



The Meaning of Life

Director: Hugh Brody, Canada, 2008, 82 minutes

The Meaning of Life takes us into an innovative program for rehabilitating prisoners, a collaboration between the Chehalis Nation of British Columbia and Correctional Service of Canada. Filmed over the course of two years at *Kwikwèxwelhp* (formerly known as the Elbow Lake Correctional Facility), the film exposes a different way to look at the concepts underlying punishment and rehabilitation. It proposes that, by including community in the process, the current prison system can be significantly changed. Director Hugh Brody was granted unparalleled access to prisoners and staff at the facility, as well as to the Chehalis Nation elders who run the program.

Over half of the men at *Kwikwèxwelhp* are from First Nations backgrounds. The others have agreed to accept Aboriginal spirituality and community as central elements in rehabilitation programs. Most of them are serving life sentences. The men followed in this film have committed murders, armed robberies, and sexual assault. All the inmates are struggling to find meaning in lives that have gone agonizingly, terrifyingly wrong. One of the men asked the central question of the film in his own way: *You commit yourself to death; you've taken away your life by taking a life... where do I go from there?*

In the film, we hear the voices of many who have never been heard, people who have lived in deep silences of the soul. Childhood abuse, experiences at residential schools, the violence of the streets — the men speak openly and intimately about these elements of their

lives. They take us on a journey into what it means to be among the most disadvantaged, vulnerable, and violent populations in Canadian society. The pain of some men, when speaking of their childhood, is palpable.

The Meaning of Life asks the difficult question: is there a justice system where we can find forgiveness and redemption?

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Hugh Brody is an author, filmmaker, lecturer and mediator who has been involved for 35 years in aboriginal issues in Canada and internationally. His contributions to seeking change and justice for aboriginal communities began in the 1970s with the Land Use and Occupancy studies of northern Canada, and as an expert witness for the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry and the Treaty 8 land claims. Educated at Oxford and an honorary associate of the Scott Polar Institute, Mr. Brody now holds a Senior Canada Research Chair at the University College of the Fraser Valley, a seven-year appointment by the Office of the Prime Minister of Canada. His publications include 9 books, including *Maps and Dreams* and *The Other Side of Eden*, over 50 essays and 12 documentary films, including *The Washing of Tears*, *Time Immemorial* and *Inside Australia*.

FILMMAKER IN ATTENDANCE