



# Deer's dream gig

By Greg David

**T**racey Deer's dream has come true. When she was 12, she dreamed of being a fictional filmmaker but followed the documentary genre in university. *Mohawk Girls*, prepping for a potential fifth season on APTN, was first created as a documentary film but burnout caused Deer to revisit the project as a scripted series. A chance meeting with Cynthia Knight — they were introduced at a Christmas party hosted by Rezolution Pictures — cemented their friendship and partnership co-showrunning the Canadian Screen Award-nominated series about four women living on a First Nations reserve.

## Does everyone bring personal stories into the writers' room as inspiration for Bailey, Zoe, Caitlin and Anna's adventures?

We definitely pull all of our storylines from personal experiences; hardships and relationship disasters are wonderful fodder for ideas. We always want their stories to be as grounded and as realistic as possible.

## Who is in the writers' room for season five?

We have Heidi Foss and Penelope Laurence. And we have our story coordinator, Emilie Arcand. We're an all-female writers' room. The show is about women and who better to write about them than women?

## *Mohawk Girls* began as a documentary. When did you realize it made sense as a scripted series?

I was working on my first feature film in northern Quebec, and I was in a car in a blizzard in the middle of the night. It was during this long ride that I reflected on my relationship at the time and my sister's relationship. I started making notes on the crazy things going on in our lives. That was at the beginning of my documentary career, and I did ten years of them. When my last documentary, *Club Native*, was done I was suffering from emotional burnout. I couldn't come up with another idea and months had gone by.

When I was a child, I wanted to be a fiction filmmaker, and I only fell in love with documentaries when I was in university. I thought, 'Let's see if I can be a fiction filmmaker after all.' I wrote a short film that was the context of *Mohawk Girls* and filmed that.

## Was it a bit of a mind twist going from documentary filmmaking to scripted television?

A total twist. I find fiction to be very freeing, and you can do anything you want. With documentaries, a lot of the storytelling happens in the editing room. It's an entirely different process to have the sky as the limit, but very, very fun.

## How does the co-showrunner partnership between yourself and Cynthia work?

This is our first time, and we're doing it as a team. We both bring different strengths to the table and have very naturally fallen to those strengths. Cynthia is very 'big picture,' and I am a director, so very much about the details. Instead of one brain balancing the two, you have two putting all of their energy into these two departments.

## Series like *Mohawk Girls* really spotlight real First Nations stories. How important is it to tell those stories?

There needs to be a partnership between my people and this country to make things better. Bridges need to be built between the communities, and one of the things we wanted to do with *Mohawk Girls* was, 'Welcome to our world.' Come in and get to know us. We are more than the 30-second news bite that is negative and depressing. Understand the social issues we're facing. Once you understand, help us with them. We have incredible stories of both joy and hardship, and it's important that Canadians know that because they play a big part in that story. ■

Past seasons of *Mohawk Girls* can be found on APTN.ca.