

Lorne Cardinal Takes Center Stage as Grandpa Nat in PBS KIDS' MOLLY OF DENALI

As the stage lights came up, all the audience could see was a pair of legs sticking out from behind a stove. The legs wiggled and the audience laughed.

From that moment, Lorne Cardinal was hooked.

"I got bit by the bug," said Cardinal about his first acting role as the stove repairman in a college production of William Robertson Davies' one-act play, *The Voice of the People*. "I was standing on stage feeling totally comfortable. That's when I knew that acting was what I wanted to do with the rest of my life."

Although Cardinal is a natural both in front of and behind the camera, his acting career is something he stumbled into. After a series of odd jobs ranging from planting trees to photography to working for a newspaper, Cardinal decided to attend college at age 23. During his first semester, he signed up for an Introduction to Acting class, believing it would be "easy credits."

Since then, Cardinal's career has been nothing short of groundbreaking.

Now, Cardinal has almost 100 professional film and TV credits, and has acted in and directed a number of theatre productions. Whether he is portraying Sergeant Davis Quinton in the beloved Canadian sitcom *Corner Gas* or Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, critics praise Cardinal's versatility and stage presence.

"I try and find characters that are interesting and complex and challenging," said Cardinal, who is Cree. "That's why I love theatre."

The classically-trained stage actor was the first Indigenous student to graduate with a bachelor's degree of fine arts in acting from the University of Alberta. In his most recent stage role as Prospero, Cardinal leads a cast of both deaf and hearing actors in the Citadel Theatre's production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The roles were both spoken aloud and signed. Cardinal learned some American Sign Language for his role, so he could communicate with his cast members on and off the stage.

This summer, Cardinal takes on another trailblazing role as Grandpa Nat in PBS KIDS' upcoming animated children's series, MOLLY OF DENALI. Set in Alaska, it's the first nationally distributed children's series in the United States to feature a Native American lead character, MOLLY OF DENALI features Alaska Native Molly Mabray, who takes viewers ages 4 to 8 along with her on adventures and fosters literacy skills along the way. Cardinal voices Grandpa Nat, who is a volcanologist who is spry, energetic (a little mischievous), and always up for an adventure.

"I love the connection between Grandpa Nat and Molly, and the way he imparts knowledge and

shares stories,” said Cardinal. “Grandpa Nat is very supportive of Molly. It is important to support young people, because there’s no limit to what they can do when encouraged to ask questions and learn more.”

The role of Grandpa Nat is personally meaningful to Cardinal. In one episode, Molly and Tooeey find out that Grandpa Nat doesn’t sing his Alaska Native songs anymore because he was forbidden to do so as a child attending boarding school. Molly and Tooeey go on a treasure hunt to find Grandpa Nat’s childhood drum that he had given to a friend. Touched by the children’s detective work, Grandpa Nat reclaims his Alaska Native songs and ends the episode by dancing with Molly.

As recently as a generation ago, many Alaska Native, First Nations and Native American children were forced to attend residential schools. Many were punished for speaking their Native languages and singing their songs.

“That episode is a very dear one, because both of my parents were residential school survivors,” said Cardinal. “I was very much thinking of my own parents, aunties and uncles who also went through that -- that system and how they were affected by it. It affected me and my family growing up as well.”