When we were kids, we used to buy comics in bulk at a corner store near the local gas station. It was $3 for a random grab bag. Batman, Spider-Man, Fantastic Four—we never knew what we’d get.

Except in some ways, we knew exactly what we’d get. With few exceptions, we’d get a white male hero.

It’s strange that these stories about outsiders and underdogs are so dominated by privilege. The X-Men fight to overcome social prejudice. Spider-Man struggles to balance the conflicting identities of a high-schooler and web-slinger. Superman grapples with blending in as an alien immigrant in America. But it’s rare to see fictional heroes from the communities that deal with these challenges in real life.

This year, with Marvel’s release of Inuk superhero Snowguard, and Black Panther setting box office records, the world of comics is a bit more diverse, but there’s still a long way to go to change minds about what makes a hero.

“When would anyone want to hear an Indian speak at Comic Con?”

Cree filmmaker Sonya Ballantyne was asked this by an online troll when she fundraised $3,935 to fly to San Diego Comic Con to speak about diversity. Ballantyne believes she was the first Cree woman to speak at the annual pop culture event, which brought together 130,000 fans from around the world on July 19–22, 2018.

She plans to chronicle the journey in Cree Supergirl, a forthcoming documentary.

“I didn’t have a hero who looked like me growing up,” says Ballantyne. “You have to be the person you needed when you were younger.”

Ballantyne fell in love with Superman and Wonder Woman at a young age. She saw herself reflected in their fight to fit in, if not their complexions.

In 2014, she released Crash Site, a short film about a young Cree girl who moves to the city after the death of her parents. There, she meets a superhero named Thunderbird, who teaches her to harness her inner powers.

Ballantyne has since become an advocate for more diverse heroes.