

Saskatchewan · New

## Acting Piapot chief, other Sask. Indigenous people react to CBC investigation into Buffy Sainte-Marie

Acting chief of Piapot First Nation says his community will not turn their back on Sainte-Marie



Alexander Quon · CBC News · Posted: Oct 27, 2023 8:11 PM CDT | Last Updated: 22 minutes ago



Buffy-Sainte Marie's claims to Indigenous identity have come into question after an investigation by CBC's *The Fifth Estate*. (Chris Young/The Canadian Press)

The acting chief of Piapot First Nation says his community will not turn its back on Buffy Sainte-Marie after an [investigation by CBC's \*The Fifth Estate\*](#) revealed information that contradict the songwriter's claims to Indigenous ancestry.

"I can relate and understand to a lot of our people who feel betrayed and in a sense lied to by her claiming Indigenous ancestry, when in fact she may not be Indigenous," said Ira Lavallee.

"When it comes to Buffy specifically we can't pick and choose which part of our culture we decide to adhere to.... We do have one of our families in our community that did adopt her. Regardless of her ancestry, that adoption in our culture to us is legitimate."

For many years, Saint-Marie claimed she was born on the Piapot First Nation near Regina, but that has been called into question by evidence obtained by CBC News, including Sainte-Marie's Stoneham, Mass., birth certificate and members of her family saying they believe her story is built on an elaborate fabrication.



Ira Lavalée is the acting chief of Piapot First Nation. (Adam Bent/CBC)  
Lavalée said the information in the investigation is new and a shock, but it does not change his mind.

"The majority of us in our community, my generation, we've lived our entire lives knowing Buffy as she is, as she was," said Lavalée.

"She is a part of her community. She spent time in her community."

**Watch the full episode of CBC's *The Fifth Estate* detailing the investigation:**

In the face of the *Fifth Estate* episode, Sainte-Marie issued a public statement saying she found the allegations "deeply hurtful," and that she continues to claim her Indigenous identity.

- **Buffy Sainte-Marie calls Indigenous identity questions hurtful**

The fallout of CBC's investigation has been emotional for many across Canada.

One of those people is Crystal Semagenis, a member of the Little Pine First Nation, located about 175 kilometres northwest of Saskatoon.

Semagenis is a survivor of the [Sixties Scoop](#), a period of Canada's history where Indigenous children were taken from their homes and placed with non-Indigenous families. Sainte-Marie has said she was taken in the Sixties Scoop, but CBC's investigation also called that into question.

Semagenis said that while she has come to accept a new truth about Sainte-Marie, many will need space to mourn.

"We can still love Buffy Sainte-Marie. She remains an excellent singer, musician, songwriter. Those things will never change, but I know she's not a Sixties Scooper and that hurts. That hurts us deeply," Semagenis told

Semagenis said she knows people are struggling and that many have not yet grappled with the widespread phenomenon of false Indigenous identity claims, something she has actively tried to root out.

"People don't know the extent of Indigenous identity fraud and that's a huge problem. There is no data, so people don't know," she told CBC.

"So when this issue today came forth, I knew it was going to be met with great resistance, great emotional fallout."

**'The truth will set you free'**

Kamao Cappel is a residential school survivor from Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation, which is located about 10 kilometres away from Piapot First Nation.

Cappel said Sainte-Marie has been considered a hero to people in the area since Cappel was a kid. He said these revelations about her Indigenous ancestry will hurt young people.

"As adults we can take it. We've been through so much already. Rightly we can accept this. We can take it. It's the children, the children and the youth of today who look up to Buffy ... you can see they need somebody like Buffy," he said.

"It's the children that really need this so it's like a star has fallen. So how do we replace that?"

#### **LISTEN | Buffy Sainte-Marie's Indigenous ancestry challenged:**

"They've been through some really terrible things. And now this just rubs salt in the wounds," Cappel said.

"People might just say, 'Oh, it's just music,' 'Oh, it's just a pop star,' but these have real impacts on people."

Cappel admitted that he felt conflicted, sometimes thinking the revelations should've been left buried, allowing people to live "happily ever after."

"But that's not a reality and we'll survive," he told CBC. "What was the saying? 'The truth will set you free.' It's better to deal with the truth and we'll be OK."

- **THE FIFTH ESTATE**

**Buffy Sainte-Marie's claim to Indigenous ancestry contradicted by family members and birth certificate**

#### **FRONT BURNER**

**Buffy Sainte-Marie's Indigenous ancestry challenged**

For Kerry Benjoe of the Muscowpetung Saulteaux Nation, the results of the investigation are hard, but necessary.

Benjoe, the managing editor of Eagle Feather News and a former CBC reporter, said no one can call into question Sainte-Marie's positive work for Indigenous communities.

However, as a journalist, Benjoe said she looks at the information that's been presented and concludes it is not easily disputed.

"We need to separate Buffy 'the artist' and Buffy 'the person,'" Benjoe said. "The reality is, she is not who she said she is. And so I think we're all just kind of trying to digest that now."

Benjoe said she believes the details will hurt many people, because Sainte-Marie has long been held up as a hero, an icon and someone that Indigenous people should emulate.

Benjoe said the investigation also presents a chance for a conversation about how people reap benefits by claiming to be Indigenous.

"Maybe this is the catalyst we need to actually start making real changes," she said.

"I think now we need to actually put in the work to ensure that Indigenous people who claim to this identity are actually Indigenous, because this exploitation has gone on for far too long."

**WATCH | Sask. reaction to CBC's Buffy Sainte-Marie investigation:**



Reaction continues to pour in the wake of this CBC investigation.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

---



[Alexander Quon](#)

Reporter

Alexander Quon is a reporter with CBC Saskatchewan based in Regina. After working in Atlantic Canada for four years he's happy to be back in his home province. He has previously worked with the CBC News investigative unit in Nova Scotia and Global News in Halifax. Alexander specializes in data-reporting, COVID-19 and municipal political coverage. He can be reached at: [Alexander.Quon@cbc.ca](mailto:Alexander.Quon@cbc.ca).

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/buffy-sainte-marie-reaction-piapot-1.7011149>