

## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

My name is John Loftus, and I've spent the bulk of my 16 years with the Muckleshoot Tribe serving as its Director of Media Services. Early in 2003, the Tribal Council decided to make a film documenting that year's Tribal Canoe Journey, which is a truly epic annual adventure shared by the Native Peoples of the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia. I was in charge of the project, and had a signed memorandum from the Tribal Chairman to prove it.

We'd made a documentary on another subject the year before using a well-known local Native filmmaking team, but the results were less than satisfactory. The process had become chaotic and wound up being an unpleasant experience for all concerned. Having seen the downside of documentary filmmaking in 3-D and Technicolor, I was determined to get the best possible Native filmmaker for our Canoe Journey film, which was of great importance to the tribe. I wanted to prove just how well a documentary could be done, given the right team and sound process management.

The filmmaker I found was James Fortier, and I have always been proud of the choice I made. He took the loose-knit conceptual framework of the project and breathed life into it, developing a rich and fascinating character-driven cinema verite' type of approach that resulted in a finished product that made lasting stars of many of our tribal members. Our feature-length film, "Pulling Together" has been shown throughout Indian Country and the featured players are minor celebrities to this day, often being recognized by people they've never met.

This success of "Pulling Together" is a tribute to the acutely honed professional skills of James Fortier, who took more than 60 hours of footage of a journey where more things went wrong than right, and transformed it into something that sheds light not only on the cultural aspects of the journey, but also on human nature itself. Our tribe's Canoe Family was going through some growing pains. Numerous conflicts arose, and as co-producer on behalf of the tribe, I was in a state of justifiable panic. These were NOT the type of things you want happening when you are making a documentary film about your tribe! I truly couldn't see how a good film could come out of it.

James retired to his editing cave, a darkened studio in his home, and immersed himself in the many hours of footage, grappling with these problems. The next deliverable was to be the Film Treatment document. He delivered it on time and it was terrific -- well-written, colorful yet concise and, best of all, it truly did prove to be a durable document, providing a true roadmap that eventually took us to the end of the project. Once the treatment document was approved by the tribe, James began to actually craft the film, providing us (again, on schedule) with a succession of increasingly refined cuts, starting with that was over three hours long (and every minute of it interesting) and eventually paring it down to its final 90-minute run time.

Some of the days had been difficult when we were filming on location, often on distant beaches far from any modern convenience, and there were times when I may have doubted that James Fortier could actually deliver the goods. He is, without question, a top-notch cameraman, but I expected that. It was the skills he showed afterwards, in post-production, that firmly established the deep respect

I have for him to this day. The three-week canoe journey that was the subject of our documentary had gone in almost every possible direction but the right one as it unfolded that summer, and this made James Fortier's feat all the more remarkable. When James finally emerged from his cave, he had crafted a film that was dramatic, compelling and, as it reached its climactic conclusion, ultimately inspirational and uplifting.

We had a gala local premiere for the tribal members, and after that it was all good times, going to film festivals, being nominated for awards and actually winning a few of them, etc. Our film, "Pulling Together," is still being shown all over the world. James Fortier is the man who made it happen.

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