

As one of the two co-ordinators of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), Sherry Pictou has had a long journey. Battling the obstacles of being born in poverty and under political oppression, today she leads a global struggle to end such conditions in fishing communities.

Sherry Pictou, 47, mother of a son and daughter and grandmother of one granddaughter, is a Canadian indigenous woman. The regions that indigenous people of Canada inhabit are known as "First Nations". It was only in the 1960s when Sherry was a young

of life of the Bear River First Nation, part of a larger confederation of people known as the Mi'kmaq, the aboriginal inhabitants of much of Canada's Atlantic coast.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, Sherry witnessed and participated in the struggle of the Mi'kmaq for political recognition, socioeconomic improvement, and basic human rights. Her grandmother became the second Mi'kmaq woman to become the Chief of a First Nation reserve. But the recognition of the rights of the Mi'kmaq and the improvement in social conditions through the 1980s and 1990s was a double-edged sword. Government programme for education, health, and housing also served to destroy the traditional way of life. It was assimilation with a benevolent face.

A turning point for the Bear River First Nation was when a landmark decision by the Supreme Court of Canada, guaranteeing the right of the Mi'kmaq to a commercial fishery, was undermined by the federal government by integrating First Nations into mainstream corporate-style fisheries management. The Bear River First Nation was one of a very small number of First Nations to say "No" to this maneuver and their leader was Chief Sherry Pictou.

It was about this time that Sherry met Thomas Kocherry, the founder of WFFP, at an international workshop on community-based management. According to Sherry, "WFFP was the only one that understood our struggle, and its constitution encompassed the values of the Bear River First Nation." A few years later, Sherry Pictou became a co-ordinator of the WFFP. She is now engaged in fighting for the political and labour rights of fisher women throughout the world. ❖

## PROFILE

# Sherry Pictou

Sherry, a Canadian indigenous woman, is one of the two co-ordinators of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP)

Profiled  
by **John Kearney**  
(john.kearney@  
ns.sympatico.ca)  
Nova Scotia, Canada

girl that First Nation women in Canada gained the right to vote. Until this time, they were wards of the State.

Raised on the reserve of the Bear River First Nation, Sherry experienced the poverty, poor housing, and alcoholism that characterized so many First Nation communities. While the establishment of the reserve system by the Canadian Government was a deliberate attempt to marginalize and assimilate First Nations, the reserves nonetheless served as a land base, albeit small, for the continuation of traditional hunting and fishing livelihoods, nourishing land stewardship values.

As a young woman, and in her own words, "being something of a 'tom boy,'" Sherry went out hunting and fishing with her uncle. Thus she learned the traditional practices and way