


THE
ART
OF
SUCCESS

A CIVIL ENGINEER FINDS HIS LIFE'S
PURPOSE — IN SPRAY PAINT

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It was never Trenton Pierre's plan to become an artist.

As the youngest of five brothers, he felt like he was living in some "big shadows." And as a member of the Katzie Nation, who grew up listening to horrific tales of his father's residential-school experiences, Pierre always felt a duty to prove that First Nations people are as smart and capable as anyone else.

"It made me want to do something big with my life," he says.

He decided that civil engineering was a worthy career, and from a young age he worked hard to follow that path. Though he never obtained his P.Eng. professional licence, his eagerness to learn and his willingness to work long days meant he excelled quickly.

He even taught himself how to read complex drawings: "I could see construction drawings in 3D, even though they were just on flat paper." His artistic brain was already revealing itself.

By his early 20s, Pierre was overseeing multi-million-dollar highway and bridge projects all over the province. He was well-respected in his industry and earning a handsome salary. According to society's usual markers of success, he should have been happy. But he wasn't.

"I was stuck in a funk," he says. "I missed home. I realized I'd been working so hard on this career that I'd never really taken the time to breathe."

With his employer's blessing, he moved back home and started working on different types of projects, which allowed him to learn new skills. He also saw his family more.

"It was getting better, but I still felt super empty," he says. "I was just numb."

One evening, while scrolling on his phone, he came across a video of spray-paint artist Porfirio Jimenez. Pierre watched the video at least 10 times.

"It was the first time my heart fluttered for anything like this," he says.

Never one to hesitate, Pierre immediately went to Home Depot and bought cans of spray paint. Then he headed to Michael's for a canvas, but the store was closed. Undeterred, Pierre pulled a piece of art from his own wall and

painted it white, turning it into a canvas. He stayed up half the night painting a "deer overlooking these misty mountains with a meteor-shower sky."

Finally, it was finished. "I leaned it up against a wall, and I just started bawling my eyes out." He spent hours staring at it, until he realized he had to leave for work soon. "I'd been up all night painting and crying, wondering what this is."

Very quickly, he figured out what it all meant. "I think this is what I want to do with my life. I want to be an artist."

The first person he told was his father, who defied every parental stereotype by offering encouragement: "You have to do what your spirit wants."

Two days after creating his first painting, Pierre quit his job, abandoning the career he'd spent eight years pursuing.

"I hung up my hard hat. And then I picked up the spray can."

Both of Pierre's parents supported this decision, but his brothers thought he was crazy. He laments that society constantly reinforces the message that "an artist isn't going to make it," noting that schools usually treat art as an afterthought, not as a possible career path.

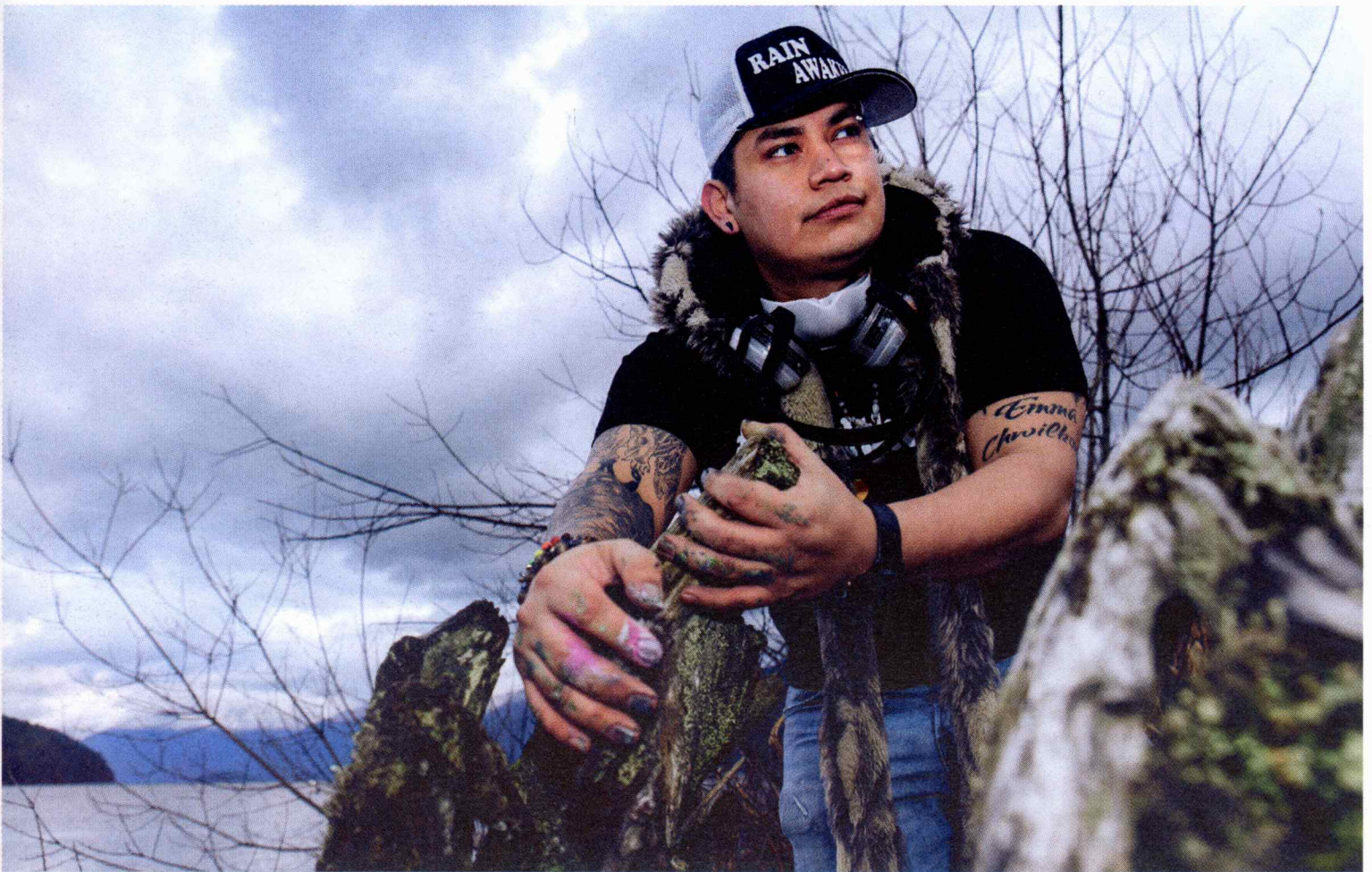
Just like Pierre taught himself how to be a civil engineer, he also taught himself how to be an artist. He began studying YouTube videos and "pumping out" paintings.

"I wanted to modernize traditional Native artwork, but make it my own way."

It wasn't long before a big opportunity presented itself. At a meeting of elders, his proud father told everyone about his paintings. One of the other elders was a principal who needed a mural for her school. After looking at photos of Pierre's work, she offered him the gig.

"Six months after I quit my job, I got my first mural contract and I sold my first large-scale painting."

He's been working in schools and universities ever since, creating murals, teaching students how to spray paint, and delivering motivational talks. For each school mural he paints, he awards a \$500 bursary to a student who needs a "little extra help to reach their goals and dreams."



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He plans to help 6,000 students across Canada, “in honour of the 6,000 children that died in residential schools” and “were robbed of their dreams.”

It may sound like Pierre’s art career has been all smooth sailing, but he’s had setbacks. One city initially rejected one of his designs for looking “demonic.”

Having his artwork evaluated through a religious lens infuriated Pierre: “My people come from generations of attempted genocide, generations of being called demons and heathens.”

Plus, another local city used some of his artwork without compensating him. Pierre scoffs at the explanation offered, that exposure would be good for his career, noting that no one ever uses this line on a mechanic. Fortunately, Pierre won both of these battles.

In the four years since creating his first painting, Pierre has accomplished more than many artists do in a lifetime, but he’s not slowing down.

He has big plans for the immediate future, from competing in the Olymp’Arts to writing a book to launching a YouTube channel.

His life has changed in other ways, too. He now embraces that he’s two-spirited: “I think artwork has made me brave enough to fully accept who I am.”

And he feels more connected than ever to his parents, who divorced when he was four years old, and credits his artwork with bringing the three of them closer together.

When asked what advice he’d give to a young artist, Pierre doesn’t hesitate. “The only person that can tell you no is you. It’s not your mom, your dad, your relatives, teachers, friends or anybody that you know. The only person that can tell you no is you. Your dreams are yours, and you must go for them.”

Seems like solid advice for everyone, whether they’re an artist or not. 💛