Watching Dr. Danielle Behn Smith kneel in the Namibian dirt, helping women of the Ovahakaona tribe dig out the root of a tree, you realize that this is neither a typical television personality nor standard reality show fare.

*Medicine Woman*, a series of 13 hour-long programs being aired on both VisionTV and the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, bills itself as “one doctor’s personal mission across 6 continents to learn the ancient knowledge” from shamans, yogis, herbalists, folk healers, mystics and traditional medicine men and women.

The interesting hook to this Canadian–Australian co-production is Behn Smith, a young, videogenic family physician who is also West Coast First Nations. From the opening credits, the viewer is pulled in by the narration of Behn Smith as she explains not only the premise of the show but also her personal reasons for doing it: “My quest is to find these healers, learn from them and preserve their knowledge for generations to come.”

It’s a lofty yet admirable goal, and Behn Smith meets the challenge with dignity. Unlike most television journalists who parachute into foreign countries wearing flak jackets and posing as instant experts, she comes across as humble and respectful learner.

“I was trained in Western ways, but I wanted to learn from traditional healers,” explains Behn Smith, who studied medicine at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario and completed her family practice training at the University of Manitoba’s Rural Medicine program. “I had just finished my locum on the West Coast and I was a bit disillusioned with my family practice training. It wasn’t what I wanted. Something was missing,” explains the 29-year-old. “I’d been taught how to diagnose and treat medical illness. I know all of the medications to prescribe and the lifestyle changes to recommend. What I hadn’t learned is how to help empower people to fight disease using their own traditions.

“As a 92-year-old homeopath in Namibia pointed out to me, conventional doctors heal with the head; traditional doctors heal with the heart. For me, that was the missing piece.”

*Medicine Woman* is part National Geographic, part spiritual quest and part travelogue. Through Behn Smith, viewers are introduced to Aboriginal healers living in the lush rainforests of South East Australia, to the Veddahs or Forest People of Sri Lanka, to the Women of Red Ochre in Namibia, to...
Among the Himba of Namibia, Behn Smith finally realized that conventional doctors heal with the head while traditional doctors heal with the heart. “For me, that was the missing piece.”