“They Will Matter to Us Forever”

They will matter to us forever. They mattered back then. There was a period of history when those things were taken from us and we were told that they didn’t matter, and we began to believe that they didn’t matter. But we never did let go: they still matter.

DARNELL RIDES AT THE DOOR

We have to break that chain from the residential schools, from what our parents, grandparents, great-grandparents learned at residential school. You know, they couldn’t speak their language or talk about their culture and so now we are breaking that chain. We’re saying, “Enough is enough. We are who we are, and we’re going to learn, we have to learn, take care of what we have.” Such as these shirts, and our stories and our language, you know, we have to utilize what we have and the elders that we do have so we don’t lose these in the future.

ALISON FRANK-TAILFEATHERS

Our history is oral. So this was their education, this was their certificate, this was their PhD degree. So we can show young people: hey, you want to be like this, you want to be able to wear this? You better achieve it!

That’s the other impact of the shirts. I don’t only look at the spiritual. There’s other impact to it. To our young people. A lot of our young people are trying to identify themselves. They don’t really know who they [are]. All they know is, I’m an Indian, and that’s it. They don’t know their history. They didn’t know how we achieved things, and what we get to achieve that, what do we need to do. So these shirts, I’m not saying they’re going to go on war coups any more, but they can go to university, they can go achieve business, teacher, doctor, lawyer, chief, and say, okay, I’ve now achieved, I need my sacred shirt to be made.

FRANK WEASEL HEAD
Well, I have to say this. We’re very fortunate that you brought these over here, otherwise we would have never seen them. I would have never known that these things were made like this. I’ve never seen anything like this. And to actually, you know, not just in pictures . . . to actually see them when we went to the museum. And even Rosie [Red Crow] said that too. This is really something. To actually see them, the way they made them in those days, and the preparations that went into it. Said it was a lot of work. That’s what she said. . . . But this is really something for us. We’re very fortunate that we were able to see them. And I know a lot of us that were there, they were simply amazed that these from way over a hundred years old they suddenly come back to us. Almost like a blessing, you know. A blessing for them, and for you.

SOPHIE TAILFEATHERS

LAURA PEERS: What would you say to future generations who might see these shirts?

LAVERN SCOUT: Be proud. That is how you’re going to survive. And seek out your culture. By coming to view these shirts I think you have made a big step to finding out where you come from and these are your ancestors and [they] are what your ancestors wore. And if you learn about the values and the tradition of your people it will only enhance your life, it will make your life a lot a lot better.