical memorial to lost loved ones

"I had a pain in my heart...it never went away. I found out that I couldn't take care of the pain by myself."

— Stan Marsden, in *Carved from the Heart*

Typical Questions and Answers

What is happening with the community and the family now?

Stan Marsden continues to carve poles for other communities in Alaska. For the Marsden family and the town of Craig, the Healing Heart Totem Pole remains an important symbol of sobriety, communal healing, permission to express loss, and empowerment to act. Furthermore, the pole represents that Native cultures are alive and well, continuing to adapt to contemporary concerns. In Craig, there are annual Healing Heart celebrations. "The community is not cured," explains Cindy Gamble, chair of the Healing Heart Committee, "but many subjects were opened and we took a step forward. Prevention is ongoing, although years of habits are not going to be easily changed."

How representative is Craig of other communities in Alaska and the United States?

Substance abuse and family violence impacts people across cultures, classes and borders. Small communities may be more interconnected, with family and individual secrets surfacing more easily than in a city. However, communities, and individuals all over face the loss of loved ones and experience racism and prejudice. Barriers to understanding and working together also effect all of us.

Is it okay to talk about suicide?

Yes, and it might save someone's life. Suicidal behavior is often a "cry for help." Research shows that most people who consider suicide do not want to die. They want their pain to end and can not see any other way to stop it. Many people who think about suicide do or say things that indicate their thoughts. Learn the indicators of suicide and if you observe them in someone, let the person know you care. Ask them if they are thinking about suicide and if the answer is yes, find help for this person. Asking about suicide will not put the idea in a person's head, but will show you heard their cry for help and care enough to respond.

Address stereotypes and misunderstandings that viewers may have about Native people, addictions, and domestic violence:

Have viewers reflect on how biases and beliefs affect their perceptions of the film's message. Encourage them to look for universals and to appreciate the distinctive experiences of the people in the film. Also, addiction is a disease. Although a person may choose to use alcohol or drugs, they can't choose how their body will respond to the substance.

Resources and Information

- *Words from the Heart*, a follow-up video which reflects the powerful audience responses to *Carved from the Heart*. It explores the implications for individuals and communities in witnessing such a profound event. New Day Films, (888) 367-9154
- *Choice of a Lifetime: Returning from the Brink of Suicide*, a New Day video by Nila Bogue, available from Fanlight Productions, (800) 937-4113
- *Native American Post-colonial Psychology*, by Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran.
- *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being*, by Harold Napoleon.
- "Teaching Tolerance", curriculum from: www.Teachingtolerance.org
- National Mental Health Association (800) 969-6642; www.nmha.org
- Anti-Defamation League (212) 490-2525; www.adl.org (racism issues)
- Alcoholics Anonymous (212) 647-1680; www.alcoholics-anonymous.org
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (800) NCA-CALL; www.ncadd.org
- National Association for Native American Children of Alcoholics (206) 903-6574.
- National Suicide Hotline (800) 784-2433.
- National Hope Line Network (800) 784-2433.
- Youth Crisis Hotline (800) 448-4663.
- Teen Advice Online: www.teenadviceonline.org
- Hospice Foundation of America (800) 854-3402; www.hospicefoundation.org
- Akeela, Inc. (800) 478-7738; www.alaskaprevention.org
- Alaska Native Health Board (907) 562-6006.
- 4 Worlds Development Project (403) 320-7144.
- National Depressive & Manic-Depressive Association (800) 826-3632; www.ndmda.org
- National Domestic Violence Hotline (800) 799-7233; www.ndvh.org

About the Carver and Filmmakers

Stan Marsden is a member of the Tsimshian Tribe and lives on Prince of Wales Island in Southeast Alaska. He is also a Master Carver. Marsden began carving as a child and has worked as a full-time carver since the 1990s. He has taught carving for thirty years and has lectured on Native Art. Since the raising of the Healing Heart Pole in Craig, Alaska, Marsden has carved a friendship pole for the elders of Hydaburg, Alaska, and a community pole for Pelican, Alaska. Both projects involved community members in the carving and raising of the poles.

Louise Brady is a member of the Lingit Tribe of Southeast Alaska. She is a Raven (Yeil) of the Frog Clan (Kiks.adi) from the Point House (X'aaka Hit) of Sitka, Alaska (Sheet'ka Kwaan). Brady has worked in human services for years, assisting people to overcome the adversities caused by the social problems that exist in Indian Country. She strongly believes in the practice of sovereignty in Native American communities as a means to overcome these problems. These problems exist today as a manifestation of years of oppression and intergenerational grief caused by the imposition of foreign values on traditional Native cultures — which existed and flourished for centuries on Turtle Island before contact! Louise continues to work to the end of achieving true sovereignty for her tribe, as a whole, and for each of its tribal citizens.

Ellen Frankenstein is a filmmaker and community artist. She is a member of New Day Films, a national film distribution cooperative of independent media makers. Frankenstein is a Fulbright-Hays Fellow and the recipient of other grants and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs. She has coordinated community media projects and taught in schools from south-central Los Angeles to Southeast Alaska.

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