

## Transcript - DJ Burnt Bannock

### 1. Please introduce yourself and give us a quick synopsis of your series DJ Burnt Bannock.

DARCY: I'm Darcy, from Edmonton First Nation. I'm a writer, producer, TV host and actor based out of Winnipeg. I'm the Creator and writer of *DJBB*, and I will play Kevin Cardinal, aka DJ Burnt Bannock in the series.

REBECCA: I'm Rebecca Gibson, Partner & Head of Development for Eagle Vision, and Story Editor and a director on *DJBB*.

**SYNOPSIS:** Darcy Waite (host of APTN's *That's AWSM!*) stars as Kevin Cardinal, aka DJ Burnt Bannock, a struggling Cree DJ who realizes that if he is going to achieve the success he dreams of, he needs to make a mega move to prove to the world, and himself, that he is seriously talented. Too bad he's about to do it all wrong.

### 2. Tell us where the idea for the series came from and how you came to write/develop it.

DARCY: I was producing my first feature with my friend Madison Thomas, and we had a bar scene that we needed some people to play DJs in the background. Me and my roommate ended up filling the roles. We had a blast. The cast and crew loved it. It kind of snowballed from there. I made the logo and put it on stickers and swag. It made people laugh. Then the ImagineNATIVE web series pitch came up, and I thought, *what would a series look like with these two characters?* I quickly came up with a concept and a season 1 arc for the pitch. We didn't win, but my producer Cynthia Murdock and I made it to the pitching finals. After the award show, APTN approached us and said to apply to the RFP in the spring. Fast forward to the spring and Winnipeg is in lockdown. I email Rebecca to see if EV is interested in this project. They said yes and we spent the next two weeks writing out a 4-episode series and pitch package. I have the philosophy that as a young filmmaker it's hard to ask a production company to hire you on the bigger shows if you don't have the experience. But if you bring a show to them that they could use to train you, it's easier for a production company to attach you to work on the bigger shows. This show and my writing wouldn't be where it is without the work/ teaching that Rebecca has done with me over the pandemic.

REBECCA: My partners Lisa Meeches (who recently became a member of the Order of Canada), Kyle Irving, and I all believe in mentorship. Eagle Vision just celebrated 20 years since Lisa founded it, and mentorship has been fundamental to the corporate culture for over two decades. My partners and I had great mentors throughout our careers, and one of them is Lesley Oswald, who was the director on the first show we all did together, *Tipi Tales*. She always pushed us to ask ourselves, “what do you want to do?” That is a very hard question to answer, but it is important for any artist. With Darcy, he wanted to do comedy. So, we wanted to support that. We’d developed some other content together, and when it came time to develop *DJBB* we thought, okay, at the very least this is an excellent opportunity for mentorship. The fact that it got ordered by APTN, then supported by the Bell Fund was a bonus, because the mentorship will continue through the process of making it. Not to mention, it’s going to be a super fun show for us to work on, and for audiences to participate in. When we started working on *DJBB*, we were just finishing four seasons of our factual series *Taken*, about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and men and boys and LGBTQIA2S+ individuals. We were all really grateful to get to work on the show, but it was really hard. When Darcy brought *DJBB* to us, we all felt that we needed to work on it. The show approaches some challenging topics, but it does it with humour. We all needed that release. We’re very grateful and excited to get to make it.

**3. Eagle Vision is Canada’s most prolific Indigenous-owned production company, with some major accomplishments in film and television. Can you tell us what it’s like to be working with them/having their support on DJ Burnt Bannock?**

DARCY: Working with Eagle Vision and having them on board for *DJBB* changes the foundation of your project. Personally, I’ve only been out of school for four years. Eagle vision has over 20 years of experience. That’s like getting to play with Gretzky as a rookie. My favorite saying is, “you don’t know what you don’t know.” I did a web series with a budget of \$30K two years ago and it was the hardest show I’ve produced so far because it was my first show I had with a budget. EV has taken the line producing out of the equation so I can focus on the story and work with Rebecca to grow my skills as a writer. Working together has elevated my skills tremendously. Without EV I’d still be trying to break out as an artist. It’s not every day you get to work with a company like EV. They have different ways of mentoring people. I think I got the throw-you-in-the-deep-end-and-see-if-you-sink-or-swim method. Sometimes I wish they would have thrown me a couple of floaties but honestly, I wouldn’t change a thing because it taught me to hold myself to a high standard.

**4. The series promises to explore important issues through comedy. What are some of the issues you hope to explore and why is comedy such a great genre for exploring important issues like these?**

DARCY: A lot of the issues we see in *DJBB* came out naturally. When I sat down to flush out *DJBB*, I wanted to tell a story of what I just went through in my mid 20's. They're a lot of the stuff I went through before I landed my first hosting gig on APTN. I always knew I wanted to be an actor and comedian. Before I made money telling jokes I was considered immature, Before I started getting roles, people teased me about chasing the dream. It's what every artist who starts late in their life goes through. Then you add being mixed to the whole thing and there are tons of topics to talk about like growing up in a non-nuclear family. I see a lot of shows about the community (the rez) but that's not my story. My story is being an Indigenous person growing up in the city, having to connect to culture without having a tie to the community. My dad's Christian and my mom's a traditionalist. I grew up going to ceremony on Saturdays and church on Sundays. There are a million ways to tell these stories, and each artist is going to tell them in their style. I'm a comedian. I enjoy telling these stories through comedy. As the Elders say, laughter is medicine.

REBECCA: We did a film called *We Were Children* about residential schools that was released in 2012. It was, and continues to be, one of the most impactful films about residential schools. Prior to making this film, Lisa and her team (myself included) travelled across Canada interviewing residential school survivors for the Government of Canada's Legacy of Hope project. Many survivors shared their story for the first time through that experience. It astonished me that as they told these stories, *all* of which were heart wrenching and horrifying, there were always moments of light in the darkness. In every interview there were moments of humour. In every interview there were moments of laughter. It was almost inconceivable, but it taught me so much about how we process pain, and how we tell stories so others can understand pain without tuning out. There are important things that Darcy wants to address in *DJBB*. We know that if you can sneak important conversations into things that make us laugh, we have the release we need to process those important topics.

**5. What has it been like working together, writing/punching up scripts, what is the extent of your collaboration, etc.?**

DARCY: It's been a great learning experience. I still have so much to learn, and Rebecca has been such a great mentor since I started working at EV. Without Rebecca I don't think I would have been able to write a series on my own that would have received the Bell Fund. It's a very



competitive fund. Throughout this process it's been like the workout montage in *Hercules*. At first I was this little scrawny writer. A year later, I have big writing biceps and I know what expected of a series writer. My goal is to be a writer on a sitcom and eventually be like the people I look up to like Rob McElhenny, Issa Rae, Guz Khan, Aisling Bea etc.. People who make their own projects. People who carved a space for themselves to be themselves.

How our collaboration works is I'll write the eps then send it to Rebecca to polish, then I'll polish her polish. We'll jump on Zoom to talk about the eps and how we should move forward, jokes that work, jokes that don't etc...

REBECCA: Darcy wrote all the scripts, I did a polish. Darcy polished my polish. Now Darcy is polishing that polish, and the cycle continues. Because mentorship is important to us, we'll do things like "Screenplay Day" at Eagle Vision where we break down famous scripts based on various scriptwriting theories like Blake Snyder's Beat Sheet from his book *Save the Cat*, or the Hero's Journey model by genre in Stuart Voytilla's *Myth and the Movies*. So, throughout the process of developing and writing *DJBB* Darcy and I talked about things from a technical perspective as we went. We talked about joke structures. We talk about other content that makes us laugh (we share a love of Danny McBride, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, eating ice cream out of a soft serve machine...). Darcy and I are comedy nerds, so we love to analyze what makes people laugh, and we also love to make each other laugh.

As we start casting (with the Bell Fund we are able to cast members of ACTRA), we want to ensure that we drill down deeper into the specificity of each character with each actor in mind. For instance, Paul Rabliauskus (who is set to play Allan) is Ojibwe, and Darcy and Joy Keeper (who is set to play Kookum) are Cree. So, we need to make sure the maternal and paternal lineage are clear, and we need to make sure the names are right, etc... It's details like that that are so important and make everything more real and therefore better. We have asked Elders and Knowledge Keepers for help throughout the process to ensure that we're on the right path spiritually and creatively, as we do with all Eagle Vision shows.

**6. You have had the support of Bell Fund since very early on in the development process, from pitching the show at Imaginative, all the way through production. How has their support been integral to seeing this project come to fruition?**

DARCY: It was really cool to get that email from the Bell Fund saying that they saw the pitch at ImagineNATIVE and were excited to see the pitch application come in. Having the Bell Fund is a game changer. I've tried to do a show at a lower budget and it's a financial challenge from Day 1. Especially during times like these, to be able to pay people at rates they can put food on



the table for their families is a special feeling. If we weren't in a pandemic I would talk about the creative and all the cool stuff we can do now. But for me it's the crew, the cast. I remember when we shot *Burden of Truth*, hearing the stories from the crew, about how tough the pandemic has been financially. I'm humbled that it's *DJBB* we get to shoot but I remember when I was a kid and sometimes my mom couldn't afford to put food on the table. To be able to help families out is a great feeling.

REBECCA: We would have made the show for APTN with a much lower budget had the Bell Fund not come in with their support. Lower budget = lower quality. And lower reach. It's no secret that to get people to watch your content you need to pay for reach. The creative excellence of Darcy's work would have been there, but we would have had to make a lot of sacrifices to get the show made. Now the team still has the energy of putting our everything into this process, but we are able to do two more episodes, tell more of this story, and hire our dream cast and crew to join us on the journey.

We have an incredible DM Producer on staff, Ginger Dilk, and her vision has had a massive impact on Eagle Vision's content including the #SacredMMIWG social action campaign for the Government of Canada's National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls which reached over 1/3 of all Canadians and won international awards. The Bell Fund's participation in *DJBB* ensures that Ginger and Darcy and their team can get very creative with the DM and social media strategy across a variety of platforms. This is a young, fun show that is about a video going viral by accident, so it'll be exciting to see if we can make that happen with the series and accompanying content on purpose. We could not accomplish this without the Bell Fund's participation – everything would be pretty bare bones.

## **7. What other projects have you worked on that would have been impossible without this kind of funding? Why is this kind of funding so important in today's cultural landscape?**

DARCY: Pretty much everything I've done as an independent producer so far. As a young producer, it's been a grind. Having the Bell Fund is awesome because we can have a little bit of breathing room now. I remember when we broke the show down before the Bell Fund came in and our AD was telling me I had to cut jokes because it didn't work in the schedule. I had one feeling, devastated. I'm just kidding but it sucked because I knew those jokes would kill. Funding like this helps grow and support our next generation of filmmakers, it gets our voices heard (and seen). When I was a kid, I never saw an Indigenous person like me on TV. I'm pretty sure there are very few or no Indigenous foster kids who've been able to tell a story like mine at this level of funding.



REBECCA: The Bell Fund supported the digital media for Eagle Vision's series *Taken* for APTN and CBC about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. This includes a beautiful, comprehensive website full of resources, a web series, an app called the Taken Knowledge Keeper app that was developed with families of women and girls who have gone missing or been murdered, law enforcement, academics, and advocates. Katarina Ziervogel, a Deaf, Ojibwe-Mohawk writer, wrote a series of groundbreaking blogs as part of our digital media for the series. Our *Taken* social media has a large and dedicated following. It's its own community and hub for the issue. We have seen change happen through the blog posts, and social media posts, and responses to the resources on the website. The *Taken* DM was nominated for a Canadian Screen Award for Best Cross Platform project. It is an essential component of the series. When Lisa Meeches, who hosted *Taken*, spoke to the audience, she said several times throughout the episode – *visit our website*. Cases have been reopened, tips have come in, conversations about important issues have been sparked *because* the Bell Fund supported this show. Would it have been impossible without the Bell Fund? Yes, it would have been impossible.

I only want to work in an industry in which there are no barriers to entry. I think it's gross that people have been excluded from film and television because they are not men, or because they have a disability, or because they are not white, or because they are not wealthy, or other stupid reasons. When artists and content creators are supported by funds that are inclusive, and accessible, and promote equity, those artists and content creators can make a living. It makes it possible for people to work to share their stories and make their voices heard. It costs money for content to be seen (I mean, we all know things can go viral, but I'm talking about professional, industry-standard content), so these funds not only support artists to share their stories, but they also support these artists' stories being seen and heard. That's major.

## **8. You have several mentors/mentees on your team. Why is mentorship so important in the TV/film industry?**

DARCY: Without mentorship there is no Darcy Waite or Madison Thomas. We wouldn't be at the level we are at in our careers without mentors like Kyle Irving, Lisa Meeches and Rebecca Gibson. As we get funds like this, it's our job to start to help the next generation of filmmakers. Kids like us that need a shot to show what they can do. A rising tide raises all ships.

REBECCA: I wanted to work in film and TV from the time I was a tiny kid. I was already working professionally as an actor in high school. I asked my high school guidance counsellor how to work in film and TV, and she told me to go to university for broadcasting – not what I

wanted to do. I sent letters to all the local production companies asking for an internship – no response. I went to university for theatre and English and continued to work in the theatre while reading every book in the library on film and TV, and volunteering on sets. I went to film school in New York, and asked my instructors, “how do I work in film and TV.” My teachers were like, “sweetheart, if we knew the answer to that we wouldn’t be teaching.” I realized I could not work in film and TV without on-the-job training. Having worked in Toronto, Vancouver, and New York, I came home to Winnipeg, and immediately the world opened up when Lesley Oswald gave me a job as a production assistant. She set the template for Eagle Vision’s mentorships, because she also mentored Lisa and Kyle. I was mentored by several powerful women in the industry, including Kim Todd (Emmy Award winning producer of *Fargo*, and *Handmaid’s Tale*), Norma Bailey (Cannes award winner, international TV director), and many others. They kept letting me do whatever I wanted to try, and pushing me to explore, to work hard, and to read everything I was photocopying (that was Lesley’s trick – you can learn a lot about contracts, budgets, etc... when you’re standing around waiting for things to copy...although most things are sent electronically now). I would not be in this industry without having been mentored. I have mentored, without exaggeration, thousands of others who have participated in the industry in a variety of capacities. Many of those people mentor others. If we don’t have mentorships, particularly those that are paid, and promote equity, accessibility, and inclusion, we don’t have an industry.