



THE MEANING OF LIFE

a feature documentary and educational DVD



SYNOPSIS

The Meaning of Life is an 82- minute documentary which looks at a very unusual prison. And at a fascinating model 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 examines a different way to look at the concepts underlying punishment and rehabilitation and the idea that the current prison system can be significantly changed by including community in the process.

Director Hugh Brody, who holds a Canada Research Chair at the University of the Fraser Valley, has been granted unparalleled access to prisoners and staff at the facility, as well as to the elders of the Chehalis Nation.



What happens in a prison that really is for Aboriginal people?

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 grievous sexual crimes. All the inmates are struggling to find meaning in lives that have gone agonizingly, terrifyingly wrong. One of the inmates in our film 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?”

We listen to the voices of many who have never been heard, who have lived in deep silences of the soul, some of whose spirits have been broken. Childhood abuse, experience of residential school, the violence of the streets. The men speak about these elements of their lives, and take us deep into what it has meant to be among the most disadvantaged, vulnerable and violent populations in Canadian society.



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

Educational DVD Features

In addition to the feature documentary, the DVD release includes two and a half hours of supplementary interviews and reflections from inmates, elders and experts which can be accessed by students of the law, criminology, Aboriginal studies, sociology and anthropology. The DVD will also provide discussion materials for legislators, judges, lawyers and justice system staff across the country.



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