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Our cover artist: Jesse Desmoulin

By Terry Lusty

If you've ever wished to meet a 'true, bonafide' artist you really do need to acquaint yourself with the work of Jesse Desmoulin who is based in the Edmonton, Alberta region. Recently, she had her own one-person show at Edmonton's popular Bearclaw Gallery at 10403 - 124th St., just west of the downtown core.

The May 4 - 16 exhibit and sale, entitled *Where the Journey Takes You*, proved a superb example of what this artist is capable of as well as her future potential of acquiring a heightened level of recognition and acceptance as one of Canada's breakout Ojibway talents. She is quickly taking her place in a demanding field in which the competition can be quite fierce and certainly challenging.



Desmoulin with her painting "Moon Glows and Sun Shines" on exhibit at Bearclaw Gallery in Edmonton.



(Detail of) "Power and Grace" by Jessica Desmoulin. Courtesy Bearclaw Gallery.

Here we have a fine example of a true artist. She is totally self-taught, never attended art school or took any formal art courses, and just "lets it flow" from within, from what the Creator gifted her with internally, and spiritually to share with the world around her.

Her art style could be likened to the traditional eastern Woodland Indigenous artists such as the late and great Norval Morrisseau, Roy Thomas and Carl Ray, among others. Her illustrations are not only compelling, but expressly complimentary of the flowing lines style associated with such luminaries as Alex Janvier, Morrisseau, Jackson Beardy and others. Desmoulin also incorporates connecting lines, division circles and x-ray imagery -- a format now legendary among the greats and a style that exemplifies human relationships/connections with the land, animals and plants as well as the spirit world itself.

In the early stages of her life, Desmoulin didn't visualize art in any serious manner, certainly not as a career. That, however, all changed about 20, 25 years ago when she unfortunately fell victim to an illness that limited her ability to pursue the demands of manual labour.

With that in mind, she reassessed her position in life and gave consideration to her love of art. She started to experiment with it and developed a liking and a talent at it. Her mother liked what she saw and encouraged her to look at marketing her works. She continued to create pieces, more or less instinctively, and from the heart. In short, one could say that she stumbled into it as a career by accident and also as a form of therapy.

As she poured herself into her new-found passion, she discovered an innate affinity for the Woodland style of some notable Indigenous artists of Canada. The imagery somehow appeared to reflect her own thoughts and feelings about art styles.

Really, it was all so surreal. It seemed as if the stage had been set for her to intuitively develop her own unique style from the artistic elements just mentioned and which had lain dormant within her being/soul for years, but were now emerging instinctively. On that note, she simply began incorporating those elements in her art just as some of Canada's past great Indigenous artists had done.

Then things began to go her way. She happened

upon Jackie Bugera and Bearclaw Gallery in Edmonton. And, as that old adage goes, "the rest is history."

Bugera provided her with "advice" and "insights" of the art world and marketing that put her on a proper path and helped her on her journey, she explained. That good turn, she continued, will always stay with her and is something for which she is tremendously grateful.

With Bearclaw at the helm, assisting her in exhibiting and promoting her art, Desmoulin's visibility escalated and the demands for her art and skills surged. Her own grandmother who lives in Thunder Bay purchased her first major piece of work after spotting it online. Thereafter, matters just snow-balled. The University of Alberta acquired pieces, her art was included among other artists in books and magazines. Travel Alberta, schools and communities jumped into the picture as did hospitals and youth programs like Spirit Runner.

And so, this begs the question put to Desmoulin, "What would you really like to see down the road, what dream would be your wish come true?"

Her response: "I'd love to see my name alongside Norval's, to do shows in places like Toronto, New York, Vancouver worldwide!"

Indeed - who wouldn't! With her talent it is possible.

The door is open right now for emerging artists and established artists to join the great Indigenous artists of our time. Might Jessica Desmoulin be one of those to complete the picture? Only time will tell. She's definitely knocking on the door, ready and willing to step up to the plate if given the opportunity.

When it comes to Edmonton being her home base, she loves the area because it's treated her well, it's been "kind and welcoming," she says. She also welcomes the opportunity to learn more about her culture and reconnect with it.

On a parting note, she is delighted and grateful to Jackie and the Bearclaw Gallery for helping her with her career.

The Bearclaw Gallery at 10403-124th St. in Edmonton markets Desmoulin's art in addition to that of many Indigenous artisans from across Canada and the far North.

Terry Lusty is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter for Alberta Native News.

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Woodland Cree First Nation blockades drilling project

By Jeremy Appel

An oil company is attempting to have the chief of the Woodland Cree First Nation jailed for refusing to allow its drilling project to proceed on his nation’s traditional territory in northern Alberta.

As first reported by journalist Brandi Morin for IndigiNews and Ricochet, the First Nation has set up a blockade to prevent Obsidian Energy employees from accessing its land near Peace River.

On May 6, the company obtained an injunction against Woodland Cree First Nation and the people occupying the blockade camp. The First Nation has called Obsidian’s “intimidation tactics ... the worst we’ve ever seen.”

A week later, Obsidian CEO Steven Loukas flew to the region for scheduled negotiations with representatives of the First Nation, including Chief Isaac Laboucane-Avirom, band council and their lawyer, at a Peace River hotel.

The talks didn’t last long, with the First Nation’s team leaving the meeting after less than 10 minutes.

After RCMP entered and exited the conference room where the oil company’s representatives remained, Woodland Cree Coun. Joe Whitehead Jr. and the nation’s legal counsel returned without Chief Laboucane-Avirom for about five minutes.

On his way out of the hotel, Laboucane-Avirom told Morin that he was leaving because Obsidian “had no intent to negotiate.”

When Morin approached Loukas for comment as he slipped out the back door, the oil executive would only comment on the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Within an hour, the First Nation received an email declaring that Obsidian intended to take legal action and have the chief arrested.

A request was filed in a Calgary court on May 14 to have the First Nation and its chief charged with contempt of court for violating its injunction, and asking that Laboucane-Avirom and other nation representatives be arrested and “placed into custody” until their blockade is dismantled.

It argues the First Nation is “obstructing Obsidian’s lawfully permitted activities and causing loss and damage to Obsidian.”

According to the filing, the RCMP has “indicated that they have no plans to enforce” the injunction.

An RCMP liaison confirmed Morin that the Mounties would prefer to facilitate “peaceful negotiations” between the company and First Nation.

Chief Laboucane-Avirom told Morin that his nation isn’t opposed to oil drilling on its territory per se, but that it wants a fair share of Obsidian Energy’s profits.

“If I get arrested for sticking up for our lands, sticking up for our treaty, sticking up for what we

believe in,” Chief Laboucane-Avirom said, “I think that will be a shame on the province, on the country, and on industry. We’re more sophisticated than that, and we’re here to stay. [These are] our traditional lands, this is our backyard.”

He added that he wants “to develop a process that works for everyone.”

Another concern he identified is a series of earthquakes the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) found were caused by Obsidian disposing industrial wastewater underground. One of these earthquakes, at a magnitude of 5.6, was the largest recorded in Alberta’s history.

Chief Laboucane-Avirom said he wants improved consultation and input on environmental standards for Obsidian’s operations on his nation’s territory.

The company, meanwhile, contends that Woodland Cree First Nation’s demands would establish “a monopoly in its favour,” which it argues would be unfair to the other First Nations in the region it’s partnered with.

But Woodland Cree, in a May 13 news release, says its blockade has support from “a growing number of First Nations in Alberta,” including Treaty 8 First Nations, Duncan’s First Nation, Sucker Creek First

Nation and Loon River First Nation, among others, who have either joined the blockade encampment or written letters of support.

The blockade, which consists of about 100 people, including sympathetic industry partners, is set up like a traditional Cree camp, which includes a teepee, mobile kitchen, porta potties and lawn chairs.

Elders are bussed into the encampment daily to visit, play cards, trade stories, and offer support to band leadership.

At the same time, youth cut fresh moose harvested from the land and hang it to dry over an open fire.

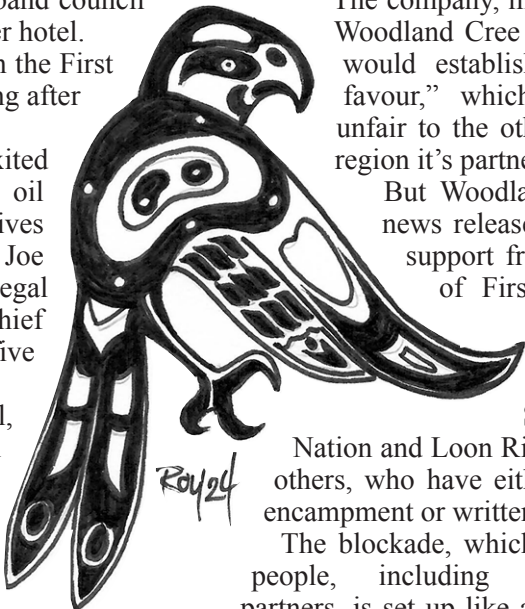
Chief Laboucane-Avirom connected Woodland Cree First Nation’s displacement from its traditional lands to extractive industries.

“We want to continue to enhance our understanding of what’s going on because there’s also cumulative impacts and effects that surround us, whether it’s from pipeline spills, produced water spills, earthquakes, forest fire, drought. We want to control what’s in our backyard,” he told Morin.

The chief accused Obsidian, which produces 31,000 barrels of oil equivalent a day, of “manipulation” in pursuit of its efforts to increase production by 12 per cent this year.

“If they want to sustain development, they have to work with us in a meaningful way. It might be a lack of understanding. If you have an American company that does business in a certain way,” said Laboucane-Avirom.

Jeremy Appel is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.



CAREERS showcases opportunities and career paths

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the significance of career exploration cannot be overstated. For students navigating the maze of potential career paths, opportunities to delve into various industries and professions are invaluable. Building partnerships with nations to offer different career exploration activities is vital to Alberta’s growth.

"This is my first time actually coming here. It shows you other jobs, other careers and maybe then get a better understanding of them," says Adam Soop, one of the participants in the Blood Tribe Employment and Skills Training (BTEST) Exposure Camp where CAREERS was invited to showcase different paid internship opportunities and career paths for Indigenous youth.

The camp serves as a springboard for students to dive into the world of work, offering hands-on experiences and interactive learning opportunities. From engaging in trades to honing interview skills, students are equipped with the tools and knowledge to embark on their career journeys.

"CAREERS aspires to continue to empower our First Nation, Metis, and Inuit youth, through collaboration with the FNMI coordinators within the schools across Alberta," explains CAREERS Provincial Indigenous Co-lead, Crystal Wolvengrey. "By creating a space for youth to explore their passion, CAREERS hopes to empower the next generation of Indigenous youth to realize their full potential."

A large part of CAREERS’ success is attributed to the many employers who are open to mentoring youth. With looming workforce gaps, businesses are finding that working with CAREERS provides an effective way to attract and retain future talent. Youth also bring fresh energy and ideas to the workplace. Levi Little Mustache, Executive Director of BTEST, sees the value of partnering with CAREERS to expand opportunities for the Blood Tribe Nation.

"We've been partnering with CAREERS: The Next Generation for the Registered Apprenticeship Program for years now, and they're able to provide some offers of placements. These are opportunities that might not be available on reserve. It's very important that we can provide on reserve youth opportunities that may not exist."

Aligning missions with likeminded organizations and businesses is needed to provide these opportunities and showcase the many different industries that are growing within the province. The Blood Tribe First Nation (Kainai) has worked with CAREERS to place students in skilled trades, agriculture, and information and communication technology paid internships.

The impact of such initiatives extends beyond individual students, reaching into communities and fostering a culture of empowerment and opportunity. "Coming out to indigenous communities is a major impact for everyone," reflects Indigenous Youth Career Coach Darrel Daniels, "Because, you know, it opens the doors for Indigenous youth to see that there's more options out there for them."

By providing students with the tools, resources, and support they need to navigate their career paths, the camp paves the way for a brighter, more inclusive future. Whether you're a young person or an employer, you can take advantage of CAREERS services, completely free of charge. Learn more at www.careersnextgen.ca.

SC rules against Blood Tribe

By Jeremy Appel

The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that the federal government broke its Treaty with Kainai Nation by shortchanging them on reserve land, but the province’s statute of limitations precludes the band from seeking remedy through the courts.

On April 12, the court delivered its unanimous decision in the case of Jim Shot Both Sides v. Canada, in which Justice Michelle O'Bonsawin declared the Canadian government’s failure to fulfill its Treaty obligation “deplorable,” but argued the nation failed to bring the matter to court in the required timeframe.

Kate Gunn of First Peoples Law, which represented Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta in the case, called the Supreme Court’s decision “disappointing.”

"It affirms what the Blood Tribe has been saying all along," Gunn said, referring to the Kainai Nation by its other name, "but it leaves the First Nation in a place where they're not able to get substantive relief from the courts. I think it raises a couple of problematic and challenging issues."

The claim centred around the Crown’s failure to set aside as much land as was promised the Blood Tribe when it signed Treaty 7 in 1877. The First Nation, which is part of the Blackfoot Confederacy, initiated legal proceedings against the Crown in the 1980s.

Under Alberta’s statute of limitations, plaintiffs have six years to file a lawsuit.

The case hinged upon whether the clock began ticking in 1971 – the year a Blackfoot researcher discovered the tribe received 162.5 fewer square miles of land than it was promised in Treaty 7 – or 1982, when the Constitution Act officially codified Treaty rights under Canadian law.

Federal Court ruled that the clock began ticking when the Constitution was signed, upholding the land claim. But the Court of Appeal reversed the ruling and prohibited the lawsuit.



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Lost loved ones remembered, on Red Dress Day in Edmonton

By Terry Lusty

They came by the score to remember and honour missing and murdered relatives and friends. Their journey is filled with grief, anguish, and anxiety and their quest for healing, closure and justice is a never-ending nightmare.

Such was the setting in downtown Edmonton at Churchill Square on Saturday, May 5th, National Red Dress Day. By 12 noon, a crowd of 100 or more had exploded to several hundred, and then a thousand! Dozens upon dozens brandished posters, signs, and pictures of lost loved ones who met their end by way of murder, violence, or unknown causes. Many more are simply missing.

Throughout Canada, similar gatherings were transpiring. Most of the event organizers are women wanting to share their stories, create awareness and seek closure and justice so they can get on with their ever-elusive healing journey.

Like the ‘Every Child Matters’ movement, this event continues to gain momentum as affected family members refuse to let go, are determined to locate their family members and friends, and are committed to finding justice and peace of mind.

It is a demonstration of pain, love, advocacy, and resilience.

At noon, everyone in attendance began a scheduled walk to Beaver Hills House Park, several blocks away. Led by several female drummers, participants sang all the way to the park area but paused briefly at a halfway point and conducted an impromptu Round Dance in the middle of Jasper Avenue. Joining the walk was Edmonton's mayor, Amarjeet Sohi and a few council members.

Upon arrival at the park, the gathering chanted the Women's Warrior Song, then refreshed themselves with coffee, tea, water and light snacks before proceeding with the afternoon agenda of speakers – all individuals who have been impacted by the loss of dear ones.

This year, as in previous years, the heaviness was present. So was the sorrow, the pain and trauma, and the anxiety experienced and expressed by brothers, sisters, parents and relatives and friends of the missing and murdered.

Admittedly, it is a continuing saga that simply

refuses to go away. Regardless of the awareness and attention given to this Canada-wide tragedy there appears to be very little progress in adequately dealing with the issue as the numbers of missing and murdered just keep on increasing.

Statistics show that in Canada, Indigenous people are twelve times more likely than non-Indigenous people to fall victim to murder or to go missing. Although they constitute four to five percent of Canada's female population, they account for 23 percent of Canada's murdered or missing people (using figures from 2014 and 2018). Between 1980 and 2012, according to RCMP figures, the number of missing and murdered is 1,181 females. Canada's Parliamentary Secretary for Gender and Equality, Kelli Paddon, claims that 409 Indigenous women and girls were victims of homicide in Canada between 2009 and 2021. British Columbia and Manitoba have the highest rates for missing individuals which number 258 and 152 per 100,000 respectively.

That said, there are many people who say that these numbers are only in reference to "known" cases and that the real numbers are likely a great deal higher.

Once the Red Dress walkers settled in at the park, those carrying posters and pictures of loved ones set them up on the grass, along a brick-paved walkway at the north side of the patio area. Visitors strolled among the posters and chatted with some of the relatives in attendance.

One by one, individuals and family groups addressed the audience to express themselves and talk about their victimized family members or friends. This portion of the day's activity was difficult - not just for the impacted families but for the supportive walkers who were there to lend strength and love for the lost and their relatives. To share in the grief and worry for the victims.

Lisa Big John, who lost her sister on Vancouver's notorious East Hastings Street was raging as she told of knowing "how it is to have your life ripped apart." She was also highly critical of the child welfare system in addition to failures in the justice system.

Walk organizer, Judith Gayle, kept things rolling along smoothly and also drew attention to the fact that Palestinians are suffering in Gaza. "We stand in solidarity with them," she affirmed.

Donna Robillard, surrounded by several family members, poured her heart out over the loss of a daughter a year ago. With her moving words, she demonstrated an incredible amount of inner strength.

Then there was Cindy, a sister of the late



Commemorating missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Edmonton.

Georgina Papin who was a murder victim of one of Canada's worst serial killers, Robert Pickton. He was the pig farmer responsible for what is believed to be at least 49 female deaths. Cindy concluded her talk about the ongoing love she carries for her late sister and stated, "We (women) are not weak, we're strong!"

Attention was also drawn to the fact that Pickton is currently applying for day parole. He was arrested in February of 2002 and convicted in 2007 of murder 2 in the killing of six of the 49 women that he is believed to have killed. Naturally, many people are upset that authorities would even dare to hear a request this early for his parole.

Red Dress Day is commemorated annually in Canada on May 5, the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people. The origin of the symbolic red dress is attributed to Metis artist Jaime Black. He began hanging the red dresses in Winnipeg in 2010 to signify the violence inflicted upon Indigenous women and people. To most people it represents the pain and loss felt by loved ones and survivors.

The acronym MMIWG was coined by the Cree journalist Sheila North Wilson in 2012 when she worked for the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

In Edmonton at Beaver Hills House Park, the crowd began to disperse on May 5 by 3 pm. The organizers and participants will continue to raise awareness and advocate for justice for their lost loved ones. And we will continue to share their pain and their love.

Terry Lusty is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter for Alberta Native News

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Advocating for education and cultural sensitivity in healthcare

By Chevi Rabbit, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Paula Bailey, a primary care nurse practitioner, proudly embraces her European and Indigenous heritage. As part of a growing demographic celebrating their rich histories, she stands as a role model, both in her professional career and in the beauty industry. Through her journey, Paula uplifts others and demonstrates the possibilities that lie ahead.

"I grew up in Fort McMurray, Alberta, with a mixture of Indigenous and Caucasian heritage," Bailey shared. "My family roots are European and Indigenous, with my dad's side hailing from Newfoundland and my late mother from the Northwest Territories, specifically the hamlet of Fort Resolution."

Bailey's upbringing fueled her passion for promoting health and wellness within Indigenous communities. "My late grandmother, Elizabeth Giroux, worked as a community health representative in Fort Resolution," she explained. "Her dedication inspired me to pursue nursing."

After graduating from the University of Alberta in 2005, Bailey began her registered nursing career with Health Canada, serving First Nations communities in the Edmonton area. Over the years she worked in other capacities but always circled back to her passion of Indigenous health.

Paula's experiences with Indigenous populations ultimately motivated her to further her education. "Witnessing the unique needs and challenges drove me to pursue a master's in nursing, specializing as a Nurse Practitioner," Bailey noted. In 2023, Bailey obtained her master's degree from the University of

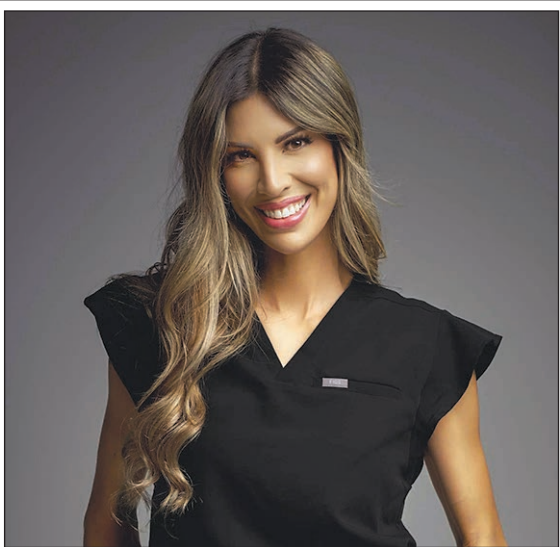
Saskatchewan and began providing primary care services in the Rocky Mountain House area.

In her youth and alongside her nursing career, Bailey pursued modeling as a means of personal growth and empowerment. "Modeling allowed me to step out of my shell and gain confidence," she stated. "It's been a journey of self-discovery and connection with fellow Indigenous artists and models like Michelle Houle and Lauren Bellerose."

Paula graced the pages of local fashion publications in Alberta, with features in the *Edmonton Journal* and having television appearances during Western Canada Fashion Week. Paula was also a top 20 contestant in the Miss Universe Canada pageant in 2009.

Paula's interest in the beauty and fashion sector also transpired into obtaining certification in cosmetic injections in 2019, which has since evolved as another passion in her career. "The cosmetic injection industry has become mainstream with its purposes in self-care and aging gracefully," she affirmed. This transition marks a rare instance of an Indigenous nurse with a master's degree offering services that focus on empowering others in a way that contrasts her work in Indigenous communities.

"I enjoy the balance of both passions; they are each unique and rewarding in their own ways," she noted. "As a licensed medical professional, my priority is to ensure safety and build trust through the quality of care I deliver, regardless of the setting I am in." When Paula is not working as a nurse practitioner in Indigenous communities,



Nurse Practitioner Paula Bailey

she is occupied with advancing her skills in medical aesthetics from her home base of Calgary.

Bailey acknowledges the significance of government investment in Aboriginal health careers programs and encourages Indigenous youth to pursue these opportunities in post-secondary education. "Education is key to success and empowerment," she emphasizes. "I aim to inspire Indigenous youth to explore their passions and contribute to their communities."

Advocating for education and cultural competence within healthcare, Bailey maintains her dedication to serving Indigenous communities and fostering holistic well-being. By investing in local talent and empowering Indigenous individuals to enter healthcare professions, both Indigenous communities and the broader Canadian population stand to benefit and thrive.

SC rules cont. from p 5

The Supreme Court sided with the Court of Appeal, arguing that Treaty rights were enforceable prior to the Constitution's patriation, meaning Blood Tribe could have filed its lawsuit in 1971.

Despite ruling that the lawsuit couldn't proceed, Justice O'Bonsawin acknowledged the "longevity and magnitude of the Crown's dishonourable conduct towards the Blood Tribe."

"Canada breached its treaty promises to the Blood Tribe. Canada did not provide the land as promised: 162.5 fewer square miles were set aside than should have been," the judge wrote.

"This conduct is deplorable and does not reflect the fundamental objective of the modern law of treaty rights, which is the reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and their respective claims, interests, and ambition."

Acknowledging the wrongdoing, O'Bonsawin

wrote, "will promote reconciliation and help to restore the nation-to-nation relationship between the Blood Tribe and the Crown."

The ruling gives the Blood Tribe an upper hand if it chooses to take the federal government to a specific claims tribunal, where it can be awarded up to \$150 million.

"The Blood Tribe and the Government of Canada are actively in negotiations on resolving this past injustice," Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations spokesperson Carolane Gratton told the CBC.

Calgary-based lawyer Ron Maurice, whose firm represented the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations as an intervenor in this case, called the ruling "cold comfort."

However, Maurice and Gunn both noted with optimism that the court didn't rule on the constitutionality of provincial statutes of limitations as they pertain to holding the Crown accountable for historic misdeeds.

Jeremy Appel is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

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