

papa ED

A STORY OF
RESILIENCE
AND HOPE



By Ed Seymour and Donna Klockars

Playing on sandy beaches, chasing hummingbirds and watching his Dad fish filled young Ed's carefree days. It seemed as if everything that anyone could want or need was right outside the door of the house that his Dad built on the water's edge of Kulleet Bay. However, his joyful life suddenly changed forever. A mission boat came to the beach. All of the children were torn from their parents' arms and taken to Kuper Island Residential School.

When he heard the sound of a small outboard engine, young Ed was convinced his parents were trying to rescue him. Only after months of crushing, daily disappointment, did he learn there was no hope of returning to his beloved home. Although Ed survived the residential school, it was not long before he faced a long and near-fatal battle with tuberculosis.

As a respected Elder, Ed dedicated himself to guiding high school students. He shared important teachings and protocols. He encouraged and motivated young people to reach their full potential. The students loved and cherished their "Papa Ed."

Edward Seymour's life story is one of resilience, courage and hope for the future.

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by EDWARD SEYMOUR
& DONNA KLOCKARS

Acknowledgements

The Stz'uminus Education Project celebrates the oral narratives, Elders, heroes and artists of the Stz'uminus Mustimuxw (The People of the Stz'uminus First Nation).

As project coordinator and editor, I raise my hands in thanks to the traditional knowledge keepers, caring educators and Stz'uminus community members who generously contributed to this body of work.

The project aims to provide literacy opportunities for all ages and all territories. Extensive lesson plans and Hul'q'umi'num Language strategies to support educators or interested community members are available (for free) to download.

Educators are invited to contact dklockars@shaw.ca with any questions or for classroom support.

Elder Pearl Harris, Charlotte Elliott, Rita Harris, Delia Seymour, Alice Louie, (late) Elder Edward Seymour, Len Merriman, Karen Burnham, Elder Florence James, Daniella Harris-David, Doug Harris, Josie Louie, Elder Gwen Point, Buffie Seymour-David, Joe Elliott, John Jim, Joey Caro, Edward Seymour Jr., Jessica Kuhnley, Dan Elliott, Damien Daniels, Cameron Park, Scott Booth and James Klockars have joyfully and generously contributed to this project.

Hay ce:p qa, I raise my hands in thanks to all,
Donna Klockars

Uy yátul ct 'i' cíuwatúl ct
Treat each other well as we work together

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papa ED A STORY OF RESILIENCE AND HOPE

*By Edward Seymour
& Donna Klockars*



Dedicated to our Stz'uminus Youth

Looking Back and Moving Forward

Even though I am eighty-two years old, and my memories of my own school days are filled with sorrow and sadness, I am at school every morning ready to greet everyone. My official title is “Edward Seymour, Elder in Residence,” but everyone calls me Papa Ed. Students and teachers are always asking me to share the things that happened during my lifetime.



Looking back and remembering where I have been and what I have done makes me realize how important it is to continue my work. I want to help my people so that our youth are proud, strong and healthy. I want to provide guidance and encouragement for our youth. I want our youth to know the stories of our people and the accomplishments of those who have gone before. My hope is that every young person will be prepared to meet many challenges. I am proud of young people when they make good decisions and choose a healthy way of being. It is important to respect the teachings that have been passed down. I believe that if our people have good health care, safe housing and excellent education opportunities we can accomplish all the work that needs to be done now and for generations to come.



Born on a Fishing Boat

When I look back and remember the events of my life, it seems that the land and the water play a part in every aspect of my life. I was born on a fish boat along the inside waters off Vancouver Island. My parents were cod fishers. I guess that is why I never had a birth certificate. (One time, I wrote to the government to see if they had any record of my birth, but they had nothing.) My mother lost her first husband. He went under trying to save his son who fell into the water off Yellow Point. After this terrible event, my Mom went to live in Saanich to be with family, and this is where my Dad, first courted her. After they were married, my Dad decided to build a house at Kulleet Bay just up from his grandparent’s Big House. Most of my early memories are about the good times I had playing on the beach. Our house looked right out to the water. I always thought I lived in the best place. The long, sandy beach was my playground.

I was proud of the home that my Dad built for us. He used materials that he could get second hand. The house had three windows, and it was one big room. The floor was dirt, but we were always warm. We had a big oil drum for a wood stove. My dad filled the bottom with sand and dirt and cut a hole in the middle to feed the wood. There was no electricity and we used oil to light the lanterns at night.

When all of my older half-brothers were home, we made nine kids in all! Our house was not very big, so all of us kids spent most of our days outdoors.

We would be gone all day. I loved all of the wildlife, but especially birds. I remember thinking that hummingbirds were the most beautiful tiny creatures. The bright sunlight made the birds sparkle with gold and red colours!

My half-brother, Chris, had many stories about me when I was very small. He said that if I went missing, the first place people looked, was on the beach or by the creek. One winter morning my parents could not find me. Finally, they spotted me playing in a big tub of cold water that was kept by the spring. It seems, winter or summer, I loved to play in water!

Chris also liked to tell everyone that if I were in trouble, I would announce to all who would listen that I was “going to go to the creek to drown myself!” I guess I had a flair for the dramatic.

My Dad was a good provider! Salmon and black ducks practically arrived at our front door! Dad said that the black ducks were always around because there were so many clams. He taught me different ways to hunt the ducks. When the tide went out, I helped my Dad put pegs on four corners of the clam beds in front of our house. We would dig up lots of the clams for the ducks so that they couldn't resist an easy feast. The last step was to cover the whole area with a big net that we anchored down with more pegs.

When the tide came in, the ducks would swim under the net and eat the clams. Dad would wait until there were four or five black ducks under the net before he pulled the net closed.

One day I noticed that my Dad was out in his canoe. He was hauling a cedar log covered with branches that stuck straight up. Next time I looked out to the water, I saw the log with all the branches, but I didn't see Dad's canoe anywhere in the bay. Soon, all of us kids were busy playing kick the can on the beach, and I forgot all about my father.

Suddenly we heard a loud “pop, pop, pop.” At first, we were scared and ran to our house. Dad wasn't home and we started to worry about him. Finally, we saw him coming ashore with sacks of ducks. He explained that the cedar log was a “blind,” and the ducks didn't know that he was behind the log. He gave every family a nice fat duck for their dinner that night.



There were many birds on the water and in the river, even in the winter! I remember spending hours with my cousins setting traps for black ducks. The traps were made from wooden Japanese orange boxes and a piece of string that was nailed to the top of the box. We scattered breadcrumbs under the box and propped one side up.

We sat quiet and still until the ducks came to get the bread. Once a duck went for the bread - SNAP - went the lid and the ducks were trapped. Some of the first money I ever earned was from selling ducks to a buyer who came to our bay in a big seine boat.

Dad taught me how to salt the ducks. We always had lots of black duck to eat, and there was a big pot of duck soup on the stove.

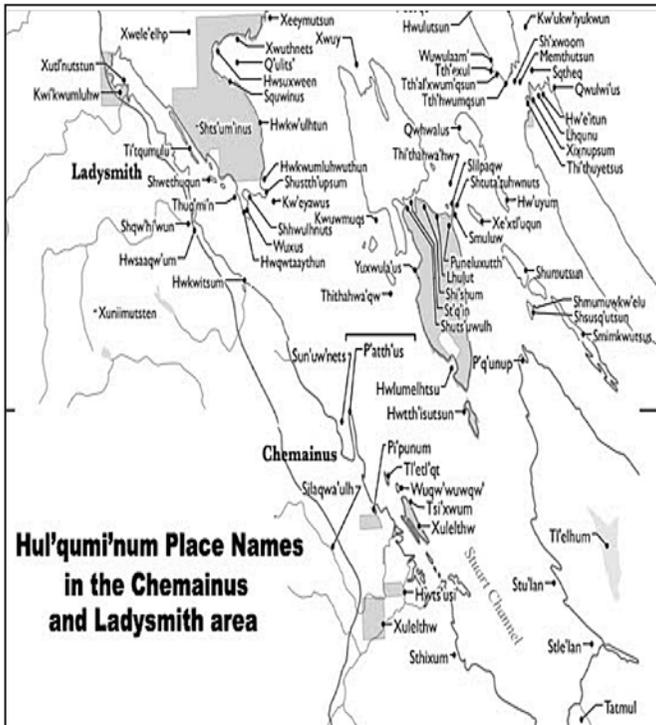
Dad also taught me how to set nets for salmon. (As I said before, the salmon practically came to our door!) He would tie a net to a log on the beach. Before dark, we would always find five or six salmon in the net!

Dad was always giving fish away. There was so much abundance; sea urchins, octopus, salmon, clams, lingcod and rock cod. Food was easy to get and delicious to eat!

In early March, milky-coloured herring roe covered the beaches. Dad would lay cedar branches down on the sand. The herring would deposit their milky eggs. We would gather the branches up and eat the roe right there! We called it “chumus.”



Illustration by Dan Elliott



Deer were all around us. They came to the water's edge to drink foam left on the beach after the tide went out. I guess they came for the salt. When he got a deer, he let me help him skin and prepare the meat. After the meat was cut into big chunks, we delivered fresh meat to every house in our bay. Nothing went rotten. No part of the deer was wasted.

I learned a lot about the land when I was young. Whenever we travelled, Mom

taught me the traditional names of places that her great grandmother and grandfather taught her. The names were easy to learn because each location had a story or a family name connected to it. Sometimes an area was named after the plants that you could expect to find there. A place name might also tell you if the land was swampy or if the shore was rocky or goeey. I knew a lot of Hul'qumi'num back then. I have forgotten some of the traditional names now, because I lost my language when I went to the Indian School on Penelakut Island.

You know, it seemed to me that everything that anyone could want was right outside the door of our little house that my Dad built. I never was hungry when I was little. My Dad was such a good provider!

However, I did come to learn what it felt like to be hungry, and the next part of my story is not filled with happiness.

Residential School Days

When I was seven years of age, a mission boat came to our beach. All of us kids were put on to the boat. I wasn't too worried, because my older brother, Willie, tried to comfort me by telling me that we were just going to town. I believed everything he told me. Something was wrong though, because Willie had tears in his eyes. Soon all us kids in that mission boat were crying, even the older boys. We did not go to town. We were taken to Kuper Island Residential School.

The very first morning I slept in that huge strange brick building, I was awakened by the familiar put-put sound of an engine. I quickly dressed and prepared to greet my parents. I figured they were bringing our boat to the school so they could take me home. I got a chair and tried to wave to them. I did not see our little motor boat, but I knew the familiar "put-put" engine sound so I knew they were close. I stayed by that window for hours, calling out from the window. The building was huge and the big room I slept in was high up from the ground. My parents couldn't hear me calling out to them!

Every morning the same "put-put" sound woke me up. I rushed to the window sure that this would be the day that my Dad and Mom would pick me up and take me home. Even when the leaves fell from the trees and the winter winds blew through the channel and rattled the big glass windows, I looked out and searched for my parent's motor boat.



One day I saw my brothers, when we were sent outside the school to play. I called out to them in our Hul'q'umi'num language. I wanted to tell them that Mom and Dad were trying to come and pick us up in our little boat so that we could go home. Nothing went my way that day. Instead of talking to my brothers, I learned that speaking even a word of our language meant the rubber strap. And not just on your hands, but all the way up your arm. I thought and thought about how to get a message to my brothers. I did not have any English words to call out to my brothers. Everything I tried failed.

I don't remember exactly when, or how, I finally figured out that the "put-put" noise was not from my parent's boat engine. The noise came from an engine called a generator. That noisy machine was right below my window. The day that I knew that Mom and Dad's motor boat was not in the bay waiting to bring me home was the saddest day of my young life.

I remember feeling alone and scared. It seemed to me, I was always in a black room and could not find my way out! Every night I went to bed, tears and sorrow filled me up. I sure missed my family!

When I first came to the residential school, I only spoke Hul'q'umi'num. Looking back, I think not being able to communicate gave me a lot of stress. I was always in trouble for something! Those nuns really got me upset and I guess that is why I wet the bed. Every time this would happen, the nuns would write on the chalkboard "Ed Seymour wet his bed." This did not make it any better. I continued to wet my bed the whole time I was there! A lot of us young kids wet the bed. We sure did not want to be caught, so a bunch of us figured out how to get our sheets down to the basement laundry, and grab new sheets before the nuns checked up on us.

I never saw my sister because the girls were in a separate place and the boys were never allowed anywhere near the girl's side of the school. I didn't see my brothers much either because they were in different rooms. I did have a nephew that slept in the same big room as me. We slept in three long rows in a room they called a dormitory. He was a real sleepwalker! In the middle of the night, he would try to climb up a pole that was in the middle of our dormitory.

Many of the kids I went to school with died very young. Some got sick with the flu or with Tuberculosis. Others tried to swim home by crossing the channel. We never knew if they made it to shore safely.

Young people ask me about my time at residential school. The memory that stays with me the most was that I was hungry all the time. The food those nuns fed us smelled like sheep. We had to eat what was put in front of us and that was... sheep, sheep and more sheep! I guess they called it mutton, but we had other names for it that I will not mention! It was tough, greasy and the smell got into everything! That smell is still stuck in my mind!

As far as I was concerned, most of the food was rotten. One time the nuns said that they had made a cake and this was supposed to be a treat. About seventy boys sat at a long table. Only a few would try the cake because it smelled rotten. Sure enough, the boys who ate the cake got sick!

Some of us boys got tired of being hungry all the time. We knew there was an orchard with lots of apple trees on Thetis Island. Everyone talked about this big farm on Thetis. They said that there was a castle there but I guessed it was just a big house. Anyways, we got to thinking about those apples. The nuns let us play outside after supper. We played kick the can and hide and seek games until it was almost dark. This meant that we had at least a couple of hours when the nuns did not pay much attention to us. We figured we could sneak away without the nuns even knowing we were gone.

One night we took off from school with gunnysacks we stole from the kitchen. We ran as fast as we could to the old bridge between Penelakut Island and Thetis Island. We crossed the bridge and sure enough, there was a big grand house and a beautiful orchard full of apple trees. We filled the gunnysacks with as many apples as we could carry. We ran home with the bags and hid them under the gym. We got all this done just before the nuns came out to send us to bed. We were scared that we would be caught and strapped, but nobody even noticed we were gone! We kept going back to that big fancy farm to get those sweet juicy apples. Since we were so successful, we got braver and braver. Soon we worked out a plan for stealing bread from the school bakery. We hid the loaves of bread in the same spot under the gym with our stash of apples.

When we were playing games at night, we would sneak away to our spot under the gym and fill up on apples and bread. We never were caught! But even with those apples and loaves of stolen bread, we were still hungry when we went to bed!

Some of the good memories that I have from my school days are when the nuns would let the boys and the girls get together. This was the only

way I could see my sister. The nuns and the priests would plan a picnic or a soccer game. One Christmas we played some games in the gym. If you won a game, you chose a present that they had pinned on the gym wall. I remember being pretty disappointed when I unwrapped the present I had won. It was just an old dried up turnip!

When I was about thirteen years old, I got permission to leave school for a week. My Dad and Mom asked the principal if I could attend a Mask Dance at the Big House. This surprised me because during my Dad's time, the Big House rules were very strict! No kids. I was surprised and excited about going! When we got home, I helped my Mom bring duck soup, deer meat and smoked salmon to the Big House. There was food everywhere. Every household brought steaming dishes in big wooden bowls. They started feeding people at noon. I noticed that the Elders were served first and I was proud to bring plates of the delicious food to respected Elders. People kept on arriving from Penelakut, Cowichan and Valdez and even from Cold Bay! Soon I heard the drums and that big strong beat got right into my body! All my relatives were gathered together to do very important work. I was proud to be present at the ceremony.

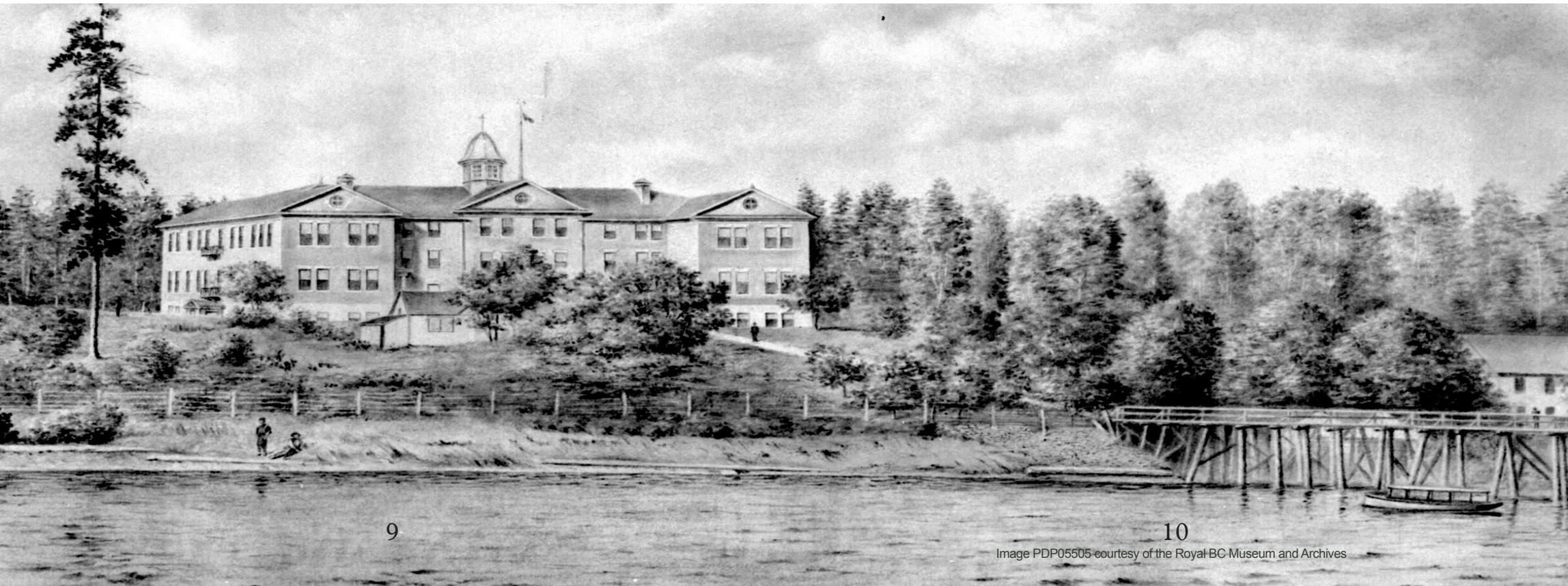
I learned that my family carried a lot of knowledge, and my Dad was

a respected Dancer. I knew then that I wanted to learn all I could about the work that was done at the Big House, especially since my parents considered me old enough to witness the dancing and hear the speakers! I will never forget how proud I was of my father when I saw him dance for the first time.

Shortly after I got back from the Big House, one of the older boys called out to me, "Ed, the principal wants to see you."

I thought "Oh no, I must have been caught doing something wrong again." My older brother had been kicked out the year before. I cannot remember what he got in trouble for but I know he got strapped real hard. We all got strapped. It worked that way; if there was any mischief we would all get strapped. I heard a lot of crying boys when I was in that school. Anyways, I figured that the principal thought all of us Seymours were a bad bunch, and that was why I was always in trouble.

The principal told me I was to go with my Mom and Dad, and I was not welcome back. He said that I had been bothering the girls. (I figured out the principal was talking about a time when a bunch of us boys tried to get the girls' attention but I guess I was the one that got caught.)



That principal told me I should go up and get my clothes. I went up to gather the few things that I owned, and I never even said goodbye to anyone after being at that place for seven years!

That is how I got away from residential school. I guess it was a whole lot better for me than what my nephew, Willie, experienced! He jumped off the wharf at Thetis Island, swam all the way to Elliott's Point, and finally landed at Deer Point! He was lucky to have made it to shore. I know others who tried to swim back home who were not so lucky.

After they closed Kuper Indian School, people went in and tore down the building, brick by brick. There is not a trace left of it. Well...except for some stairs that lead up to nowhere but sadness. There was so much anger in the hearts of those who went to that school; they even threw the plaque that had the name of the school and the year it was built, right into the salt chuck. My nephew, Willie, was part of that healing, but there is still terrible grief and loss connected with that school for so many of my relatives.

There was a lot of lawyer talk about the residential schools a few years ago. A lawyer came to talk to me, but I could not make out half of what he was saying. The lawyer used words that I didn't understand and to tell you the truth, I did not know what was going on. They sent me a file but I did not go to court. I know many of our people who would not even take the money that was offered. Some of people pressed charges and talked about the Principal touching us boys. I know one of my relatives had a whole lot of anger for those Brothers. And it stays with him even today!

For me, losing my language was the worst. I went into the school speaking only Hul'q'umi'num. My Mom was raised with her grandparents and her great grandparents. She knew traditional ways to prepare all kinds of food. She knew where to find the healing plants and where to find the best berries. She showed me how to can salmon and dry clams.

I think it is important for our young people to know Hul'q'umi'num names of all the surrounding beaches, rivers and mountains. I am also very proud of our work with the young people to bring back the language and to see our traditional protocols in place at school. Maybe my work with young people will help the students have a better experience in school than I did. Learning should happen side by side with the Elders. We were traditionally taught this way. This is why I go to school every day. I want to be available for the young people. I want them to love learning and gain all the skills they need.



Kuper Island Residential School

Finally Home!

Once I was free of that Indian School I had some good times, especially when I went and worked with my mom, dad, and cousin at Great West Canneries. We went over to Steveston in our little boat, and stayed in the company houses. There were many Stz'uminus families working at the canneries or on fishing boats.

This was a great place to live after those lonely years at the school. There was a nice wood stove, and we had lots to eat. There was a company store where we would get our groceries. The work wasn't very hard for us kids. My Mom and Dad worked packing the cans full of salmon. My brother unloaded the packers. Those packers that arrived at the dock loaded with more salmon than I could ever imagine.

We worked with and lived along side the Chinese families. This was during the Second World War. Japanese families, who had worked at the canneries for many years, were sent away to internment camps in the B.C. interior by the government. This did not make sense to me because most of the workers were Canadian citizens and their kids were born in the town of Steveston.

We lived in the houses that the Japanese were forced to abandon. The houses lined the waterfront for almost a mile. They were well built, warm and comfortable. It didn't seem right that the cannery company just took them. The same thing happened to the Japanese fishing boats. The cannery put them up for sale. This is how many of our people ended up with trawlers and seine fish boats. I remember that my Dad signed papers for his fishing boat with an X because he did not read or write.

As I said, I had some good times when we were in Steveston. This was my first time in a big city. I liked walking all the way from Steveston to downtown Vancouver. There was a lot to see, and I wanted to explore the whole city. Great West Cannery paid our family twenty-four dollars a week, so I thought that we were pretty well off.

We would get all dressed up every Saturday night and go out dancing. I have a lot of good memories of those dances that were held in a little hall in Steveston. They played some peppy songs like "Patti, Patti, and Cement Mixer."

I made good friends when we lived in those company houses. Even though my cousins and I and the Chinese kids tossed tomatoes at each other on a regular basis, we all got along pretty good.

My Battle with Tuberculosis

Once we got back home from the canneries, I complained to my parents that my neck was sore. I had lumps on both sides of my neck. This was the start of my long battle with tuberculosis. I have a feeling my health troubles started while I was still at the Indian School. We never saw any doctors. Sometimes one of the boys would cough up blood. We all slept close together so we knew when a boy was sick. It seemed that when the coughing got bad, they were suddenly taken from the school. We were never told what happened to the kids when they got sick. Many times, we never saw them again.

My parents took me to a doctor in town. Right after that, I was sent off to the Indian Hospital on the Mainland.

There were hundreds of us Indians at the hospital. I saw a lot of young and old people die from this horrible disease. Doctors seemed to use us as human guinea pigs, because we got weird treatments that did not do much of anything. In fact, sometimes the treatment made things even worse. Even if a treatment was good, no one ever explained what would happen and why you had to have the treatment. This happened to me when they emptied blood out of my lungs. My brother had ribs removed. I just remember how scared I was when they took me for treatments.

I must have been very sick because I can't remember much about how I ended up in the Nanaimo Indian Hospital. I thought this would be a better place because I was closer to home, but no one could visit me because I was still so sick with the consumption.

It seemed like I just got my family back, and then I am feeling all alone again even though I am in a big crowded room. There were over two hundred beds in that place and it felt just like the Residential School. Some of the young people had been in the hospital for years. I remember a little girl who was only four years old. She spoke Hul'q'umi'num. She cried all the time. Some of the little kids were tied to their beds.

I was feeling really down one day. An orderly decided I was lazy. Every time he saw me, he would make sure to give me a good slap to the head as he went by. This had been going on for almost a year and one day, after two or three of his hard slaps, I had had enough!

I jumped from my bed and got him by the head. I was tired of this bully and I didn't really care if I got in trouble. I figured I didn't have much to lose. It turned out that I was wrong about that, because after all the effort that went into that head hold, I coughed up two containers of blood.

A Nuu'cha'nulth teenager and a boy from Prince George did a lot to keep my spirits up after that. When they saw me coughing up blood, they would tell me to be strong and not give up. They said, "You have to fight. You have to make up your mind to survive!" I was so sick, all I could do was roll over on my side and even that was hard work.

A week later the Nuu'chuh'nulth boy passed away after he struggled through a solid week of coughing up blood. No one from his family was beside him when he died.

I was not in much better shape. I thought for sure I was at the end of my time here on this earth. I was getting weaker every day. But I didn't give up and I was lucky because a young doctor came to the Nanaimo Indian Hospital and told me to take a new drug called streptomycin. I figured it was worth a try.

Within a few days, I was coughing less. I started to have a bit of energy return to my skinny body. In one month, I was able to get out of bed for the first time in a year. Soon they said I was cured and I could go home! I had been away from my family for over four years.

When I got home, I found out that this terrible disease had affected almost every family. Doctors hardly ever came to see any of them. The truth was that many were afraid of doctors. When a doctor finally did come and gave out pills to help them, the old people refused the pills. They did not trust the doctors. I also learned that my younger brother now had TB and my other half-brother, who was working as a medic overseas during the war, had been killed when his ambulance was bombed.

My poor Mom had a lot of sadness in her life!

Home Again

I was only back from the Sanatorium four days when I went out hunting with my family. Like I said before, my Dad was a good provider and it was time to bring in meat before winter arrived and snow covered the mountains.

Even though I was still weak, I couldn't wait to go hunting with my Dad. All the men worked together to move game up the mountain. This was called a hunting drive. Ten to twelve men would make a line spread out across the bottom of the mountain. They would gradually drive the deer up to the top of the mountain. The deer ended up trapped near the top of the mountain. Two or three men were waiting for the deer to arrive. Bringing the game back down from the mountain was hard work.

I was eager to show that I was up to this part of the hunting trip so I offered to carry the biggest buck down the mountain. It didn't take long before I knew that my energy level was gone. I had a heck of a time keeping up with everyone because I had to rest on just about every tree stump that I came upon. Man, I was beat! However, that wasn't the biggest problem that I faced.

I had not been home for a long time and I sure didn't remember the trails I needed to follow to get me back home. I was completely lost and ended up in a swamp. It was two days before I made it home.

I decided right then that I was going to work hard to regain my strength and build my health back up. I also decided that next time I went on a hunting drive; I would let someone else carry the biggest buck home.

Gradually life returned to normal and I got stronger and stronger with all of the good food and fresh air. Ordinary events gave me great joy. Most of the chores were getting easier. This was a time when I learned good things from the Shaker religion. There was no drinking or bad behavior allowed. I continued to get healthy and was able to help many other people. Sometimes we would be gone for three weeks doing all kinds of work. It felt good to provide support and guidance to others. I encouraged folks to stay away from alcohol and it seemed to me that the Shaker ways had some good effects. Anyways, it seemed to work for me and I was proud of the healing powers that I had.

I witnessed many weddings during my young adult years. Marriages happened only in the summer in big grassy fields in those days. The Dancers danced outside. In those days, the families would decide the marriages. Not like today, where you pick your own wife.

Blankets, canoes or animals (mostly horses and cows) were “put up” for the right to marry the “bride to be.” The bride’s family would throw blankets made from goat hair right off a platform that was on the roof of the Big House, to large crowds gathered below. Everyone was hoping to catch one of those beautiful blankets.

This talk about marriage reminds me of when I was still living with my Mom and Dad. They had decided that it was time for me to get out of the house. They started making marriage plans for me. I wasn’t too keen on this idea because I already had my eye on a special lady but I wanted to be respectful.

“Who do you have in mind?” I asked. They told me all about this woman from West Saanich. I already knew a lot about her and I certainly knew she was not right for me so I protested...

“Well, who do you have in mind, son?” they asked.

“There is a very nice woman from Deer Point who writes to me. She is kind and a good person,” I said in the most convincing way I could.

“Okay then, we will go and speak to her parents for you. We will tell them that you will be a good partner and you will take care of her.”

Some years later, my wife and I got talking about those arrangements. She learned that her grandfather, mother and father were each paid five dollars for her hand in marriage.

“Was that all I was worth?” she asked. “Fifteen bucks? Humph!”

My response was, “Sorry about that, but we didn’t have any cows or horses.”

We both had a good laugh.

Big memorials and ceremonies took place during the winter. It took a lot of wood to keep those three big fires in the Big House going night and day. I worked with my cousins to chop and stack the wood. Many ceremonies would last for days and sometimes more than a week! We never asked for money. It was just what you did.

There have been many changes over the years. In my Dad’s time, the Big House rules were very strict, and, of course, there were the anti-potlatch laws that were in place until the fifties. Despite those laws, my parents made sure I knew the traditional ways of the Big House. My Dad saw to it that my song came to me in the old way.

When I was named, I knew that if I didn’t carry that name in the right way there would be a stern lecture! Carrying a name came with many responsibilities. When I received my name in the Big House, I felt proud! That name had come through many ancestors to get to me. I felt like those ancestors were now part of me.

I believe it is important to teach young people to care for and respect the land. No matter how things change, I try to live my life in a way that honours my ancestors. There are things we can’t talk about outside the Big House, but I am always at the school to help guide young people. I want them to learn appropriate ways of conducting themselves. One thing I have noticed is that all of the educators and students are keen to learn the Hul’q’umi’num language and carry out the traditional protocols at all of our gatherings.

Our students use Hul’quimi’num greetings. The beat of the drums can be heard every day at noon as students gather to sing the prayer song. They are learning more songs every day!



Blankets were thrown from traditional Ielum (house)

Looking Ahead

Our school asks respected Elders to share their knowledge. Cultural knowledge remains strong because Elders take time to work with the youth. Sure, there are many changes! Now, the men are paid to keep the fires going during the winter ceremonies. We are having difficulty getting enough wood! Things are changing, but our culture remains strong and I am proud that my song has been passed on.

I believe in education and I want my people to have all the education opportunities they need to accomplish their dreams.

I have had some sorrows in my life, and even though I had some hard years, I am proud of the fact that I overcame challenges. I was always athletic. War canoe racing was a big part of our lives and I have wonderful memories of pulling in many canoe races.

I always enjoyed playing soccer and one of my favourite pastimes is to watch a good wrestling match. My battle with Tuberculosis showed me the importance of good health. I try to take care of myself so that I can continue to be strong for my family and my community.

Every day brings a new path and I raise my hands in thanks to all my ancestors who have helped me learn important truths.



Epilogue

1869-1965: Residential Enrollment

Timeline of apologies for role in Residential Schools in Canada

- 1986:** United Church apologizes for its role in residential abuses
- 1991:** Oblates of Mary Immaculate apologize for its role in residential schools
- 1991:** Phil Fontaine becomes first native leader to publicly disclose his abuse
- 1993:** Anglican Church apologizes for its role in residential schools
- 1994:** Presbyterian Church apologizes for its role in residential schools
- 1996:** Last government-run residential school closes; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples publishes a comprehensive report on First Nations issue
- 2006:** (May 10) The Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement was approved by all parties. It is the largest class action settlement in Canadian history.
- 2008:** Truth and reconciliation commission launched
- 2008:** Prime Minister Harper and other party leaders deliver a formal apology in the House of Commons
- 2012:** First Nations Education Act proposed as a way to break the cycle of failure on reserve schools
- 2012:** Truth and Reconciliation meetings in Cowichan Territory - March 15
- 2012:** The Commission releases interim report under the heading: "Lack of Cooperation"
- 2013:** Justice Gouge rules that Canada must disclose its records to the commission
- 2015:** Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final, horrific and damning report is the culmination of a six year examination of the history and legacy of residential schools.

“Our recommendations should be an opportunity to embrace a second chance at establishing a relationship of equals, which was intended at the beginning and should have continued throughout”

Justice Murray Sinclair

