

**TRADITIONAL NISGA'A LEADERSHIP
THE CHALLENGES THROUGH CHANGE**

by

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TRADITIONAL NISGA'A LEADERSHIP: THE CHALLENGES THROUGH CHANGE

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Institute's Committee of Sages expressed concern that the new generation of leaders were unaware of and were not practising traditional diplomacy demanded of Nisga'a statespeople. Research was undertaken to explore the idea of Elders as cultural refugia who retain leadership traditions despite imposed social tumult and who understand how to convey those traditions to future generations. Knowledge holders known for their leadership would be interviewed to see how they have kept the ancient knowledge despite cultural and ecological disruptions.

The primary research question was: "What qualities of leadership have sustained Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and how does tradition-based leadership enable cultures and ecosystems to survive during times of change?" To answer this question, I first had to describe the qualities that define Nisga'a leadership and thus identify its numerous facets. Leaders know about place: they have intimate knowledge of the land and of the animate and inanimate components of the landscape. Leaders know about people – how to accomplish transitions between leaders and how to handle difficult situations requiring a unified response. Leaders are fluent in Nisga'a language – the language provides clear insights into the intricacies of traditional history and cultural protocols such as wilxo'oskw (wisdom or knowledge), as well as 'ancient family histories and sacred family origin stories.'

These qualities informed the research methodology. Interviews with Elders recommended from within the Committee of Sages were conducted in both the Nisga'a language and English. Transcripts in Nisga'a were then interpreted into English. Portions of the interviews were left in Nisga'a and were interpreted by the Elders themselves. To keep the Elders' voices intact, rather than rewording the interviews, I left portions of the interviews intact, in both English and Nisga'a. The words of the Elders were grouped in themes defining Nisga'a leadership.

The stories, concepts, and phrases knowledge holders shared were found to have value in many aspects of Nisga'a life, including educating new leaders and the role of leadership in the management of Nisga'a life. Nisga'a wisdom also provides ideas useful to all cultures, and perhaps in particular to Indigenous cultures whose peoples may struggle with similar issues.

Lay Summary

The main goal of this study is to provide an understanding of Nisga'a leadership, and how that leadership continues to the present day. It is based on qualitative research carried out with Nisga'a leaders, all of whom are hereditary Chiefs and Matriarchs. The information was gathered at the request of the Committee of Sages from Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Institute (Nisga'a House of Wisdom – the Nisga'a university-college), primarily in 2012. Key findings are that traditional Nisga'a leadership is groomed from birth and continues throughout one's life. Knowledge of Nisga'a language helps us to understand the intricacies of Nisga'a laws and culture and experiences on the land, at times of harvest. It also helps us to recognize solidifying knowledge as a concept and knowledge as experience. A Nisga'a leader must 'walk the talk.' This study contributes to an understanding of traditional Indigenous leadership grooming with an emphasis on the importance of continuing this tradition into the future.

Preface

The identification and design of this research program was the intellectual product of the author, Deanna Nyce. The fieldwork reported throughout was covered by UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) certificate number H07-01499.

Research data was analyzed using principles of decolonizing methodologies following from Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and as employed through Nisga'a oral history. None of the thesis has been published elsewhere; this is entirely original work without collaborators or co-authors.

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List of Abbreviations

AMAX	American Mining Corporation
BC	British Columbia
DIA	Department of Indian Affairs (Canadian federal government department)
GED	General Equivalency Diploma (secondary school)
IRS	Indian Residential School
NITEP	University of British Columbia Native Indian Teachers' Education Program
NTC	Nisga'a Tribal Council
NWCC	Northwest Community College
NVIT	Nicola Valley Institute of Technology
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
SD 92	School District 92 (Nisga'a)
SMIRS	St. Michael's Indian Residential School (Alert Bay)
UBC	University of British Columbia
UNBC	University of Northern British Columbia
WWN	Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a

Glossary

Aama	Good
Adaawak	History, legend, story
Adigwil	Always
Agu(hl)	What
Algax	To talk
Algaxam Nisga'a	Nisga'a language
Al'algaxat	Speaking
Aluugigat	Ancient forebears, ancestors, Indigenous peoples
Amaaga'at	To be careful
Amukws	To listen
Ango'oskw	Nisga'a House Territory, Land
Anguu	To take
Anhee	To say, saying
Anlayt'ix	A sign, physical marker in nature
Anwilaakw	The way something is taught (to a person)
Asbisaw	To be too quick, move, or act
Asbisaw-hiy'	To talk out of turn
Ax	Spiny wood fern (<i>Dryopteris expansa</i>)
Ax'an-biskw	Unexpected
Ayeem-goot	To be charitable
Ayukws	Crest
Ayuuk	Law
Ayuukhl Nisga'a	Nisga'a laws
Bak	To feel, felt
Bakw	To come from
Bana'a	Oolichan dip net
Biskw	Expectation
Cultural refugia st	Elders (knowledge holders) who retain the age old traditional knowledge after surviving economic marginalization, racist and repressive laws, missionization, colonization, Indian reserve system and Residential Schools, and racism
Deexgoot	To think carefully
Didalk	To talk to (plural)

Didils	To live, life
Digidim-gangahl digit	Cedar sticks for smoking oolichans
Dim	Will, about to happen
Diya	To say, said
<u>Gan</u>	Tree or wood
<u>Ganada</u>	Raven/Frog Tribe/Clan
<u>Ganee'e</u>	Three-sided structure to sun dry strings of oolichans
<u>Ganwilaak' ils</u>	To educate, have earned education
<u>Ganwilxo'oskw</u>	To be knowledgeable
Gat	Man or people
Gaydim-goot	To look down upon someone
<u>Gewin</u>	Seagulls
<u>Gigiina\underline{x}kw</u>	To pray
Gik'uuhl	Many years ago or ancient past
Gilo	Wait, do not be too quick
Gimxdi	Brother (to female) or Sister (to male)
Ginam	To give
Gip	To eat (something)
<u>Gisk'aast</u>	Killerwhale Clan
<u>Gisk'ahaast</u>	Killerwhale Clan
Gitwilaak n'uum'	To teach them the way we do things
<u>Gom'</u>	Go ahead, start, begin
<u>Goot</u>	Heart
Gwildim-goot'in	To prepare (you)
Gwilks-yo'oks	Cleansing feast
Gwinwilaak'intkw	Reincarnation
Ha	Air
Haadiks	Inner hemlock bark
Hagwil (hu)wilin	Take your time
Hahlo'ohl	To walk together
<u>Hanak'</u>	Woman
<u>Hasak</u>	To want
Hat'al'	Inner cambium of cedar bark
Haw'it	Stop

Haw'ahlkw	Traditional cautions, behaviour culturally forbidden
Haw'ahlgum	To be strictly forbidden, evoking bad fortune
Hiin'ak	Skunk cabbage (<i>Lysichiton americanus</i>)
Hlak'askw	Seaweed (<i>Pyropia abbottiae</i>)
Hlo'omskw	To honour
Hobiiyee	Nisga'a New Year
Hugax	To be right, to be just like something
Huwilp	Plural of Wilp (House) and an extended family social unit
Jih	(Expression of surprise)
Jiits	Grandmother (informal)
<u>K</u> 'aats	Prohibited marriage or relationship of two people in the same tribe or Clan
<u>K</u> 'amksiiwaa	Non-Indigenous person(s) word used to refer to white people, derived from the Haida language in reference to the colour of beach driftwood
<u>K</u> 'amligiihahlhaahl	Supreme Being, Creator, God
<u>K</u> 'ay'	(Colloquial term) Shame on you!
<u>K</u> 'aylimksit	Young people
<u>K</u> 'ayukws	Filleted, smoked and dried salmon
<u>K</u> 'e'em-goot	Compassionate, kind-hearted
<u>K</u> 'oomhl-goot	To be greedy, stingy heart
Ksijapkws	Shelter
Ksim	In reference to a person and more commonly in reference to women
Ksax	Continually doing or saying something
Ksuuw'	Hemlock bark (<i>Tsuga</i> , inner cambium which is a food source)
Kwhliixoosa'anskw	To be respectful
Kyool	One person
Lak'in	To wreck something, to take something apart
Lakw	Firewood
Laxgibuu	Wolf Clan
Laxha	Heaven or sky
Laxsgiik	Eagle Clan
Lax Tsimilx	Beaver Clan (Subclan of the Eagle)

Ligitnaa	Anyone
Luu'anyee	Person next in line to inherit title
Luw'	To be greedy, refuse to share
Luubayt	Recklessly, lacking proper seriousness and dignity
Luubayt-wil	To be disorganized
Luu-kw'ihl	Turned around
Luun'a _x -no'ogam-goot	A person with a hole in their heart
Luut'aahl	To place something or someone
Maay'	Berries
Mahl	To tell
Mak'a'am lo'op	Stone-moving feast
Maksa'an	Asking one person to stand up
Mee _x	Sour or spoiled
Ndahl	Where
Nidii	No or not
N'idiit	They or them
Nidiitnaa	No one
Nigwoodiy'	My father
Niyeetgwin-la _x -ts'eets'iks	To walk on the land
Nii	No
N'iin	You (singular)
N'isim'	You (more than one)
Noon	Your mother
N'uum'	We, us, our
Oots'in	Spirit
Pdeek	Clan
Refugia	Areas that remain habitable, conserve genetic information and help retain structure of, and interaction within, an ecosystem
Saak	Oolichans
Saak'oots	To take top off (something)
Sbayt	Among
Sdo'oks	Beside (something)
Sk'ee _x kw	Village of darkness
Sigidimnak'	Matriarch (singular)

Silgit	Eldest
Simgigat	Chiefs, chieftain class
Si'mihl	Wave it over a flame, to smoke (something)
Sim'oogit	Chief (singular)
Sim'oogit Laxha	God (literally Chief of Heaven)
Sisaatkw	To cleanse one's self
Siwilaks	To educate, learn
T'ipdidalk	To talk down to someone
T'ipga'ahl	To look down upon someone
T'ipyees	Stonecrop or lava berries (<i>Sedum divergens</i>)
Ts'al	Filletted and half-smoked fish
Ts'eets'iks	Land
Ts'im	In
Txeemsim	Nisga'a supernatural cultural hero
Ukwstisim-giiks	To push away from shore
Wa	Name
Wa'am Nisga'a	Nisga'a name
W'ahlingigat	Chiefs of older times, old people, ancestors
Wak	Brother (to male)
Wil	To be
Wilaalohl Nisga'a	Nisga'a culture
Wilksilaks	Father's family, paternal family
Wilksiw'itkw	Father's family, paternal family where a person and their skills come from
Wilp	House (Extended family social unit)
Wilxo'oskw	Wise, wisdom or knowledge
Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a	Nisga'a House of Wisdom
Wiyitkw	To cry
W'o'o	Witness (at a feast)
Xk'aat'aatkw	To embarrass
Xna	To know, understand, hear
Xtk'aldipdalk	To mention what you see or hear about a person
Ye'e	Grandfather

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Dedication

For future leaders

and

for the Elders who generously shared their wisdom and for those who follow in their footsteps

Also for family: Harry Sr., Harry Jr., and Lori Nyce; Starnita, Kaitlyn, and Wilson Nyce; Angeline Nyce, Allen Benson, and Ethan Benson-Nyce; and Allison, Suzzanne, and Maurice Nyce

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation is an exploration of traditional Nisga'a leadership from the perspectives of traditional Nisga'a leaders, each of whom are Elders and hereditary Chiefs and Matriarchs, based on their own lived experiences. The hope of these Nisga'a Elders is that, through their oral histories, new Nisga'a leaders will gain an understanding of traditional Nisga'a leadership that incorporates Ayuukhl Nisga'a (Nisga'a traditional laws), knowledge and understanding of Nisga'a language, and most importantly, knowledge and awareness of Nisga'a history and culture embedded within Nisga'a geography. The Nisga'a have a guiding education philosophy that states education is a way of life (McKay and McKay, 1987), and it has been the push/plight/goal of traditional Nisga'a leaders for over a century to guarantee access to and control over education for Nisga'a citizens.

In order to contextualize traditional Aboriginal leadership, the paper will introduce the concept of traditional Nisga'a leadership, the challenges and changes the Nisga'a leadership have had to endure, and the hope for the future of Nisga'a leadership. The persistence of traditional Aboriginal leadership is akin to the concept of refugium (Turner quoted in Shore 2004), as an ecosystem that stays intact through change. The Elders are cultural refugiasts who have, despite chaotic changes to every aspect of Aboriginal lives, retained crucial ancestral knowledge (Mackin 2004; Mackin and Nyce 2005) to keep communities intact. The thesis is that traditional Nisga'a leadership has been sustained by its underpinning in Nisga'a philosophy of education known as siwilaks (to educate, to learn) that begins at birth and ends at death. The dissertation will explore the changes to education faced with the encroachment and imposition of a colonial government for control of education through mission schools, Indian day schools, Residential

Schools, and the boarding home program that failed Nisga'a children, and the enduring negotiation of Nisga'a traditional leaders to (re)gain control of Nisga'a education.

The dissertation begins by defining 'refugia' within the larger context of traditional ecological knowledge. Secondly, the definition and theoretical underpinnings of Elders as 'cultural refugiasts' with their examples of preserving ancestral knowledge during decades of disruptive societal changes. Thirdly, a brief overview of Aboriginal education, specifically in the Nisga'a context, is provided, and finally, the dissertation ends with the Nisga'a Elders' hope for the new leadership and direction of Nisga'a education.

Chapter 1 offers an overview of the entire dissertation. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 focus on the foundation of the thesis – of Elders as cultural refugiasts – and introduce the interviewees; in addition, they provide an overview of Nisga'a history and traditional leadership. Chapters 4 to 7 provide direct quotations from the interviewees on traditional Nisga'a leadership, and where possible, Nisga'a leadership attributes are emphasized. Chapter 8 is a look to the future, as told by the interviewees that caution the way ahead for new leaders. Chapter 9 draws together lessons learned about traditional Nisga'a leadership. A final chapter that serves as an epilogue, marking the end of this journey, offers a caution and makes recommendations for futures leaders and researchers.

1.2 Impetus

This thesis was inspired by work with Nisga'a Elders (knowledge holders) while building curriculum for the Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a (WWN) Institute. WWN is the Nisga'a university-college located in the Nisga'a Village of Gitwinksihlkw. During many of these discussions, the Elders expressed their utmost concern about the diminishing knowledge respecting traditional Nisga'a leadership. As they explain, traditional Nisga'a leadership exercises diplomacy and integrity. The new leaders, they said, did not appear to be groomed for leadership as well as those of past generations. Elders were

concerned that current leaders could not speak or understand the Nisga'a language, nor were they aware of Nisga'a history, culture, or the geography of Nisga'a homelands. The Elders voiced concern for the continued existence of Nisga'a as a culturally discrete nation. They suggested that perhaps the education system was interfering with oral history and the retention of ancient knowledge. It is within this larger context that the research and, more specifically, the research questions emerged.

1.3 Research objectives

Within the broader context of knowledge respecting Nisga'a cultural leadership, the primary research questions that informed the research are "What qualities of leadership have sustained Traditional Ecological Knowledge for the Nisga'a?" and "How does tradition-based leadership enable cultures and ecosystems to survive during times of change?" This interdisciplinary research project seeks to understand the modes and circumstances through which individual leaders within Aboriginal communities perpetuate and exchange knowledge, during times of profound societal change.

The research also looks at the role of Nisga'a leaders in terms of the acquisition, transmission, and exchange of knowledge across cultures, both historically and in the present day. Recent concerns are explored with respect to the erosion of traditional knowledge systems, and solutions sought through this investigation into the ways Elders have traditionally led through times of change. The research hypothesizes that present-day leaders may acquire skills from tradition-based leadership that will help them to lead Indigenous communities and associated ecosystems into a future of continued change.

The dissertation focuses on qualities of traditional knowledge vital to the health and well-being of First Nations societies and associated ecosystems. Information from First Nations' oral histories and Elders' teachings provides instruction on how to lead people so that cultures and ecosystems will remain strong. One story from Nisga'a history talks about how leaders exercise compassion; other stories teach about the responsibilities of a leader to maintain peace unless lives are threatened; still

others teach about how social well-being is interdependent with abundant resources and overall ecosystem health.

1.4 Theoretical underpinning in Elders as cultural refugia

“Ecologically speaking, a refugium is a habitat or ecosystem or fragment of an ecosystem that remains intact through a time of great change or disturbance. It can be as large as an area left unglaciated after the last Ice Age, or as small as a single tree spared in a forest fire. Refugia are areas that remain habitable, conserve genetic information, and help retain the structure of, and interactions within, an ecosystem,” says Dr. Nancy Turner. “They often serve as a way of repopulating the surrounding areas that were disturbed.” People can serve in a similar way. “Since the colonization of the Pacific Northwest, there’s been a tremendous disruption of cultural practices and knowledge ... Yet throughout all this change, these key individuals [particular leaders and knowledge holders] have retained their traditions, understanding the importance of that knowledge for the future of their people. They can be considered *cultural refugia*, and these are the people that I and other academics have been drawn to” (Turner quoted in Shore 2004). Cultural refugiasts are Elders who retain the age-old traditional knowledge after surviving the tumultuous storms of economic marginalization, racist and repressive laws, missionization, colonization, Indian reserve system, and Residential Schools, all of which were ploys to eradicate Indigenous languages and cultures.

For this research, the term ‘refugia’ is used to describe traditional knowledge that “remains intact through a time of great change” (Turner quoted in Shore 2004) where Elders, traditional knowledge keepers, have retained ancient knowledge despite linguistic and cultural assaults. Intrusions altered the lifeways of very trusting Elders, and abuses still exist in the form of ongoing colonization. This includes economic exclusion as evidenced by repressive laws, missionization which brought us the Residential Schools, and separation of our homelands and families.

One example of a cost of missionization is reflected in the Tsimshian Nation communities having been divided by the churches (Tennant 1990). Hartley Bay is a United Church community. Kitkatla and Metlakatla are Anglican communities. Metlakatla is one of several First Nations communities created as missionary communities. Port Simpson is United Church, where the Methodist missionary Thomas Crosby was and where Residential Schools began (Hare and Barman 2006). Later the Salvation Army moved into Port Simpson, which caused further division within this community. Kitsumkalum became United Church. Kitselas was Christian Band of Workers (United Church) and later Salvation Army.

For those with family spread across these Tsimshian communities, this means their families would have been divided by church doctrines. The impacts of Christian missionaries disrupted Indigenous spirituality, diet, medicines, education, and family organization, and displaced families and communities. Taken alone, any one of these impacts is profoundly disruptive. Together, the impacts have been overwhelming and results show in social dysfunction extending throughout communities.

Traditional Nisga'a leadership is inherited through matrilineal kinship, where inheritance is through the mother's line and children assume the Clan of their birth mother. Sons traditionally inherit from their maternal uncles (mother's brothers), as shown in Table 1. Daughters directly inherit from their mothers, as shown in Table 2.

Table 1 Chieftainship line of succession



Source: Deanna Nyce

Table 2 Matriarchal line of succession



Source: Deanna Nyce

Missionization confused the traditional matriarchal system with the patriarchal system practised by all missionaries. Missionization's impact on the matrilineal system was, and continues to be, difficult for Nisga'a people, causing lineage confusion and conflict.

Marginalization continues to place Indigenous peoples at an economic disadvantage. For example, there is not a fair distribution of social development financial support for marginalized families. If one lives on reserve lands, where the cost of living is higher, and is in need of social assistance, their Indigenous childcare agencies will receive less percapita than their provincial, territorial, or national counterparts (King, Wattam, and Blackstock 2016, 34). The same holds true for support of kindergarten to grade 12 schools on and off reserve lands, where Indigenous schools on reserve receive far less for programming and capital. Compounding the financial discrimination, ignorance, racism, and abuse continue to exist at almost every turn.

Despite this tsunami of life abuses, most Elders have retained some vestige of ancient ancestral knowledge that still informs and guides us today (Mackin and Nyce 2005). For example, one Sunday morning in Gitwinksihlkw Nisga'a Elder the late Lawrence Adams explained the construction and operation of his salmon and oolichan smokehouse. He described how it was constructed following ancient traditional methods that maximize the use of the sun and wind in fish and meat preservation. The outer wall slats were horizontal with airflow spaces between to maximize use of the airflow. The

smokehouse itself was situated so that the sun would travel around it from morning to night to maximize sun-drying as well. The age-old and still-preferred recipe that renders the fish or meat lightly smoked in a way that incorporates the effects of wind and sun. This description illustrates traditional knowledge bringing together many facets of life without separating them into discrete disciplines.

1.5 Practical underpinning in education

This dissertation also has a very practical underpinning. Education is a way of life for the Nisga'a people (McKay and McKay 1987). Education begins at birth and ends at death, and as explained by McKay and McKay, education is not a new concept to the Nisga'a. Nor did education come about because of the introduction of Western education system.

The Nisga'a term *siwilaks* literally interprets to English as 'to educate or to learn' depending on the context of the word. More importantly, *siwilaks* is a Nisga'a word as old as the Nisga'a people. Nisga'a have always believed in the critical importance of education and learning. For Nisga'a leaders of the past, in the struggle for resolution of the Land Question, education was always a part of the discussions. For example, in the very early days of the Nisga'a Land Question, the Nisga'a 1913 Petition sent to the Privy Council in part alludes to education: "For more than twenty-five years, being convinced that the recognition of our aboriginal rights would be of very great material advantage to us and would open the way for the intellectual social and industrial advance of our people ..." (Nishga Nation Statement of the Nishga Nation or Tribe of Indians adopted on 22 January 1913, 1).

Siwilaks in the Nisga'a world pertains to many forms of education and learning. *Siwilaks* ranges from studying and learning efficient building construction specifically designed for a variety of purposes in the climate of northwestern British Columbia; ways of harvesting many foods and medicines; how to

make tools for harvesting, for fishing oolichans, for rendering oolichan oil; for medicinal and food preservation and usage; for the economics of trade and barter that travelled north, south, east, and west; for studying weather and weather patterns and their effects on food; for sustaining the plants and animals that sustain people; for guiding people on how to behave, especially in public. It is culturally important to know the rules and protocols when interacting with others. Nisga'a Elders of long ago would teach their children that they would be known as ambassadors of their families, communities, and people. The children were taught knowledge of the family history, stories, land holdings and resources; weather patterns; astronomy; and the rules of the culture and language. The siwilaks list covers a plethora of topics – such as how many fathoms a net should be for different water types – since variations of Nisga'a life require a complex education system.

Education also emphasized the importance of learning Nisga'a language and using it well. Nisga'a, like other First Nations groups, prided themselves in speaking a variety of languages. Nisga'a Elder, the late Eli Gosnell, whose father was Tsimshian, could speak five First Nations languages in addition to English, as did his contemporary, the late Peter Nyce, whose first language was Haisla. Peter also spoke Tsimshian (his matrilineal language), and Gitksan and Nisga'a (languages of his wife's peoples), as well as English. Peter had the most charming accent as he referred to the Gitksan as 'Gitiksan' when he spoke about family who live in that area. Both Eli and Peter were my grandfathers.

Western education changed many aspects of siwilaks. Mission schools were established as missionization took root. These mission schools were fashioned after what was most familiar to the missionaries and came out of their educational experiences in Europe. Education during the missionary era was centred around the priest, his mission, and his mission's needs. Mission schooling included a whole range of activities, from learning to read the Bible and hard physical labour to assist

the priest with his domesticity, food preservation, preparation, and gardening in servitude to the priest and his family.

Mission education is well described by Emma Crosby in her letters to her mother in Jan Hare and Jean Barman's *Good Intentions Gone Awry* (2006). Emma Crosby's teachings began with girls' assisting her with daily tasks in looking after her children. When her own children began emulating the girls, Emma Crosby moved the Tsimshian girls out of her house and established a Residential School in Port Simpson (Lax Kwalaams). Many Nisga'a girls attended this school in Lax Kwalaams as well.

As they existed all across Canada, the Indian day schools were also found in the Nass. These schools were administered by the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa (with provincial 'regions'). Often, teachers hired for these Indian day schools were not trained teachers. The Nass River day schools ranged from grades 1 to 7. In 1969, there were four Indian day schools – one in each of the four Nisga'a communities. Later, kindergarten was established in these schools.

Beginning in the late 1800s, Indian Residential Schools began to be established in Canada as part of the federal government's policy to assimilate Indigenous people by attempting to remove Indigenous cultures and languages. As with all First Nations in Canada, by federal Law, Nisga'a children were required to attend those schools. The Residential School system was a purgatory that included forced labour, human experimentation, and sexual, physical, and psychological abuse. While writing her master's thesis in education titled "The Effects of Residential Schools on Native Child-Rearing Patterns," Rosalyn Ing (1990) found graveyards of Residential School children.

The impact of Indian Residential School education on the children, the parents, and the grandparents was significant on many different fronts. First and foremost, including my own IRS experience, is that it was not successful at educating the children; the horrendous abuses made sure of that. Parents

and grandparents were left heartbroken when they eventually learned of the atrocities. Parents, like my mother, wrote letters objecting to how the schools were operated; their concerns were largely unheard and ignored. Traditional education usually carried out by grandparents was crammed into very short periods of time when and if the children returned home during the summer months. The children would most likely not be speaking their Indigenous languages anymore for fear of physical abuse. Interaction between brothers and sisters, who lived separately at Residential Schools, was stifled and in summer months back at home, they had to learn how to live with a sibling with whom they lived separately in the Indian Residential Schools; and even if they knew of each other, they were forbidden to speak with each other. The family fabric was shaken to its core. The significance was epic, reaching far beyond the Indigenous family and community into the entire social fabric of Canada, where the deleterious effect of Indian Residential School education will unfortunately resonate, despite apologies from the Prime Minister and the churches who ran the schools, for a long time well into the future.

A boarding home education program was also phased in by the federal government. Children were taken from their home communities and placed in homes in cities and towns to receive high school education. Also, as with Residential Schools, part of the impetus for the boarding home program was to save cost by not having to construct and fund the operation of high schools in Indigenous communities. In order to attend high school, many Nisga'a teens left their families to move to homes in Terrace, Prince Rupert, Vancouver, and other Lower Mainland communities. Some of these homes were supportive; others were abusive.

All of these federally imposed education systems were fraught with financial, academic, and social problems. Students did not get the education promised and the dropout rate was extremely high. The results of low education performance have transferred from generations of Indigenous people to their children.

In 1969, the Nisga Tribal Council (NTC) was very concerned about the lack of their children's success in Residential Schools and the boarding home programs. The NTC approached the Terrace School District who was serving the Nass Camp community – a logging community north of New Aiyansh (Gitlaxtaamiks) at the time. The Terrace School Board met with the Nisga'a delegation. The Nisga'a maintained that Nisga'a language and culture should become a part of the curriculum. The Terrace School Board abruptly turned the Nisga'a down. The Terrace Board spokesperson at that time said, "Absolutely not! Nisga'a students will not receive Nisga'a language and culture programming. They will receive the same education that all the children in the district receive!"

The NTC continued to lobby the provincial government. In 1974, the provincial government created School District 92 (Nisga'a) and a superintendent was assigned for a one-year period to begin the task of setting up the school district. In 1975, a Nisga'a educator, the late Alvin McKay, who had completed his master's degree in educational administration, was appointed superintendent, and school construction began in three of the four Nisga'a communities. Alvin's brother, the late Bertram McKay, another Nisga'a educator at the time, along with many Nisga'a knowledge keepers, created the Nisga'a Bilingual Bicultural Centre for the school district. Bertram put together a team whose prime task was to build Nisga'a language and culture curriculum. Numerous Elders (knowledge keepers) assisted in the process. Under this new system, the school-completion success rate turned right around. Students were graduating in much higher numbers from grade 12. The vision of high school completion was being met – very unlike First Nations schooling to that date – due to the leadership of the Nisga'a seeking to declare their vision of education for their children.

School District 92 was declared a public BC school district in 1975 and officially opened in 1976. After high school, students increasingly entered British Columbia's post-secondary system. Nisga'a students attended Northwest Community College in Terrace and other post-secondary institutions in

British Columbia. However, the BC public post-secondary institutions began failing Nisga'a and other First Nations students at very high rates. The BC public post-secondary program failed to meet the needs of Nisga'a and other Indigenous students. In 1979, the number of Indigenous university graduates was extremely low. This was an argument UBC's NITEP program used repeatedly in seeking government financial support to build their program and, today, the program remains open.

The Nisga'a Tribal Council (NTC) conducted a Nisga'a Population and Training Needs Study in 1988. Their goal was to prepare Nisga'a to assume positions for the many jobs anticipated when the Nisga'a Treaty became a reality and to assert control over local resources (Nishga Tribal Council 1988, 1). As a result of the Training Needs Study, the NTC put together an Industry Adjustment Committee. NTC also lobbied the local Northwest Community College (NWCC) and a Nisga'a college coordinator was hired to coordinate college courses and also to serve as a community liaison for the School District 92 (Nisga'a). There were no post-secondary programs established by or with NWCC, just isolated courses. For example, in 1977, I completed my GED – grade 12 equivalency – through a NWCC–School District 92 (Nisga'a) initiative. The next year, English and psychology courses were offered. Northwest Community College established college sites in a number of communities in British Columbia's Northwest (Houston, Hazelton, Kitimat, Prince Rupert, Stewart), but not in the Nass Valley.

Nisga'a post-secondary students had to continue to experience the disadvantage of travelling away from the support of their home communities for post-secondary education. The public post-secondary system continued to fail Nisga'a students. In part, the Nisga'a Population and Training Needs Study recommended creation of a Nisga'a governed and operated post-secondary system to meet or beat the public system.

Under the leadership of the NTC and an appointed team of governance made up of NTC, SD 92, the seven Nisga'a community representatives, and the Nisga'a Valley Health Board, the Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a (Nisga'a House of Wisdom) was incorporated in 1993 under the Societies Act of British Columbia. Negotiations began in earnest with the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) administration. In September 1994, WWN realized 222 enrolments in five of its seven communities. The WWN-UNBC relationship began with a Memorandum of Understanding, that later changed to an Affiliation Agreement. The WWN-UNBC Affiliation Agreement relationship was further enriched by finally graduating to a Federation Agreement, whereby in part "the WWN will hold in abeyance any degrees offered by UNBC."

The WWN-UNBC Federated Agreement is a more of an equal partnership. The WWN's success rate with successful student completion of courses, certificates and degrees reversed the high post-secondary failure rate. The WWN also is responsible for Nisga'a research for researchers who respect the Nisga'a Research protocol.

Much change still needs to be realized, but hope appears to be on the horizon to right the injustices of the past. Universities are beginning to understand their role in trying to include Indigenous epistemology, thought and perspectives into the academic world. For example, we witness access programs in Manitoba, Indigenous law schools in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, and First Nations teacher education programs in almost every province in Canada. More locally, we see the creation of School District 92 (Nisga'a) in the Nass Valley, where parental involvement and control is promised. The BC Ministry of Education (K-12) has invoked a policy of "targeted" Aboriginal dollars devoted to improving the success rate of Indigenous learners. Indigenous cultural post-secondary schools like the Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Institute are now receiving increasing attention and support from the BC government.

The Nisga'a no longer have 'Indian Bands' under the federal Indian Act. The Nisga'a Treaty is respected by all levels of Canadian government: the Nisga'a Government, the provincial (BC) government, the federal Government of Canada, and local governments. In British Columbia, the local governments belong to the Union of BC Municipalities. One aspiration is that the tripartite government, of Nisga'a, British Columbia, and Canada, will create an Act to establish the WVN as a public post-secondary institute.

Only one Indigenous post-secondary institute currently exists in British Columbia – the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (originally established by four Nicola Valley Indian Bands). NVIT receives full BC public recognition through an Act and is fully provincially funded. The NVIT Board of Governors retains the four Nicola Valley Indian band council seats with appointees from other parts of British Columbia. The Institute of Indigenous Governance (IIG) was also a BC public post-secondary institute in Vancouver that offered adult basic education and the first two years of post-secondary studies. IIG closed in 2007, and all of its programming was incorporated in to operations at NVIT (Jothen 2011, 18).

The NVIT Act leaves us hopeful that self-actualization of Nisga'a and other Indigenous people is on the horizon. When this actualization occurs, strong leadership will be needed that is rooted in community knowledge and values. The WVN differs from NVIT in that it has research responsibilities with a research protocol that most internal and external researchers honour in working with and learning from Nisga'a knowledge holders and/or on Nisga'a lands.

1.6 Thesis organization

This thesis has nine chapters, with this first chapter being the Introduction. Chapter 2 speaks to the methodology utilized, while Chapter 3 provides a short history of Nisga'a leadership. Chapter 4 looks at the ancient attributes of Nisga'a leadership. Chapter 5 describes how Nisga'a Leadership is

groomed. Chapter 6 looks at Nisga'a leadership and the land. Chapter 7 attends to Nisga'a leadership in honouring the environment. Chapter 8 is where Nisga'a leadership looks towards the future, and Chapter 9 offers conclusions.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Chapter 2 explains the research process I used in this work. It describes the methodology and introduces the ten interviewees.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research process, selection of interviewees, and backgrounds of the interviewees, and describes the interview process.

Research in Indigenous communities must be handled with the utmost care and consideration, as explained by Dr. Linda Tuhiwai Smith in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999):

The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. It is so powerful that indigenous people even write poetry about research. The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity. (1)

Given that this response to research within Indigenous communities prevails, it was important to determine the appropriate research methodology and to carefully incorporate local Indigenous protocol for my research on Nisga'a traditional leadership. I followed Dr. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's 'decolonizing methodology' to 'give back knowledge' to the community I was engaged in and with. In addition, 'participatory research' methods were followed as outlined by Evans, McDonald, and Nyce (1999).

The Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Research Protocol that incorporates Nisga'a protocol and Ayuukhl Nisga'a (Nisga'a traditional laws) guided the research process from its inception. This research was drawn out of a meeting of the Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Institute Committee of Sages (Elders' Advisory Committee) who discussed their concerns for traditional Nisga'a leadership and new leaders. The committee requested that I pursue a research project on traditional Nisga'a leadership and identified ten knowledge holders on traditional Nisga'a leadership. These ten represented each Nisga'a Clan and village, and six different Huwilp (Nisga'a Houses). The personal oral histories of each interviewee will be shown in this chapter, but by way of introduction, an introduction to each interviewee is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Introductory table of interviewees

Name	Nisga'a Name	Birthplace	House	Clan
Alice Azak	Sigidimnak' Kiigyapkws	Gitlaxt'aamiks Nass River March 1, 1929	Gwiix Maaw'	Eagle
Larry Derrick	Sim'oogit Axdii Anxsmx	Miller Bay Hospital (Prince Rupert) May 13, 1946	Axdii Anxsmx	Raven
Dr. Joseph Gosnell Sr.	Sim'oogit Hleek	Arrandale Cannery Nass River June 21, 1936	Hleek	Eagle-Beaver
Moses McKay	Sim'oogit Bayt Neeohl	Mill Bay Nass River April 7, 1943	Bayt Neeohl	Eagle-Beaver
Willard Martin	Sim'oogit Niisyuus	Laxgalts'ap Nass River February 25, 1939	Laxha Gitalabit	Killerwhale
Oscar Mercer	Sim'oogit Ksim Xsaan	Gitlaxt'aamiks Nass River February 20, 1929	Ksim Xsaan	Raven
Dorcas Shirley Morven	Sigidimnak' Angaye'e	Gitlaxt'aamiks Nass River October 28, 1936	K'eexkw	Wolf

Name	Nisga'a Name	Birthplace	House	Clan
Emma Nyce	Sigidimnak' Hlguwilksihlgum Maaksgum Hlbin	Claxton Cannery Skeena River July 18, 1927	Hleek	Eagle-Beaver
Harry Nyce Sr.	Sim'oogit Naaws'	Gitwinksihlkw Nass River December 10, 1947	Hleek	Eagle-Beaver
Lorene Plante	Sigidimnak' Lootkw	Gitlaxt'aamiks Nass River November 4, 1940	Duuk'	Wolf

Source: Deanna Nyce

The interview process will be laid out in this chapter and important aspects to note include presenting research questions to interviewees before the actual interview, signed permission forms for recording and using interviews, review and editing in consultation with each interviewee, and follow-up with presentation or understanding of each interviewee's interviews. Unique aspects of this research included at times exchanges with interviewees only in the Nisga'a language, incorporating interview times during harvest on Nisga'a territory, and being cognizant of taking an oral record to a written record.

The research questions asked and answered by all ten interviewees were:

1. After all of these years and through all of the changes, how did you manage to keep the knowledge?
2. How do we ensure that that knowledge continues through future generations to people who are going to be following in your footsteps?
3. What are significant attributes of Nisga'a cultural leadership?
4. What resource observances help you to be a leader?

5. How does cultural food gathering and preparation help to sustain leadership?
6. Do you know any stories or personal situations relating to the environment, resources, or communities' survival in which the knowledge of leaders is exemplified or reflected? If so, would you be willing to share these?
7. What qualities of leadership have sustained Traditional Ecological Knowledge in the Nisga'a Nation, and how does tradition-based leadership enable people and our lands to remain strong even during times of change?

A special note about 'objectivity' is explored in this chapter, as each of the interviewees are connected to me and my work over the course of my lifetime with the Nisga'a community (that is well over fifty years), and at Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Institute (for over twenty-five years) and therefore my relationships to each of them could not be separated for the purposes of truly objective research. As an Indigenous researcher in her own Maori context, Dr. Linda Tuhiwai Smith offered a description of 'insider researchers' that emphasizes the importance of relationship building and maintenance when Indigenous researchers are working in their own Indigenous communities (1999, 137). This is followed up by the work of Dr. Gregory Cajete, Tewa scholar and educator, that emphasizes that 'truth' as the outcome of research cannot be objective in an Indigenous context because of the relationship factors where 'truth' may be found in Indigenous beliefs (Cajete 2004, 46) through the 'interactions' of the actors or agents involved.

2.2 The research process

The research centred on collecting stories from Nisga'a knowledge holders renowned for their leadership knowledge and from published works that have been verified by the Nisga'a First Nation. Stories were collected and interviews undertaken with knowledge holders who remember their ancestors' wisdom. Whenever possible, research was undertaken during resource management

activities taking place within the unique ecological environments of the Nass Valley, with its four bio-geographic zones and unusual endemic species.

Elders guided interpretations of stories and wisdom, an important component of the methodology since much misunderstanding has occurred in past research respecting First Nations narratives. From stories and interviews, leadership qualities were determined and the effectiveness of the qualities relative to the health and well-being of the cultures and ecologies were assessed, again with Elders as guides.

All research followed decolonizing methodologies as described by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999); that is, it gives back to Indigenous communities the knowledge that has been taken, submerged, or partially erased. Research was also participatory, defined by Evans, McDonald, and Nyce (1999) as “those that involve communities in research projects from the moment a project is conceived, to choosing what data is collected, to the drafting of results, through to deciding how the completed research is used ... A number of potential benefits result from this, not the least of which is an informed and empowered community” (ibid., 191).

Following the Nisga’a Research Protocol, a research proposal was drafted and presented to the Wilp Wilxo’oskwhl Nisga’a Board of Governors for approval.

2.3 Interviews

An initial meeting was held with the Wilp Wilxo’oskwhl Nisga’a (WWN) Committee of Sages (an Elders’ Advisory Committee) to think about traditional Nisga’a leadership. The WWN Committee of Sages, depending on the type of knowledge needed, come from each of the four Nisga’a communities in the Nass Valley. The four communities and the four Clans (both male and female) are represented

in the committee's construct.

WWN identified and recommended knowledge holders or traditional wisdom keepers to be interviewed. In terms of this research project, they recommended interviewees who they knew were recognized by their peers as traditional Nisga'a leadership knowledge holders of specific Nisga'a knowledge. Each interviewee is renowned in the Valley for their expert knowledge in particular areas. Potential interviewees subsequently nominated others known for their leadership knowledge. Ten people were interviewed in 2012: four women and six men. Two of the four women are in the Eagle Clan and two are in the Wolf Clan. Three of the men are in the Eagle Clan, two in the Raven Clan, and one in the Killerwhale Clan. They all come from six different Houses within those Clans.

Each interviewee was telephoned to set up an appointment, either in their home or at WWN, whichever was most convenient for the knowledge holder. All opted to be interviewed at the WWN campus. All interviewees gave written permission in advance for their interview to be recorded.

All interviewees were given copies of the questions before the interview. The interview questions were formulated to understand how certain knowledge keepers become cultural refugia: individuals in a community with memory of knowledge that few others hold because of societal restructuring (e.g., Residential School), and with ability to teach leadership to others.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour, with follow-up interviews to clarify points and confirm that what had been recorded was indeed what they wanted to portray. Some of the interactions were entirely in Nisga'a. After interviews were completed, they were transcribed, and as necessary interpreted from Nisga'a to English, and examined for common themes on leadership and education. The themes begin to tell the story of Nisga'a leadership in ensuring successful learning through times of change.

Follow-up interviews and phone calls ensured that interviewees' ideas had been understood correctly. Deletions and corrections were made as instructed by the Elders. Feedback from the interviewees was carefully brought into the research data. In total, interviewees each spent between five and ten hours with me, depending on the depth of research responses needed in that person's area of expertise.

I silently edited the interview transcripts to remove repetitive words like 'you know,' take out pauses and other auditory irrelevant thoughts like 'ums' and 'aahs.' I was cognizant that I was engaged in changing oral language to written.

Interviews with knowledge holders were undertaken as a way to build understanding about how leadership helped traditional ecological knowledge to be shared. The cultural/ecological refugium parallel served as a model for understanding how people learned, retained, and passed on all of the knowledge that they needed to live in all kinds of conditions.

The interviews were incredible. The knowledge holders I interviewed freely shared their knowledge with me. The trust they showed me and the truthfulness of responses impressed me like I have never experienced before. I am grateful.

One of the perceived limitations or unique aspects of this study is that I have a close relationship with the interviewees, and have worked with them over many decades in one way or another. This closeness made it difficult to be objective. However, the closeness brought a level of respect and trust that is rare to find. They were open and shared freely with me. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) outlines the 'insider researcher' position as this:

The critical issue with insider [Indigenous] research is the constant need for reflexivity. At a general level insider researchers have to have ways of thinking critically about their processes, their relationships and the quality and richness of their data and analysis. So too do outsiders, but the major difference is that insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and communities. For this reason insider researchers need to build particular sorts of research-based support systems and relationships with their communities. They have to be skilled at defining clear research goals and 'lines of relating' which are specific to the project and somewhat different from their own family networks. (137)

The 'research-based supports' and 'lines of relating' of this research incorporated Nisga'a research methodologies by its selection of Elders and interpreting their words within a Nisga'a context. The closeness and the context are what make this research project unique because without the relationships that have been built over fifty years the trust and openness of the Elders in their interviews would not have been possible.

Dr. Gregory Cajete, Tewa Indian scholar and educator, working within his own and greater Indigenous community, raised the same concerns of the importance of stepping away from 'objectivity' to gain truth in an Indigenous context:

Native American philosophy of science has always been a broad-based ecological philosophy, based not on rational thought alone, but also incorporating to the highest degree all aspects of interactions of "man in and of nature," i.e., the knowledge and truth gained from interaction of body, mind, soul, and spirit with all aspects of nature. As all knowledge originates in a people's culture, its roots lie in cosmology, that contextual foundation for philosophy, a grand guiding story, by nature speculative, in that it tries to explain the universe, its origin, characteristics, and essential nature. Any attempt to explain the story of the cosmos is also metaphysical as the method of research always stems from a cultural orientation, a paradigm of thinking that has a history in some particular tradition. Therefore, there can be no such thing as a fully objective story of the universe. (Cajete 2004, 46)

My research stems from the Nisga'a 'cultural orientation' within a Nisga'a worldview, from its inception to the selected methodology, and most importantly, to provide contextual analysis surrounding the Elders' words so that they may not be misunderstood. As noted previously, a contextualized analysis was only possible with a close, personal relationship between the researcher

and the Elders because as Linda Tuhiwai Smith says, “insiders have to live with their consequences on a day-to-day basis, for ever more, and so do their families and communities” (1999, 137).

2.4 Research questions

The interviews took the direction that the knowledge keepers wanted it to take. All answered the same questions. Questions informing the interviews were:

1. After all of these years and through all of the changes, how did you manage to keep the knowledge?
2. How do we ensure that that knowledge continues through future generations to people who are going to be following in your footsteps?
3. What are significant attributes of Nisga’a cultural leadership?
4. What resource observances help you to be a leader?
5. How does cultural food gathering and preparation help to sustain leadership?
6. Do you know any stories or personal situations relating to the environment, resources or communities’ survival in which the knowledge of leaders is exemplified or reflected? If so, would you be willing to share these?
7. What qualities of leadership have sustained Traditional Ecological Knowledge in the Nisga’a Nation, and how does tradition-based leadership enable people and our lands to remain strong even during times of change?

2.5 Interviewees

The ten Nisga’a leadership knowledge keepers who were interviewed are introduced here in alphabetical order.

2.5.1 Alice Azak

Alice was born March 1, 1929, “in old Gitlaxt’aamiks in my grandfather’s house. He was Gwiix

Maaw.’ ” Alice’s grandfather was a mail carrier who travelled by boat and walked on the ice to deliver and collect mail. He would often stop off in Gitwinksihlkw and stay with his brother Henry and his wife Martha Azak. Alice’s Matriarch name is Sigidimnak’ Kiigyapkws (like a slant on a mountain). Alice is the Matriarch in Wilps Gwiix Maaw’ (House of Gwiix Maaw’). She is in the Eagle Clan and lives in Gitwinksihlkw, British Columbia.

In her younger days, Alice was a net woman who hung and mended nets for the fishermen. Hanging nets refers to the attachment of a cork line to keep the net afloat, and a lead line at the opposite end to keep the net weighted and extended from top to bottom. She was particularly accurate and quick, so she was called upon frequently as fishermen wanted to limit their turn around time to get out to the fishing grounds. Alice also taught the ancient art of oolichan net making. Alice is also a knowledge keeper who shares her wisdom readily with all bachelor of arts students at the WWN. She maintains a small bed and breakfast in Gitwinksihlkw.

2.5.2 Larry Derrick

Larry was born on May 13, 1946, at Miller Bay Hospital in Prince Rupert, British Columbia. He was raised by his grandparents in Lax Galtsap (Greenville, British Columbia) on the Nass River. Larry is a trained carpenter. He advanced quickly as a logger for much of his life. In 1990, he retired from logging and became a commercial fisherman. He began fishing for Ocean Fisheries in Prince Rupert. He is currently fishing for the Canadian Fishing Company in Prince Rupert. His gillnet boat is called the *Tsimshian Lady*. Larry is the Chief of his House. His chieftainship name is Ax dii anx smax. He is in the Raven Clan. He also currently serves as a part time cultural advisor to ‘Na Aksa Gyilak’ yoo School in Kitsumkalum, Terrace, British Columbia.

2.5.3 Dr. Joseph Gosnell

Dr. Joseph Gosnell was born on June 21, 1936, in Arrandale Cannery, British Columbia, on the Nass

River. His parents were Mary and Eli Gosnell who were very hard working leaders in the commercial fishing industry and renowned for reintroducing traditional Nisga'a regalia, songs, stories, and dances in the early 1970s. Joseph's Clan House name is House of Plenty. Joe is the most senior chieftain of his Wilp (House). His name is Simo'ogit Hleek. Their Wilp crest is Laxsgiik, Lax ts'imilx (Eagle-Beaver). Joe attended St. Michael's Indian Residential School in Alert Bay. He was raised in Gitwinksihlkw. There are a number of Houses associated with Hleek's House that are important to mention here. One is headed by Naawis in Gitwinksihlkw and Bayt Nee_khl in Ank'iidaa then to Laxgaltzap (Greenville), British Columbia. Joe's current home is Gitlaxt'aamiks (New Aiyansh), British Columbia. The personal name of his home is Wii Xbin (House of Plenty).

Joseph was the last president of the Nisga'a Tribal Council that wound up when the Nisga'a Treaty came into effect in 2000. Joe was elected the first president of Nisga'a Lisims Government. As leader of the Nisga'a Nation, Joe is well travelled and well lauded with fourteen honorary Doctor of Laws Honoris Causa, the Order of British Columbia, and two Orders of Canada. He continues to speak on request. His most recent presentation was at a commemorative ceremony in Ottawa recognizing 150 notable Canadians in celebration of Canada's one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Confederation.

2.5.4 Moses McKay

Moses Green McKay was born April 17, 1943, in Mill Bay, British Columbia, on the Nass River as were most of his siblings other than the two who were born in Prince Rupert. Moses introduced his chieftainship: "Bayt Nee_khl w'ay (name), I'm the head of the House of Bayt Nee_khl, Laxsgiik, Lax ts'imilx (Eagle-Beaver Clan)." He attended school through the Boarding Home Program in the City of Mission, which is in provincial School District 75. He graduated from Mission Senior Secondary School. Moses' post-secondary career consisted of graduating from BC Vocational School in Burnaby as a heavy-duty mechanic. He worked at Vancouver Marine installing motors in boats. He later operated a seventy-ton overhead crane in the Watson Island Pulp Mill near Prince Rupert,

British Columbia.

When Moses returned home, he was employed by School District 92 (Nisga'a) as a secondary school home-school counsellor at Nisga'a Elementary Secondary School, a position he held for ten years.

When Moses and his wife Claudia were in their fifties they decided to return to school. He earned his culinary arts certification at Malaspina University College (now known as Vancouver Island University). Moses was invited to complete his red seal designation in Scotland by Alex Rene, the executive chef who was from Scotland. As Moses explains:

“I was away for about twenty years living in the outside world. I was kind of isolating myself away from my culture. I still remembered our language, I spoke it. My mom and dad used to come and see us down in Rupert, when we moved back to Rupert from down south. But I didn't teach my (two) boys the language. I taught them the values that I learned as a kid – how to live and how to be a good person. I tried to teach them that. One of the biggest things I guess I tried to teach, I really instilled into them was to show respect, to themselves and to everybody around them, and that included the environment. That was so important that I remember my dad telling me that, and he went to the Bible too, that is, it's in the Bible. He talked a lot about respect. Respect for your Elders. They instilled into us things in Nisga'a. That type of knowledge, I passed down to my boys and I'm doing that right now with my granddaughters and anybody that I can get a hold of, all of my grandkids. I got so many (in my extended family). I try to impart to them the values that I was taught when I was a young fellow. I was small like my youngest granddaughter is seven years old and I keep talking to them about it, and they have this problem right now and I've been after them for a while about showing respect, respecting their mom and dad, respecting their sisters, respecting themselves, and I keep at them and tell them – until you show me that you are learning what I am telling you, I will keep on saying it.” (Moses McKay)

2.5.5 Willard Martin

Willard Martin was born in Greenville (Laxgalts'ap), British Columbia, on February 25, 1939. His Mom, Clara Martin, told him that he was born at two in the morning when it was 42 degrees below zero (Fahrenheit) with the north wind blowing. Willard is in the Killerwhale Clan, and he is the head Chief of his House. His chieftainship name is Sim'oogit Niisyuus. The name of his Wilp (House) is Wilp Laxha, Gitalabit. Willard's House "full crest is Mediigim ts'iwii'aks (grizzly) with the niibuxw-uxw with two killer whales underneath" (Willard Martin).

Willard attended day school in Greenville and went on to attend Kumsheen (the Nlaka'pamux term for 'where two rivers meet') Senior Secondary School in Lytton. While attending high school in Lytton, Willard lived in residence at St. George's Indian Residential School (IRS). Like many IRS students, living at the IRS was a horrific experience for Willard. Willard then went on to the University of British Columbia to work on senior matriculation. He left UBC in favour of Pitman College where he successfully completed and intermediate certificate in accounting. He also completed elective courses like industrial first aid.

Willard then saw an opening in the Fraser District of Indian Affairs and applied as a clerk III; he quickly rose to administration officer I and was transferred to Williams Lake, where he remained for four years. He struggled with how Indian Affairs treated the people they were supposed to serve. He left Indian Affairs and took up a position with chartered accountants in Prince Rupert, which did not pay much at the time. He applied for a position he saw advertised at Manpower (Employment Agency) in the Bulkley Valley for Industry as a junior accountant. He worked for a sawmill in Houston, British Columbia, in accounting. The mill was owned by Naranda Mines and was later bought by Bulkley Valley Forest Industry. Willard was transferred to Granisle, British Columbia, where he remained for an additional eight years.

While on holiday with his family in Saskatchewan, Willard was offered a position as assistant general manager in Native Metal. He remained there for over four years. He was later offered a job as assistant secretary treasurer to John McMynn at School District 92, where he also worked for four years. He applied for and was the successful applicant as director of economic development with George Manuel of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. He moved to Vancouver. Under third-party management of local services, Willard travelled extensively all over British Columbia and the Yukon and to Ottawa where he learned to lobby under the direction of Walt Wadniki.

Willard returned home in 1989 as director of finance for Nisga'a Valley Health Board. He particularly enjoyed writing successful funding proposal yielding \$700,000 in additional funding for projects. Willard then began a business management – accounting finance home studies program with the Register industrial accounting. He did not complete his fourth year exams as he was working full time and with small children, working at five in the morning and nights after working hours and weekends till the wee hours of the morning was formidable.

Willard returned to Laxgalts'ap as the economic development officer and successfully ran for local village politics in 1991 and became an elected council member for nine years. He was deputy Chief under the late Bertram McKay. After Bert's untimely death, Willard became chief councillor of the village. After the Nisga'a Treaty came into effect, Willard was re-elected Chief. While in office at the Nisga'a Lisims Government, Willard served on the finance committee. During the 1990s, Willard served on the BC Assembly of First Nations Chief's Health Committee. He became a founding member of the First Nations Health Authority.

In 2006, Willard and his wife Carolyn Martin graduated with their master's of divinity degrees from Vancouver School of Theology. Willard is the current elected chairperson of the Nisga'a Lisims

Government Council of Elders, where he has just completed the first of a four-year term of office.

2.5.6 Oscar Mercer

Oscar was born February 20, 1929, in Old Aiyansh. Oscar is the head chieftain of his House. His chieftainship name is Sim'oogit Ksim Xsaan. He is in the Raven Clan. Oscar's schooling began at the Old Aiyansh Mission House for grades one to three – the teacher was Reverend Kinley. Oscar attended St. Michael's Indian Residential School at ten years of age after the passing of his father. After completing St. Michael's Indian Residential School, Oscar returned home for a year. While home one of the teachers got sick and he was asked to fill in by Mr. Olson (who was a member of the British Parliament in London, England). Oscar taught grade one and recalls using humour and clowning to help children feel at ease and less shy. Oscar continued teaching in the Old Aiyansh Mission School for another year and a half. Oscar attended Sprott Shaw College where he studied bookkeeping and accounting. Oscar continued to fish commercially during the summer month with and along side his stepfather, Rueben Munroe.

Oscar decided to return to school to take general courses. By this time he was married and had a wife, stepson, and his own son. His wife was a nurse's aide and she fell ill. Oscar also worked for BC Corrections–Young Offenders at the Haney Correction Centre. He enjoyed his work there and stayed there for four years. The Corrections Office was closed by the New Democratic provincial government of the day in response to union folks complaining that non-union people were teaching young offenders to be independent.

Oscar then returned home to New Aiyansh to take up a position as programs and services director with Nisga'a Tribal Council. After the Nisga'a Treaty established the new government in 2000, Oscar was elected as the Council of Elders chairperson for two four-year terms. Oscar continues to serve on the Council of Elders appointed by the village of Gitlaxt'aamiks as a Council of Elders committee member. He loves counselling and continues to counsel younger members of his family and Wilp.

2.5.7 Dorcas Shirley Morven

Shirley was born October 28, 1936, in the old village of Gitlaxt'aamiks on the Nass River in British Columbia. Her parents are Amelia (McMillan) and Herbert Morven. Shirley is in the Wolf Clan. She is the Matriarch, Sigidimnak Angaye'e in Keexkw's Wilp. Her brother, Herb Morven, is Sim'oogit K'eexkw and the head Chief of their House. Keexkw's House is one of three Houses in Git Wiln'aak'il'. The other two are Duuk' and Gwingyoo. Shirley has four children: three sons and one daughter. Her daughter, Edna, earned her bachelor of arts degree from the University of Northern British Columbia and the Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a. Shirley is fluent in the Nisga'a and English languages.

At six years of age, Shirley attended St. Michael's Indian Residential School in Alert Bay, British Columbia. She went on to graduate from Prince Rupert's Booth Memorial Secondary School's university entrance program. Shirley went on to earn her bachelor of education degree from the University of British Columbia with a special education designation. Later she returned to university studies to earn a master's of education degree in multicultural education from Washington State University in Seattle, Washington.

Shirley had a long and successful career in education that spanned more than three and a half decades. In 1961, she was recruited to teach elementary grades one to three, then later grades four and five in her home community of New Aiyansh. She also taught the secondary-level humanities courses for Nisga'a Elementary Secondary School. She later became director of the bilingual-bicultural program department for School District 92 (Nisga'a).

Shirley also served her community, Nisga'a Nation, and British Columbia's northwest by active political service. In the early 1980s, Shirley was sponsored by the Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Tribal

Council to run as their member on the Terrace and District School Board (now known as Coast Mountain School District). She fulfilled that mandate and was elected to the Terrace School District Board. Later in the 1980s, Shirley was elected counsellor for two terms of office for the New Aiyansh Band Council. She continued her political career as the elected chairperson of Nisga'a Valley Health Board (1998–2004) and an elected member of the School District 92 School Board (2011). The accumulation of Shirley's cultural, education, and elected positions culminated in an extraordinary highlight when she was elected the first woman (in the Nisga'a Nation's general elections) as chairperson of the Council of Elders, a seat she adeptly held for four consecutive years.

2.5.8 Emma Alice Nyce

Emma Alice Nyce was born July 18, 1927, in Claxton Cannery, Skeena River, British Columbia, to Eli and Mary (Moore) Gosnell from the village of Canyon City (Gitwinksihlkw). Her wa'am Nisga'a is Sigidimnak 'Hlgu wilksihlgum Maaksgum Hlbin. She is the Matriarch of Wilps Hleek, and her crest is the Eagle-Beaver Clan. Emma was the first baby baptized (dedicated) in the new Canyon City Salvation Army Citadel in Canyon City. The Anglican church had earlier pulled the teacher out of the village due to low numbers of students. The village leadership went out in search of a church that would supply them with a teacher. The Salvation Army responded by sending in Captain and Mrs. William Moore as the Canyon City Corp's founding officers. Later teachers would join them. Emma began working at thirteen years of age along with two of her life long friends Ivy Woods and Freda Morven. They were taught how to wash fish and were employed by Claxton Cannery that was situated on the Skeena River in British Columbia.

As was custom to high-ranking families of those days, Emma's marriage was arranged by her parents and grandparents in an arrangement between them and her late husband's parents, Agnes and Peter Nyce. She married Maurice J. Nyce in March, 1945 in Kincolith (Gingolx) "after the war was over" (Emma Nyce). Maurice was a high-liner commercial fisherman. They spent their winters in Canyon

City (Gitwinksihlkw) and spring through autumn on the coast at Sunnyside Cannery near Prince Rupert. One of Emma's fondest recollections of her life in Canyon City (Gitwinksihlkw) as a young mother is when she was commissioned home league secretary for the Canyon City Salvation Army Citadel in 1951. Her sister in law and friend, Susan Azak, was commissioned president of the Home League of the same organization at the same time. Senior officers of the Salvation Army travelled to the Canyon City Corps to formally conduct the installation of these two commissions.

In 1955, Emma and Maurice decided to relocate on a semi-permanent basis to Prince Rupert for employment purposes and to allow their children access to a good education. They purchased three homes in Prince Rupert during their time there. They returned home to (Canyon City) Gitwinksihlkw in the late 1960s and built their home in the early 1970s. Maurice was on the Band Council and became the elected chief councillor of the village during the Nisga'a court cases that led up to the 1973 Supreme Court of Canada Calder decision. During that time, Maurice continued his commercial fishing on the coast. They maintained homes both in Canyon City (Gitwinksihlkw) and Prince Rupert in addition to a summer home at Sunnyside Cannery during the summer. All the while, both Emma and Maurice fulfilled their numerous traditional obligations.

Approximately two years after Emma and her family relocated to Prince Rupert and settled in their new home, she contracted tuberculosis and was hospitalized in Miller Bay Hospital (then called Miller Bay Indian Sanitorium). It was a tumultuous time for the family. Two of Emma's children also contracted tuberculosis and were hospitalized at Miller Bay too. Three of her older children were sent to Edmonton Indian Residential School in May of that year, two moved in with her mother in Old Aiyansh on the Nass River, and two younger children were boarded out in Prince Rupert with their room and board paid for by Maurice. The children sent to Residential School were aged nine, eight, and seven at the time – they did not return home for well over two years. Emma worked her road to recovery well. After almost one year in the hospital, she negotiated with her doctors to be discharged

and agreed to become an outpatient. This was possible because she owned a home in Prince Rupert.

Emma was a forelady at the Sunnyside Cannery. Her dad, Eli Gosnell, taught her and her sister Lena how to hang, patch, strip, and mend fishing nets. Both became very adept at this. Emma's talent was honoured by the BC Packers Fishing Company when they awarded her with a gold pin fashioned after a mending needle. Emma also commercially fished with her husband Maurice on all his gillnet boats over time, and each named: *Grouse Island*, *Vesta-Mae I*, *Vesta-Mae II*, and finally the *Lady Paula*. They fished the entire coastline of British Columbia from the Nass River in the North, Haida Gwaii, the Skeena River, to Hartley Bay, the Fraser River, and Vancouver Island in southern British Columbia. They fished for all five salmon species and herring from March to October each year. One of her fondest memories is travelling to Hawaii twice with Maurice, and one of those travels involved an all-exclusive cruise to all the islands.

After the Nisga'a Treaty came into effect in 2000, Emma served on Nisga'a Lisims Government Council of Elders for many years. Emma remains an active supporter of her church and continues to lead her family as Matriarchs are taught to do. She continues to serve on the WWN's Committee of Sages and offers her wisdom to the many university students and speaks on many different cultural topics in bachelor of arts, Nisga'a language, and culture classes at the WWN:

“We lived in Prince Rupert for forty-nine years, when my husband passed away. We lived there for work. I work on nets and he's a fisherman. Maurice didn't want to leave his boat alone. So we were living there amongst native people from Kitkatla, and Metlakatla, and Port Simpson. (It was) very quiet, we were friends with them, they were nice to us, yet we're Nisga'a. We don't say anything, we sit there in the meeting when there's important of important but we don't say anything that's not our territory. They're nice enough to agree for us to stay there.” (Emma Nyce)

2.5.9 Harry Fraser Nyce Sr.

Harry was born to Emma (née Gosnell) and Maurice Nyce on December 10, 1947, in Canyon City (Gitwinksihlkw), British Columbia. Harry is in the Lax̓ts'imilx-Lax̓sgiik (Eagle-Beaver) Clan. His chieftainship name is Sim'oogit Naaws' in Wilps Hleek. Harry responsible for his own Wilp (House) in Gitwinksihlkw. Sim'oogit Naaws' Wilp (House) is known as Gwilbikskw (that is the name of the whirlpool in the bay adjacent to Gitwinksihlkw that is also one of their ancient traditional fishing areas).

Harry began his formal schooling by attending the Canyon City Indian Day School until he was eight years old. His parents relocated to Prince Rupert in order for their children to receive a good education. Harry attended Conrad Street Elementary School for two years when his mother was hospitalized for tuberculosis at the Miller Bay Indian Sanitorium ('sanitorium' was a term used for all Indigenous hospitals all across Canada). Harry and his younger brother Ron; and, younger sister Mae were accompanied by a nurse. They travelled by train to the Edmonton Indian Residential School (IRS). Harry and his siblings did not return home until three years later. On his return to Prince Rupert, Harry attended Booth Memorial Secondary School for two years. Harry returned to Alberni Indian Residential School 1964 to 1967. At that time, it became a student residence with students bussed to public schools in Port Alberni. He attended O.W. Neil Secondary School.

During the summer seasons and at age thirteen, Harry began commercial fishing for the BC Packers Fishing Company. The boats he fished were the *SC 131* and the *Nass Queen*, the latter was his grandfather Eli Gosnell's old boat. In 1968, Harry purchased his own gillnet boat, the *Nishga Girl*, now housed at the Canadian National Museum of History in Gatineau, Quebec, since 1998. Harry later purchased and operated the *Nyce Lady* from 1990 to 1998. He fished the entire coast of British Columbia, including the waters off Haida Gwaii.

In 1969, Harry's two grandfathers, Peter Nyce and Eli Gosnell, made separate trips from the Nass to Prince Rupert to appeal to him to move his family to Canyon City (Gitwinksihlkw). On return to the Nass, Harry owned and operated a school bussing business called Nyce Enterprises (1969 to 1979). In 1979, Harry began studying political science at the University of British Columbia and continued to commercially fish during the summer months.

Harry's political career began in Canyon City when he was elected to the Canyon City Band Council as a councillor in 1970. He also became an unsalaried band manager for the Canyon City Band Council (1970 to 1974) led by his father Maurice Nyce, his uncle Jacob Nyce, and cousin Edward Azak. When Reverend John Blythe retired as a member of the Court of Revision, he recommended Harry to assume his seat. Harry held the Court of Revision seat for five years (1974 to 1979) before it was phased out. Harry was elected chief councillor of the Canyon City Indian Band in 1975 and was re-elected consecutively until he moved to Vancouver in 1979.

While at university, Harry opened his home to plan a foundation of a Vancouver Local of the Nishga Tribal Council. In the fall of 1980 at St. James' Anglican Church Hall, Harry became its first and founding vice-president and served in this capacity until he returned to the Nass Valley in the fall of 1984. As vice president, Harry also became a sitting member of the Nishga Tribal Council. In 1985, Harry was re-elected to the Canyon City Band Council. By virtue of that election, Harry became a sitting executive member of the Nishga Tribal Council.

In 1987, Harry began his employment with the Nishga Tribal Council as the director of fisheries and cultural artifacts. In 1992–93, as the Nishga Land Question negotiations got under way, Harry became the lands and resources negotiator and continued to be responsible for cultural artifacts. In 2000, after the Nisga'a Treaty became law, Harry became director of fish and wildlife for Nisga'a Lisims

Government.

In 1987, Harry also became an elected director of Kitimat–Stikine Regional District. The year 2017 marks Harry’s thirtieth year of service to this organization. During that time, he was elected vice-chair and chair numerous times. At the same time, he became elected director of the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) and moved up its rank.

A notable highlight for Harry was in 2010, when he became the elected president of the Union of BC Municipalities serving all cities, towns, and villages in British Columbia. He is the first and only Indigenous leader to hold this position.

Harry is currently vice-chair of Regional District Kitimat Stikine. He is chair of the Northwest Regional Hospital Board. He served on the board of directors for the University of Northern British Columbia. He is appointed member of the northern panel of the Pacific Salmon Commission. He is also director of the Northern Native Fishing Corporation.

2.5.10 Lorene Plante

Lorene Mary Plante was born the eldest daughter of Basil and Ruth (née Adams) Wright on November 4, 1940. She was born into the Wolf Clan in the House of Duuk. Her matriarchal name is Sigidimnaḵ’ Lootkw. She has five brothers and five sisters. Lorene lived with her parents and attended school in Old Aiyansh until age ten, when she became ill. She then moved to Port Edward to her aunt Peggy Brown’s home and closer to medical treatment. She also spent some of her early life with family at Cassiar Cannery on the Skeena River. At twelve years of age, Lorene attended St. Michael’s Indian Residential School in Alert Bay, British Columbia, where she remained until she left there in 1957 at seventeen years of age.

Lorene’s work life was vast and varied. She worked in Miller Bay Hospital as a housekeeper for five

years. At the Miller Bay Hospital, Lorene also worked as a supervisor and was also hired to trail after one of the medical doctors who was a chain-smoker. She trailed behind him to pick up his ashes and cigarette ends, and to also watch that he did not start any fires. She also worked in the Cassiar, Port Edward, and Prince Rupert's JS McMillan canneries for many years. While living in Prince Rupert, Lorene was elected as trustee for the Prince Rupert–Port Edward Nisga'a Tribal Council Local. She was then elected as vice-president of the Prince Rupert–Port Edward Local of the Nisga'a Tribal Council as the first elected female member of the Nisga'a Tribal Council. Lorene decided to relocate to her home village of New Aiyansh in 1989, where she became an elected councillor for the New Aiyansh Band Council. While on this council, Lorene served on numerous committees, including education and economic development.

Lorene has served on numerous boards that include Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a board of directors, Northwest Community College board of directors, Nisga'a Economic Enterprises Incorporated board for the Nisga'a Tribal Council, Tribal Resources Investment Corporation board of directors for many years, director for the Community Futures 16/37 board, and on the board of directors for the Anglican Diocese of Caledonia for a number of years. Lorene also served on the WWN board for many years and continues to be active in WWN's Committee of Sages. Lorene is currently a Gitlaxt'aamiks appointed representative to the Council of Elders for Nisga'a Lisims Government. Lorene continues as owner operator of Nass Valley Gifts and Lorene's Lava Lodge Bed and Breakfast in Gitlaxt'aamiks.

Having described the research process and explained the methodology, Chapter 2 introduced the ten interviewees. The life histories help to explain their perspectives, which are detailed in their own words in the following chapters.

Chapter 3: Historical Aspects of Nisga'a Leadership

“You know, this is our history ... we pass it on to generation to generation.” (Emma Nyce)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an historical overview of Nisga'a leadership from the experiences of interviewees as shared in their interviews.

In order to look at the historical aspects of Nisga'a leadership, the discussion – as raised by the interviewees – begins with the ancient adaawaḱ (oral histories). Dr. Gosnell begins the discussion by referencing the strength of Nisga'a adaawaḱ' (oral histories) and the importance of stating proof of Nisga'a heritage. As shown in this quote by Sigidimnaḱ' Niysgankw'ajikskw (Matriarch Lucy Williams) in the audio recording of oral histories to support the Nisga'a Land Question:

This is why I am so pleased with you for coming. You will not lose out or regret this because this is very important knowledge and wisdom I have passed on to you. This is the only way you will gain. You will know how the old laws came about and why. These laws had been given to us by our Father in Heaven since time immemorial. Some of our laws are the same as those in the Bible. There are some people who fear the Great Spirit. If they lie or do something to hurt someone, they know that the Great Spirit might put a curse on them. This is somewhat like our laws. That is why I have to leave this information with you. I hope and pray that all the information you collect will give you the greatest knowledge and wisdom you need to know in order to live a clean, happy, and meaningful life. This is all I have to say for now. (Nisga'a Tribal Council 1995c, xxvii)

A foundation in Nisga'a adaawaḱ first shows that there is strength within the adaawaḱ' that emanates to strength in a person. It is this strength that helped these traditional Nisga'a leaders to not only maintain traditional knowledge through damage of the 'izations' that followed (colonization, missionization, industrialization, and economic marginalization) but to use the Nisga'a adaawaḱ' (oral history) and ayuuḱ (Nisga'a traditional law) to their advantage, and more importantly, to the

advantage of the Nisga'a community and Nation.

An understanding of traditional matrilineal culture is described in this chapter, followed by the importance of birthright, for as it will be seen, traditional leaders were groomed from birth, throughout their lives, and into adulthood. The overarching aspects of traditional Nisga'a leadership presented by the interviewees in this chapter include matrilineal succession and birthright, consequences of one's own actions and behaviour, and knowledge of *ayuuk* (Nisga'a traditional law), with particular attention to the concepts of respect and sharing.

The interviewees provide examples of retaining traditional practices through rapid changes they witnessed in the Nass Valley, as well as the importance of maintaining a collective knowledge for future generations. Knowledge of Nisga'a language and culture is at the forefront as a way to know how to bridge tradition with present-day events, as learned by and shared by the interviewees in this chapter.

A brief history of the '-izations,' and the rising of Nisga'a traditional leadership, through the Nisga'a Land Committee (1800s) and Nisga'a Tribal Council (formed in 1963), will be presented. This will show that over time there was a great dedication to Nisga'a history and knowledge of the land by the Nisga'a leadership to the present day.

3.2 Learning from origin stories

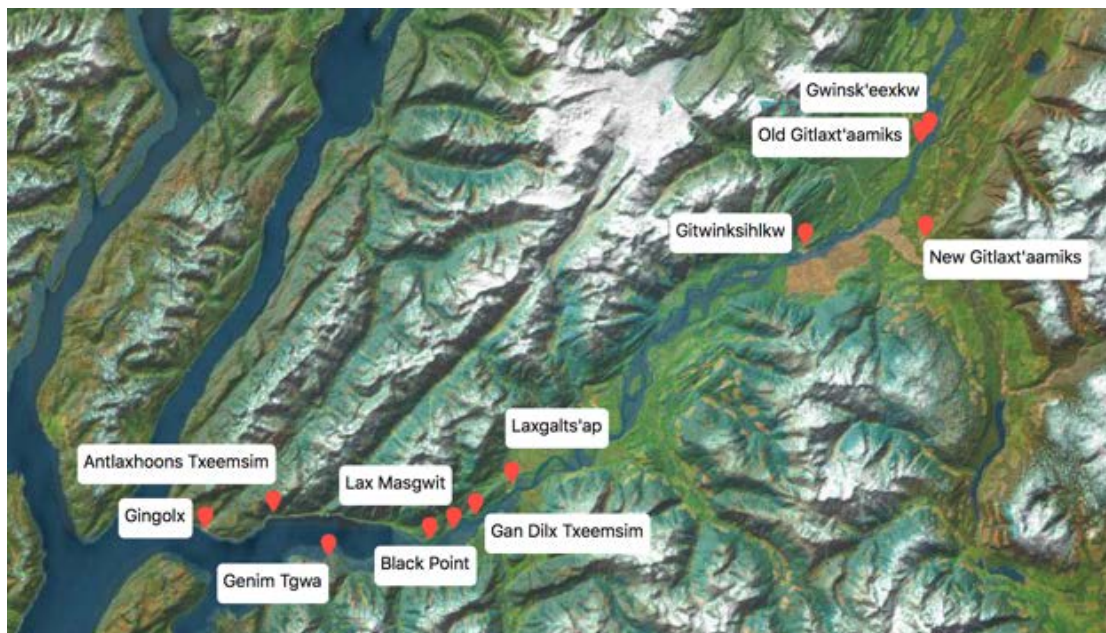
Sim'oogit Hleek, Dr. Joseph Gosnell illustrates the importance of Nisga'a origin stories, Nisga'a history, Nisga'a landmarks, Nisga'a spirituality, and reincarnation to Nisga'a leadership. Joe provided most of his own translations from Nisga'a to English:

“In order for us to know where we’re going as a Nation, we have to know where we came from, Ndaahl wil bagwit? What happened in the ancient past in the distant history of our nation? What happened, what happened that our parents, and our grandparents, relay these ancient stories to us what happened? Aguhl wilaa loohl aluugigat? What did our ancient forebears do? Today I hear many, many people still say, ‘Oh I have to go out and look for myself.’ It is not necessary to do that, you’re already here in the Nation, you’re part of the culture of our nation. Everyone belongs to a family. It’s important to listen to the heads of the Houses as they relate their family histories to the members of the House. You have to know Nisga’a history from the distant past, what words did our people use to indicate how far back in time those stories go.

“I remember the story of Txeemsim. It’s interesting to note Txeemsim, this man, our entire culture revolves around this one man; everything we do relates to what he did. Some of the events that he created and what he did are still visible on our land (and) if you know where to look, you’ll find them; they’re still visible today. So ancient Nisga’a history and knowing what it says to me is important because it tells me what happened in the past.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

The map shown in Figure 1 depicts an example of some of the important Txeemsim landmarks in the Nass Valley: Antlaxhoons Txeemsim, Genim Tgwa, Lax Masgwit, Black Point, Gan Dilx Txeemsim, and Gwinsk’eexkw.

Figure 1 Nisga'a Geographical Sites (mentioned in Chapter 3)



Source: Deanna Nyce

As Joe Gosnell explains, stories are by their nature set in place. A Nisga'a study volume explicates this point:

Txeemsim then placed these tongue-shaped pieces of shale quite systematically, and with some difficulty, high up in a sharp crevice in the cliff, just east of Genim Tgwa [Road of Glass] at a site known today as Gan Dilx Txeemsim [Txeemsim's Place of Tongues]. Located directly across from Red Bluff, and distinguishable by the many rocks sticking out, it is also known as Ank'otsdilxs Txeemsim [place where Txeemsim cut tongues]. The Nisga'a are always careful to protect this and other such landmarks. They are the proof of our heritage. (Nisga'a Tribal Council 1984a, 78)

Illuminating the past through attending to origin stories gives guidance for the present day. Joe Gosnell elaborates on this point:

“Adaawak, too, what can be more important than adaawak, the ancient stories? Our stories tell us that our people lived in a world of semi-darkness, something blocked out the sun.

Sbayt sk'eexkw wilaa wilhl gat gik'uuhl sit'aama'am gik'uuhl diyahl adaawaḵ (our stories tell us, many years ago, in the beginning, our people lived in semi-darkness). And one of our ancient communities north of Gitlaxt'aamiks carries that name, that ancient community is known as Gwinsk'eexkw, the late Harold Wright interpreted the name to mean 'the village of darkness,' Sbayt sk'eexkw wilaa wils dildilddim' dip gus, they lived in darkness.

“We have to be aware of the spiritual beliefs of our great forebears. Most people today believe that it was the missionaries who brought spiritual beliefs to our Nation, not according to our history. Not according to our history, our forebears worshipped and prayed to this man, and they called him by name. We still call him by that name today, Sim'oogit K'amligiihahlhaahl, the great, the most Supreme Being in our Nation's history, K'amligiihahlhaahl, so we have be aware of that. What did they do? And the spiritual beliefs of our Nation and the teachings of the different religious organizations are as different as night and day. When you go back into the history of our Nation and begin to learn what it was and how they did these things, what did they do. Our people believed coming back after death has occurred.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

Joe goes on to talk about reincarnation:

“To be reincarnated and we have stories in each one of our communities even today of people who are observant enough to recognize what is happening and what their children are saying. Children relate, I believe, what they saw and what they did in a previous life. In Nisga'a, it's called gwinwilaak'intkw. Gwinwilaak'intkw means 'he is letting you know that he has come back,' that's what that word means. Gwinwilaak'intkw.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

A story from Emma Nyce provides an example of reincarnation (or gwinwilaak'intkw). Starnita is Emma's great-granddaughter. Starnita's dad is Emma's grandson, Harry Jr. During one particular

visit, Lori and Harry brought Starnita to visit her great-grandmother, when Starnita was six months old. Starnita started pointing to items saying, “my scissors” and insisting that certain belongings were hers. These items formerly belonged to Emma’s then just recently deceased daughter, Shirley, who had been a seamstress and clothes designer. Emma was convinced after subsequent visits from Starnita that she is the reincarnation of her late daughter Shirley. Star’s mom, Lori recalls the story in a paper written for one of her master’s of arts degree courses in 2009:

“When we brought Starnita home, family members came to visit and each were individually talking and asking our baby directly who she was. Since, Starnita was the next baby to be born; her great-grandmother otherwise known as ‘Uulii’ stated that ‘she truly believed in her heart that her daughter was among us once again.’ My husband and I did not question her, we just accepted it. As time passed and we continued to visit my husband’s grandmother, Starnita exhibited more and more attention to his late aunt’s belongings, who was a talented seamstress who had her own sewing business called Nyce Designs. One of these visits not long after Starnita learned to walk she picked up a pair of scissors and said these were hers, and she would also sit beside and sometimes rub the sewing machine. Both the scissors and sewing machine belonged to my husband’s late aunt.

Throughout the years, Starnita is drawn and loves sewing on her Jiits’ (grandmother’s) embroidery machine and is always asking when we’re going to sew again. When my husband’s aunt passed away, she was working on many assorted sewing projects and her mother, Starnita’s Uulii, is still today completing some of these projects. When Uulii has these projects out, Starnita always has a comment or asks what she is working on and if it is completed. Starnita tells her Uulii that she has done a good job.” (Lori Nyce, FNST 650-3 Paper, April 2, 2009)

Emma also tells a story of Starnita's brother, Wilson, who she believes is a reincarnation of her late son Peter. Peter was a teacher. Peter was also an artist. When Wilson went over to his Ool'ii's (great-grandmother) house to visit. He looked all around at the art on the wall. He crawled over to a small Northwest Coast–designed coffee table Peter had made his mother, Emma, years earlier. Wilson removed the doily that covered Peter's beaver design. Emma asked Wilson, "Do you recognize that, do you remember that?" Another trait Wilson (as a baby) showed that was similar to Peter's: he disliked being dirty. As soon as he got food or anything else on him, he wanted to change right away, often tearing off his own bib.

Although the subject of reincarnation may not be seen as 'historical' in the Western sense, it is part of the belief system that folks may be a reincarnation of someone who left this physical world for the spirit world and has returned.

3.3 Understanding traditional matrilineal culture

To understand leadership among the Nisga'a is first to understand traditional matrilineal culture. In Nisga'a traditional matrilineal culture, leadership is a birthright. This important fundamental cultural law (Ayuukhl Nisga'a) has existed over the millennia, as the Nisga'a believe to have existed. There are many cultural laws that govern Nisga'a behaviour, birthright into matriarchy is first and foremost. Each Clan holds an ango'oskw (land) and adaawaḱ (stories) associated with the land. "The tribal Clan system provides the basic foundation for both the social organization and the system of property ownership of our people. In other words, the tribal Clan system defines the two most fundamental kinds of relationships of the Nisga'a: the relationships between people, and the relationships between people and the land" (Nisga'a Tribal Council 1984b, v).

Nisga'a people are born into one of four main pdeek (Clans). The four pdeek (Clans) are Eagle (Laxsgiik), Wolf (Laxgibuu), Killerwhale (Gisk'ahaast), and Raven (Ganada). All Nisga'a children

are born into one of these Clans under a matriarchy following their mother's lineage. This cultural law is a birthright bestowed by K'am Ligii Hahlhaahl (God). In each pdeek (Clan) there are many Houses (Huwilp) that distinguish a particular family who own title to land. The Laxgibuu have five major Houses, the Laxsgiik have five major Houses, the Gisk'ahaast have three major Houses, and the Ganada have three major Houses. There are Subhouses or Houses who stand beside each other (as part and or of similar rank), for example, Baxk'ap and Wii Gadim Xsgaak (see below). There are sixteen major Houses.

Alice Azak says her mother told her that there were four Chiefs within each of the sixteen major Houses (pers. comm., March 2008). If we do the math, then there may be sixty-four Chiefs and Matriarchs as heads of families. Please note that the House names are held mainly by males.

An example of birthright into a matriarchy would be as follows. My mother-in-law, Emma Nyce, is currently Sigidimnak' Hlguwilksihlgum Maaksgum Hlbin (royal white or pearly whale), the Matriarch from the House of Hleek. Her eldest son, Harry Nyce Sr., is also born into the House of Hleek. Harry is the current holder of the name Sim'oogit Naaws.' Emma's oldest daughter, Vesta Nyce-Brown, is also born into the House of Hleek. Vesta is the current name holder of the name Ksim Aamgakoks (berry bush that grows in the Observatory Inlet – one of traditional territories that belongs to their family). Children's identity is through their mother in a matriarchal society. Folks move up the hierarchy, similar to the British royal family, through birth right inheritance, wherein as leaders pass on, those that succeed them, in birth order, take their place.

3.4 Leadership order within families

Traditional Nisga'a leadership is a birthright in birth order from eldest born to youngest. Rarely are older family members stepped over in favour of younger family members. It is culturally expected that when your turn comes to lead, you will rise to the occasion you learned from birth and not

abrogate your responsibilities to your family and Clan. Leadership within the House is a birthright. Leaders are groomed from birth to become future leaders. It is interesting to note the way grandmothers speak to their grandson (who will be Chief one day) and their granddaughter (who will be a Matriarch one day). They speak to them as if they are already Chiefs and Matriarchs and everyone else follows suit. The babies then are treated from birth as if they were Chiefs and Matriarchs.

Harry Nyce Sr. describes how grandmothers and great-grandmothers groom a child for leadership roles:

“A grandmother or great-grandmother, reinforcing what a child would become as he or she is growing, they’d say, ‘Oh hello, Sim’oogit Oh hello Sigidimnak’ and then they’d go to explain while the child may not be able to understand, ‘Some day you are going to be a strong member of this community, of this tribe,’ and throughout their lives these youngsters will continue to hear those words. This cultural practice, would take place during visitations at the home, during harvesting and doing various activity with fish, with fur-bearing animals. During the fall with the moose, with the winter trapping – during those harvest times, reinforcing that some day you will be a leader. I think that cultural part helps an individual to develop and helps them to maintain how their own life is to be lived.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Leaders are groomed from birth. Necessary characteristics or attributes for them to hold leadership positions are taught and reinforced throughout a child’s lifetime into and including adulthood. From birth an adult looking after the child will correct misbehaviour by saying, “Stop, stop. You will be a Chief one day and Chiefs do not behave in that way.

“Haw’it’ meaning stop or ‘Gilo’ is to wait, suggesting don’t be too quick. I think the language in itself, has very specific direction. When Nisga’a language is used, some of the edicts like haw’ahlkw (traditional cautions) pertains to not to be disrespectful.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Alice Azak is the first born in her family. As the first-born woman who would become a Matriarch one day explains the exclusivity of her early traditional education:

“It was drilled into me as soon as I became a woman. My grandmother took me out of school, she said, ‘You don’t need to learn the k’amksiiwaa way,’ she said. ‘It’s only good for men. You learn how to keep house and listen, and provide your own food for the winter.’ So that’s what I did. I stayed with my grandmother and my grandfather for three years and then after three years, they finally let me to go back to my mom. But I keep remembering what she used to tell me, even my grandfather, I think how they teach the younger people is at the dinner table. While we are sitting around the table, my grandfather starts telling us what we’re not supposed to do and my grandmother does the same thing. So, when I start having my own children, I passed it down to them. To this day, I still don’t consider myself a leader. I try to pass down what I know if somebody else needs it.” (Alice Azak)

3.5 Grooming for leadership

Traditional Nisga’a leadership is groomed from birth to eventually assume Wilp (House) responsibilities when their turn arrives. This ‘turn’ can only happen when the current titleholder dies. In Emma Nyce’s circumstance, she assumed the House Matriarchy when her mother passed on. Even though this could have been an extremely difficult time, Emma could not renege on her traditional responsibilities:

“Birthright is really important to our people. That’s why I’m here. I didn’t want to be in this situation, but I’m the silgit (senior, the oldest – *the first born*). I learned that nobody is going to step over you in the family House. It is not that you’re greater than anyone else; it’s because you’re the oldest, the birthright, you’re the senior in the House.” (Emma Nyce)

Like Emma, girls who are the eldest daughter of the eldest daughter of the Wilp (House) are taught how very important they are to the family and to the Wilp (House). Their learning would begin very early in their life and continue throughout their lives until they eventually assume their position that can only be attained through birthright. Shirley Morven shares her story:

“Any knowledge that I have about our people, I got basically from many Elders because in our nation and the extended family trees. There isn’t a place in the Valley here that I would ever be stuck because I have many grandmothers still and many cousins from my dad’s Clan and our own House relatives everywhere I go in the Valley. I have never been stuck anywhere. In all of these places, starting from when I was around five or six, I began to be aware of all the resources that were around me. I discovered that I was a very valued person. Many people, including my uncles, would do or try to do what I would ask of them.” (Shirley Morven)

Shirley describes the gentle grooming she received as a child in preparation for her eventual role as a Matriarch:

“I learned, with certainty, what was possible or impossible and to do or what was acceptable and not acceptable to do. I learned the importance of behaviour. I had positive and negative role models everywhere. With every single action my behaviour was reinforced or changed in a very gentle way. There was no big grandstand about any of this.” (Shirley Morven)

Shirley draws an analogy to point out how important to avoid taking risks or experimentation with her grooming:

“I could use an analogy of an orchard with particular maintenance demands to keep it looking healthy and nice. It’s whole life in a little plot. At no time do you do anything to it to experiment. You cannot take that risk – was the message I received. Everybody around me had to be careful. It seemed like everything seemed so important with me. I call them all my parents and I don’t know how many of them there were. They all seemed to know what was right for me to learn this or that. They all were so part of my learning. I learned from the way they were treating me. If there was story time and I was a part of the group, even when I was tiny, it seemed important that I be included.” (Shirley Morven)

Shirley describes how breaches to the ayuuk (cultural law) in terms of inappropriate behaviour by others, is used to teach:

“I got a big message from inclusion – that knowledge has to be important. Every kind of knowledge has to be important as the child becomes more aware of the environment. Some of the stories I learned when I was little, were quite harsh. These stories may not have been intended for me, but I picked up the knowledge along with everybody else who was there. It was almost like we were witnessing the way our Elders reacted to someone’s behaviour who had breached one of our ayuuk (law). I picked up the knowledge from that particular role model who behaved in a negative way and saw that, that person might be angry. No one paid attention to the anger; it seemed that the whole focus was on adjusting that person’s point of view and ours at the same time. I picked up on that.” (Shirley Morven)

As did Emma, Shirley alludes to recognition and appreciation of Nisga'a matriarchal leadership in the Nass Valley. This is quite a departure from mainstream Canada and its treatment of women in general:

“People with exceptional exposure to mainstream living come here periodically and have similar behaviours as some here in our valley. I do not expect people should bow and scrape to me just because I'm a Nisga'a woman. There is no marginalizing my existence as a Ksim Nisga'a (Nisga'a woman) here.” (Shirley Morven)

Alice Azak offers very important advice that traditional leadership works hard to avoid 'xk'aat'aatkw' (to embarrass folks). Alice explains the attributes of respect and the important role it plays in Nisga'a leadership. She also stresses the importance of sharing knowledge to preserve the knowledge for subsequent generations:

“It's a person who so much inside of him that he has respect. You have to respect people for them to respect you. You have to stop and listen. If they are asking you something and you know how to handle it, answer. Don't keep it (knowledge) to yourself or it will die out. Some Clans try to keep knowledge to themselves. That is not the way it used to be.” (Alice Azak)

Emma, Shirley, and Alice have consistently told us how important it is not to be a callous show off or demean or bully people. Emma explains:

“Yes, you have a big name but that doesn't mean you elbow somebody, no, that's not what it's for and what it's about. Always encourage peace in your speech, that's what I heard from my dad, 'Dim bagan mi dim sim'magahl aama algax' (always give good words of advice) gaks, adigwil sigaks Sim'oogit Laxha (God) dim gigiinaxkw goodin dim yeet Laxha

sdo'oksin dim sdilit niin (will reach out like they do in Heaven to be with you). This is spiritual advice for safety. That's what I heard from my father.' ” (Emma Nyce)

3.6 Retaining traditional practices

The changes that took place in the Nass Valley were rapid. There was continuous bombardment of changes in cultural and economic activities. For the most part, the bombardment of the outside influences of colonization supported by missionization that brought Residential Schools and economic marginalization had a negative effect on almost every aspect of Nisga'a life. The outside influences decimated the language and feasting (settling family affairs), the family structure itself, and natural resource harvesting in fishing, hunting, and trapping, as well as conservation practice. During community gatherings, Elders and leaders speak of their concern of this bombardment and generational experience as a means of maintaining their collective knowledge to be carried forward to ensure the knowledge continue for future generations.

Harry Nyce suggests using the Nisga'a language as a means to encourage, and more importantly, to retain traditional practices in order to address issues that arise:

“I strongly believe the education that is being used now should include the Nisga'a language and culture that we have. Also, to encourage our young people to continue to attend events (feasts) in their communities, and the communities in the Valley where the Nisga'a language and Nisga'a culture are being performed. The reinforcement of the cultural part of lives ensures that this knowledge continues to be consistent. I believe for the most part that the younger generation can learn from our experience and strengthen the reinforcement of (the belief that) the language to continue.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Specifically in respect to education, Harry offers an example of traditional language with a contemporary application when a recent superintendent of schools for School District 92 wanted to close an elementary ‘arts’ school. The community expressed its concern. Harry was among these concerned community members and shares his experience:

“Recently, education became a focal point of our community of Gitwinksihlkw. A newcomer decided that the direction of education needed to be revamped to have a better focus on his part. Meetings were called, and at one meeting, I spoke in our language, the Nisga’a language, of the importance of maintaining our own school. The community’s spirit was very much, in our minds, as a community was being taken to task. In doing so, and from what I was able to contribute, many of our community members were very much supportive of what I said in our language, and those that understood followed suit in respect to reinforcing the importance of having our school the way it is today. So I think that’s an example of a community event and the language being used is important as a community.

“So having done so, in the community the young people that were there, young parents especially, witnessed that as the way the Elders of our community brought forward information which they would normally would not have known especially how significant this school is to the community and the expression and outpouring of support. I believe from our language being spoken that really reinforced and assisted this newcomer to change his mind. So in that light, I believe that those kind of community events could be used in the entire Nation’s process of reinforcing support for a change that is being thought about.”

(Harry Nyce Sr.)

In melding tradition with the present day, Harry Nyce stresses the importance of a consultative process with Elders when they find themselves in an unusual situation. In this instance a grave was unearthed when village roads were being constructed:

“Advice from the Elders includes that, if there was a grave unearthed and if the area was not needed, then they would abandon the plans to use the area. However, if the area was required for the community’s safety, the Elders took charge of the situation to rebury the remains. There was an access road to the bay at Gitwinksihlkw, used in those days, for barging housing supplies. A roadway was required to be built. When it was being built, it unearthed buried human remains – some human bones were unearthed. For the reburial, a bentwood cedar box was built by the members, and the remains were enclosed. The Elders then brought it to the cemetery and reburied the remains per what they understand to be the best and the cultural respect for disturbing the area.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Harry offers an example:

“The reburial ceremony would have been prayers asking for continued rest for that individual and prayers for those who were actively removing the remains. Prayers were offered throughout. Members that would continue to transport the box to the gravesite. Children were not allowed near the place while the ceremony took place.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Harry goes on to describe the application of tradition to seasonal food-gathering processes:

“There were camps for various harvesting activities in our history. There has also been some for the modern times now. There were camps and cabins built for such occasions and all they do is carry just themselves and their supplies. The cabin is already there, so they bring what they needed. During the harvest time for fishing from May through to August, they bring their whole community to go to prepare and build food supplies. For berry picking, it could

be three weeks to a month – cabins were built and that is where the preparations of food supplies is carried out. It is not done within a day, it's throughout the entire season.

“When the season ended and after food was gathered and processed, fishing nets were repaired, washed, dried and stored ready for the next season. The same process is followed for berry picking, trapping, and hunting. Supplies are repaired, cleaned and stored for the next coming season. Those things are common things that harvesters needs to do.”

(Harry Nyce Sr.)

3.7 Responding to changes over time

In reflecting on recent history, Harry Nyce opens the door to a time period that demands explication in respect to how Nisga'a have responded to changes over time:

“This would be the very late '60s, 1969 to the 1970s, the latter part of the 1970s when those we recollect, were the items that helped, provided the way, and explained how things had to be done. Leadership was required in researching how these things had to be done, attend to meetings in order to explain and to show what the community needed.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

While remaining largely intact, numerous changes transpiring over time have negatively impacted Nisga'a leadership. Increasing encroachment of European resettlement in North America brought colonization, missionization, industrialization, and economic marginalization. An unfortunate common thread that runs through all these 'izations' is ignorance from the powers that be, laced with a high degree of racism.

Traditional Nisga'a leaders were not allowed to abrogate or abandon their responsibilities to their families or their Wilp (Houses). When churches (and missionization) came into the Nass area, some leaders gave up their traditional leadership positions in favour of church doctrine that prohibited

Nisga'a from participating in the feasting, protocol for settlement of family succession affairs, or assisting newlyweds and the joining of families. The church hierarchy saw cultural practices as eroding their Christian ethic. Some traditional leadership, if not abandoned entirely, was unnaturally ceded to younger or other family members. As time went on, these types of decisions put undue stress on their families and confusion of matriarchy, hierarchy, and rightful ownership of land areas.

These "izations," especially missionization through the churches, had a negative trickle-down effect that threatened the Nisga'a language. The church wanted Nisga'a to speak English, which was a practice later inculcated into the Residential School system. Church leaders, like William Duncan, employed lashings and other types of corporal punishment. Corporal punishment was also incorporated into the Residential School system to beat Nisga'a children for speaking Nisga'a, the only language that they knew, which was very contrary to traditional Nisga'a childrearing.

As explained earlier, Residential Schools were created by the churches and the federal government to erode parental influence, and to eradicate the language and culture of the Nisga'a and of other Indigenous children under the guise of 'educating' them. The federal government assumed that their assimilationist policies would eventually eradicate Indigenous people and thereby reduce the cost of programs and services required. This act wreaked social havoc on the Nisga'a and other Indigenous families (and thus, their communities) and languages, cultures, and well-being.

This havoc still resoundingly reverberates in the Indigenous communities today. Parents lost parenting skills. The language and culture were almost eradicated and languages, including Nisga'a, are still threatened with extinction today as a result of this strongly enforced, racist policy.

Churches recently apologized for their part (only after court cases ensued) and government (under threat of court action as well) much later developed a common experience policy to 'compensate'

Indian Residential School (IRS) student survivors for abuses they received in the IRS system.

Unfortunately, children of former students who died are not able to collect their dead parents' legacy if the deaths occurred over eleven years from the beginning of the program – thus exacerbating ostracization from the intended 'healing process.' It seems the folks who benefited most from the common experience policy were government employees, lawyers, consultants and counsellors, and most of whom were non-Indigenous people.

It is important to note that a gaping negative legacy remains for some surviving IRS students that in turn negatively effects their perception. In the IRS system students were continuously taught by everyone in those systems that anything to do with "being Indian was not good, it was second rate." Those teachings still reverberate in Indigenous communities today. Some of us still believe "if it is Indian, it is second rate and white is better." For example, if you had a choice between two schools offering the same program, even though the First Nations school had a higher success rate than the non-First Nations school. The non-First Nations school would receive the enrolment as it is perceived as being better. The First Nations school is seen as inferior and criticized by folks in leadership positions. Some of these leaders are survivors of the IRS system and this mentality was engrained in them. Sadly their attendance in the IRS was a situation where there was no alternative, as it was federal law.

Fortunately a small number of Nisga'a traditional folks were spared the whole negative Indian Residential School experience and for them the language and culture remained somewhat intact in their families.

Another residual effect of Indian Residential Schooling was that some potential leaders who lived outside the Nass area for employment reasons thought, because they did not reside in the homelands, they had to abandon their birthright leadership. House (Wilp) leadership was ceded to younger

members of the family or in some instances to other related families. In other instances, a small number of would-be Matriarchs married out of the Nass area and deliberately gave up their family leadership responsibilities. Their subsequent family lines became confused. Some broke away from their family traditions and, contrary to Nisga'a cultural laws, formed unsubstantiated, illegitimate same Houses of their own elsewhere. If or when their offspring returned to the Nass, tensions and misunderstanding can ensue as their home families try to inculcate them into the Wilp.

Traditional leaders travelled the coastline of British Columbia often for employment reasons, for trade, or to meet with government officials (to save their lands from outside encroachment). There is a well-known true account on the Nass of a chieftain from Gingolx. When travelling back to the Nass from a trip to Victoria, he picked up two girls from Qualicum Beach on Vancouver Island and brought them home to the Nass to raise as his own. In keeping with traditional laws, these girls should have, in this Nisga'a matrilineal system, rightly been adopted into the Chief's wife's family and not his. Confusion entered the picture when offspring of the two girls aggressively assumed that they had title to the chieftainship their adoptive father held. Two confusions negatively impacted traditional Nisga'a life. First, the adopted girls should have become part of the adoptive father's wife's family or his sister's, as Nisga'a are a matrilineal culture. The second and more serious problem was that adoptees must follow their biological birth order, according to Nisga'a law, and they are not given rights to traditional Nisga'a names or land, no matter how integrated they become into the community. Land and title ownership, as for the British royal family, is a birthright and is held in trust and not individually owned.

Repressive government laws and subsequent policies also evoked change with negative effects.

Government initiatives such as the anti-potlatch law forced the Wilp (House) system to conduct family business, such as settling the estate of loved ones in a traditional manner, to go underground.

The Indian Act forced Indigenous communities, such as those in the Nass, to elect a Chief and council

basically to lead the adherence to and enforce or administer the Indian Act. This change forced an elected system that often created tensions with the traditional leadership system, which was criticized as 'old fashioned,' with the intimation that it was second rate.

In terms of the Nass, often those who became elected in the early years of the Indian Act elected councils who were also traditional leaders, who worked hard to temper the harsh Indian Act policies. The Indian Agent lorded over the villages and had the power to unilaterally make changes, with or without community consultation or agreement. Some villages were forced to move to accommodate 'development' and others were forced to merge. The federal government bureaucracy whose mission was to enforce the repressive Indian Act, was called the Department Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

Government and church laws attempted to fashion Nisga'a communities (like the Nass) into their patriarchal experience premised on William Duncan's Metlakatla system. The traditional family dwellings, the longhouse, was disbanded in favour of inadequately insulated Western-type houses, often eroding the important role of the extended family in grooming subsequent leadership.

Nisga'a women who married non-Indigenous men lost their legal Indian status to be Nisga'a. Conversely, Nisga'a men who married non-Indigenous women retained their Indian status and their non-Indigenous wives gained Indian status. In a matrilineal culture this is devastating in further eroding the matrilineal system. The subsequent children of women who married a non-Indigenous men were born without status even though they may have been born into a chieftainship entitlement and responsibility. There was one elected Chief who worked ardently to assist his cousin, also in chieftainship line, to regain his Indian status. The loss of Indian Status came about because his mother married a non-Indigenous person. A residual effect was that she and her children could not reside in

their homelands. After some time, the cousin and his family returned to enjoy full rights and responsibilities as Nisga'a citizens.

Churches also separated the people and often families. As noted previously, Indigenous communities were divided into different church territories. The Nass, for example, became an Anglican territory, where Englishman William Duncan (1832–1918) retained a huge influence over his Anglican priests. Among Nisga'a neighbours, the fallout was devastating and long lasting. For example, the southern neighbours to the Nisga'a are the Tsimshian who were strong allies and trading partners. The Tsimshian communities were divided by the Anglican and Methodist (United) churches. Some communities became Methodists (later United Church) territories led by the well-chronicled Englishman Thomas Crosby (1840–1914), and some became Anglican territory. A later disavowed Anglican priest, William Duncan displaced and relocated the Metlakatla Mission in British Columbia to a new Metlakatla on Annette Island in Alaska thus further eroding family and cultural ties among the Tsimshian and Nisga'a peoples.

On the Nass River, Kincolith (Gingolx) was established as an Anglican Mission fashioned after Duncan's Metlakatla System. A well-known local story tells us that after a major flood, the priest became frustrated with his inability to convert all Nisga'a to Christianity, so he set adrift with a group of converts in search of piece of land they would establish as a Christian community, preferably away from the Nass. In 1867, the medical missionary the Reverend Robert Tomlinson and his converts drifted down the Nass, but with each attempt they made to leave the Nass, the tides brought them back to the shores at the mouth of the Nass River. After many attempts the priest decided to bless the ground where they landed and thus began the community of Gingolx (Patterson 1982, 46–49; Gough 1984, 195).

Among the changes over time was the 113-year Nisga'a Land Question struggle. In the mid-1800s, Nisga'a chieftains gathered together to unite in their struggle to retain ownership over their homelands. They realized that separate attempts to convince the government about their hereditary title to their Wilp (House) lands (ango'oskw) were futile. After much deliberation, they collectively decided that they would put all their Houses together in a "common bowl" so that together, through the Nisga'a Land Committee, later to be resurrected as the Nisga'a Tribal Council, they would be better positioned to settle the Land Question with the provincial and federal governments. Although this eventually brought about the Nisga'a Treaty (2000), some chieftains were upset that their lands were excluded from core lands ("Nisga'a Lands"), largely due to overlap issues with neighbouring First Nations. Because the overlap issue attempted to stop the negotiations, Nisga'a leadership decided that overlap between families and nations would continue aloft in perpetuity forever – the price of not arriving after great lengths of time, to find mutual agreement. The impact, like days before the Common Bowl, is that permission is rarely sought today to hunt or fish in territories that are not your own. However, the Treaty requires that access must follow certain rules for both Nisga'a Lands and the Nass Area, which is nearly the entire traditional land area of the Nisga'a.

The whole of the territory is now held in common good. Hereditary names and ancient House stories remain associated with the land whether they are within or outside of Nisga'a lands. This is a truncated history of the Nisga'a Land Question struggle. This part of Nisga'a history deserves a book in its own right. However, hereto is an example of governments' attempt to repress the Nisga'a and other First Nations peoples, and whereby the federal government created a law that prohibited Nisga'a and other Indigenous groups to meet or raise money towards any work on the Land Question in Canada.

The influence of the church (in the case of the Nisga'a – primarily the Anglican Church) and government cannot be overstated. At one point, tensions between the church and the Nass River

communities witnessed the church's call to arms. The church, through its sanctioned priests, used their influence with government to persuade government to issue and deploy gunboats into the Nass, to quell a potential Nisga'a uprising in 1884 (Patterson 1982, 81).

Stories continue to reverberate in Nisga'a community still today about sexual misconduct of church priests in charge of communities in most, if not all, Nisga'a communities in earlier times and more recently into the 1980s. One such case came to light in the late 1980s where a Salvation Army officer was charged and convicted of sexually abusing a whole generation of young boys in one community. He had been their teacher.

The role outside influence played in these changes has been immense. Ironically, it was the Anglican Church that came out in strong support of the Nisga'a Land Question. Some priests often penned letters to government on behalf of Nisga'a chieftains, particularly during the late 1800s through to the mid-1900s.

The 1970s saw change as well. Nisga'a and other Indigenous people were granted the right to vote in provincial and federal elections. In 1973, the Supreme Court of Canada decision in the Nisga'a land claims court case known as the Calder case (*Calder et al. v. Attorney-General of British Columbia*, [1973] S.C.R. 313) led to significant change where Aboriginal title was affirmed and recognized. Frank Calder was the first president of the Nishga Tribal Council and during much of the Nisga'a land claims case.

The outcome of the Nisga'a case essentially brought about positive change for many First Nations communities in Canada, as it affirmed and recognized Aboriginal title. It also led the federal government of Pierre Trudeau to establish the comprehensive claims policy to begin to address the land claims issue. Nisga'a leadership of the day and the Anglican Church rallied across Canada and

church lobbyists, through Anglican organizations like Project North, lobbied vigorously to right the social injustices of the past. They held many town hall meetings in support of the Nishga Land Question. Repressive laws were repealed, Indian Residential Schools were closed and economic doors began to partially open for Nisga'a and other Indigenous Nations.

Organizations like the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia, an Indigenous fishermen, tendermen, and shore workers organization, also led the fight towards positive change in support of the Nishga Land Question. The Native Brotherhood eventually closed due to the downturn in the commercial salmon industry on the BC coast. Some First Nations fishers became independent or joined the United Fishermen's and Allied Workers Union (UFAWU). The tendermen (deck hands on packers, seine boats, and company docks) and the shore workers joined the UFAWU. Trade unions such as the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) union also came onside in support of Nisga'a efforts towards a just land settlement.

Traditional Nisga'a leaders were not allowed to abrogate or abandon their responsibilities to their families or Wilp (Houses) over all this time. When churches (and missionization) came into the Nass area, some leaders gave up their leadership in favour of church doctrine that prohibited them from participating in the feasting protocol, since the church saw this as eroding Christian ethics. Nisga'a traditional leadership, if not abandoned entirely, was ceded to younger or other family members. As time went on, these types of decisions put undue stress on their families as subsequent generations attempted to pull leadership back to rightful persons and place in order to resurrect the culture.

The church's behaviour also had an overflow negative ripple effect that threatened the Nisga'a language. As noted previously, the church wanted Nisga'a to speak English, which was a practice that was later inculcated into the Residential School system. Nisga'a church leaders, under the supervision of church hierarchy, often exercised corporal punishment to Nisga'a children for speaking Nisga'a.

Even though these attempts at eradicating a people, a culture, and a language continued, traditional Nisga'a leadership held steadfast and with grace to family histories and knowledge of the land and all the land's holdings – served as a refugia for the knowledge, practices, beliefs, and language of the ancestors.

Nisga'a traditional leadership has a strong history, be it learning from origin stories, attending to the recent past, understanding traditional matrilineal culture, retaining traditional practices, or responding to changes over time. For all of the challenges across time to Nisga'a leadership, its core remained intact, but continues to be threatened by further encroachment.

Chapter 4: Central Elements Nisga'a Leadership

"These ayuuk will never change." (Emma Nyce)

4.1 Introduction

The foundation of the Elders as cultural refugia that began in Chapter 3 is expanded in Chapter 4 with direct quotes from the Elders to the research questions:

1. After all of these years and through all of the changes, how did you manage to keep the knowledge?
2. How do we ensure that that knowledge continues through future generations to people who are going to be following in your footsteps?

In Chapter 4, the Elders share direct experiences in receiving and managing to keep the knowledge, and all express the importance of sharing that knowledge with younger generations within their respective Huwilp and communities.

Throughout these stories, the Elders share attributes of traditional Nisga'a leadership and the importance of traditional Nisga'a succession. Having established inheritance, the grooming process of each of these traditional leaders is presented through personal history in the interactions with their parents, grandparents, and older siblings. Each include learning to lead because 'learning' is not an inherited concept; a leader must learn how to lead.

The roles and relationships of families were stressed by all Elders especially in terms of k'aats (prohibited same-Clan marriage), and how that is symbolic of the changing attitudes from younger

leaders who may not see the value in such traditional teachings for maintaining the Nisga'a culture and way of life. The personal stories also reflect the importance of maintaining connections and relationships through their own perseverance and with the help of parents and/or grandparents in keeping traditional knowledge, and importantly to the Elders, the use, knowledge, and understanding of the Nisga'a language.

Chapter 4 ends with a summary of Nisga'a leadership attributes identified in the personal stories shared with the interviewees that may give new Nisga'a leadership direction in their capacities as Nisga'a leaders. These attributes reflect both personal attributes and knowledge that a Nisga'a leader must possess. Further, the interviews reveal a caution for behaviour that there are consequences of one's actions not just to the individual but also to their family and community.

4.2 Generational continuity

Several of the research questions were particularly related to this dimension of understanding.

Question 1 asked: "After all of these years and through all of the changes, how did you manage to keep the knowledge?" Question 3 queried: "What are significant attributes of Nisga'a cultural leadership?" Individuals' stories in response to these two questions are both distinctive in themselves and indicative of a strong sense of generational continuity.

Joe Gosnell shares his experience about relearning Nisga'a after returning from Residential School, and the importance of listening when learning:

"I'd like to start with what I was taught right here in Gitwinksihlkw when I was about thirteen years old when I came back from Residential School. And at that time I had to relearn the language from my mother and my father, and other people who I listened to. I think one of the most important aspects of what I was taught was to listen. Young people find it extremely

difficult to sit down and listen, especially in the feast hall, the settlement feast or a memorial feast. Their first reaction is ‘Oh, I heard this before. I heard this before. I don’t have to listen to it.’ They leave without hearing what is actually being said and in leaving they may miss some important aspect that they never heard before. So to me to listen, in looking back in my life, was one of the most important things that I learned from my father and my mother.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

Joe also talks about the value and technique of observation:

“To observe is just as important as listening. So many things happen around us in our communities, in our family life, in our cultural life, and at the cultural events that we attend. It is important for people to understand that if you’re going to remember something in your life and transfer that knowledge to someone else not yet born you have to learn to observe. Be observant of what’s around you, what did you see, what did you hear this person say that stuck in your mind.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

Joe also stresses the importance of learning by participating in community events, especially cultural events that offer instruction for subsequent generations:

“To observe is important. The next thing is to participate in events that happen in the Valley, not only in our communities, but in the Nation as a whole. It’s unfortunate that too many people stand on the sideline and watch things happen rather than be willing to participate in what is happening. To participate is important because this is the learning aspect of our culture.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

4.3 Attributes of leadership

Traditional Nisga'a education begins at birth and ends at death. Future leaders are groomed from birth until well into their adulthood. Traditional Nisga'a leadership is inherited by birth into a matriline. It is a hierarchal system whereby the firstborn girls and boys born into the House will rank higher than younger siblings, and will eventually assume leadership roles in the Wilp (House). Family birth order or rank does not discount in any way, the importance of younger family members to the Wilp (House). All members are taught to respect leadership and are groomed to lead, as one cannot foresee future Wilp (House) needs or events that may transpire.

Female leaders are groomed to become Matriarchs and male leaders are groomed to become Chiefs. As described in Chapter 3, Nisga'a is a matriarchal culture whereby children follow the paths and assume their identity (name and place) through their mother's lineage. A Nisga'a woman's entitlement comes directly from her mother. Nisga'a men's entitlement passes through the brothers and then on to the eldest sister's eldest son – uncle to nephew who is in line. The matriarchal concept may be difficult for many to understand in a patriarchal system where children assume their identity through the father's lineage often assuming his last name.

The strengths and values of this ancient matriarchal system is that the children assume their identity from their birth mothers – her House becomes their House, her Clan becomes their Clan – as will her daughters' children. As a result, the children will always have a sense of belonging to a specific place and be known for it for their entire lives, from birth to death. Matrilineal identity is also attached to one of four distinguishing Clans, and to ancient stories, songs, territorial land and all its resources, including airways and waterways. Children of that matriarchy have the privilege of gathering sustenance from those lands and also the responsibility that their homeland and its holdings are appropriately stewarded so that its resources can sustain subsequent generations in the matriarchy. In essence, children of a Matriarch practise conservation of resources for subsequent House members in

a way that creates, over great spans of time and includes multiple generations of descendants, a corporate memory of that House and that Clan.

4.4 Traditional Nisga'a Succession

Female and male succession is through the birth mother only. Traditional inheritance for males comes from the eldest brother to his younger brother who is born immediately next to him in the birth order. When no brothers remain, then inheritance passes on to their oldest sister's oldest son.

In the case of female succession, lineage passes from mother to eldest daughter, not through the sisters. If there are no daughters then succession passes to her next eldest sister and from there, mother to daughter.

Exceptions do exist, but are rare. All places in the lineage are important to the Wilp (House) and all are groomed.

A distinctive Nisga'a feature of traditional leadership described by Joe Gosnell is that persons must be born into leadership lineages similar to the British royal family:

“What is the process of inheriting a Sim'oogit (Chief) name? I think we're beginning to forget the process today. It's important for our people to understand that we don't elect hereditary Chiefs, we don't appoint hereditary Chiefs; one has to be born into the lineage with Sim'oogit – the Chief's House. Our system works similar to the royal family in England the way their heads of state are born.

“Everybody stands in line behind the eldest, silgit (the eldest – the first born), silgit siwadihl w'ahlingigat (said past Chiefs of older times), silgit anguuhl wat – the eldest will always take the name – the eldest in the House, unless the House decides otherwise. I don't

see these things happening today. I hear people arguing about the land, arguing about who's going to take the name. Its unfortunate, I hear that some people say that certain names belong to certain communities.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

Joe goes on to emphasize a very important point that names belong to families not to communities:

“That’s not the way our culture works, nidii n’ihl wilaa sisgihl ayuuk Nisga’a tgus, nii. Communities don’t own hereditary names; they have no business saying that this name belongs in such and such a community. It doesn’t work that way. I still hear that today.”
(Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

It is important to note that, occasionally in Nisga’a communities, the issue that intimates that “House leadership is owned by community” arises often by folks unfamiliar with the culture or who may have ulterior motives. Joe reiterates that House names are hierarchical and belong in families, not to communities:

“Our people moved around, in times past, much like people do today. They marry into different communities and different families. The man would go live, where his wife came from. That still happens today. People normally assume ‘Well he’s here, this name belongs to this community.’ That is not the case. That is not how our culture works. Communities do not own (a name), and they have no say whatsoever in who will carry the name after the person dies. He’s deceased, he’s gone and the question arises – Naa dim anguuhl wa? Naa dim anguuhl wa? Who’s going to carry the name? We have to follow our culture. In this process here we have to follow the culture in that silgit anguuhl wa – the eldest takes the name unless the family, *immediate* family decides otherwise. Many, many times I heard that the family

makes a decision after they've seen the way people live their lives and they decide against a person inheriting a senior Sim'oogit name.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

4.5 Learning to lead is important

Learning to lead matters. Moses McKay suggests isolation and constant use of cultural traditions helped maintain traditions and kept the culture alive with ancient Nisga'a knowledge. Moses shares his learning experiences: attend, listen, and watch. At first you may not understand but eventually you will learn:

“Before there were any roads or instant communication, like your telephone or internet, we were pretty well isolated here. I guess that helped us maintain and keep our traditions fully alive and in the forefront because we were using it all the time. I remember when I was a young child, seeing my grandfather and my dad and my uncles at meetings and going to feasts. My dad used to take us to those feasts. ‘You must sit down beside me, sit there and listen.’ Sometimes you didn’t understand what they were saying but you keep your eyes open and listen. We kept doing that for a long time and gradually, our understanding of what was going on gradually increased as compared to when I was younger and smaller. That formed the basis of my acquiring the knowledge. How do I manage to keep the knowledge? I was fortunate enough to have my mother and my brother Jacob and the previous Bayt Neekhl (the late Gordon McKay) to talk to me. He and I would sit down and discuss our history.” (Moses McKay)

In her master’s thesis, Allison Nyce describes Nisga’a education of children:

I would like to present the full citation of the late Sim'oogit Bayt Neekhl Dr. Jacob McKay as he relates his life experience; it is quite lengthy but identifies the main points of educating a child:

“The reason why we learn so well, in our case, those of us that were born at least 75 years ago, you know, we had to learn listening to people, and we had to learn by actually

doing and working with our hands. And if, you know, in my case, the first thing that I learned when I was a little boy, was the only thing I could do at that time was pack one sockeye or maybe two sockeye. Pack it up to the house, you know, we were going to can, mom was going to can fish and that was before I was able to help her lay it down on – I was able to lay it down on the table. But, I wasn't allowed to use a knife because I didn't know how to cut them either.

And then, you graduate after knowing that to, you know, looking after the garden; picking up the weeds in the garden; and then looking after the garden is the next step, step up.

And in the case of the oolichans, I actually had to go get the oolichans in Fishery Bay when I was strong enough. And the role I got to get them to Greenville – the role I got to get them back to Mom's in Greenville – so Mom and I could do our *digit* (smoked oolichans), so she could do her *si'u* (sundried oolichans) in Greenville.

And I did all that, and she taught me how to *si'u* and that's a woman's job people say – well it's not. It's part of a man's job; otherwise a man will starve if he didn't know what to do with that; how to make that and *digidim lax sk'anloots* (sundried oolichans on elderberry branches) and then making *digit*, smoked, putting them on sticks, hey, and smoking them. It's a whole process to that so I had to learn that.

And the next thing I had to learn after learning that whole thing is I had to go off with my dad or my grandfather to their trapline up above Greenville there and stayed out, you know, you stayed out until its dark and you come home. We go up on the boat in the inlet – boat all the way around and anchor or else when the tide was right, just go up with the tide and you had go up with the tide you had to row about five miles and that's where our traplines were.

And when dad went fishing I had to look after all that and as I got older I took over that and same with my grandfather's area.

And he was the one that taught me to trap beavers, snare beavers, and trap mink and martens, and you name it, you know. Wolverines, I trapped wolverines, wolves, I trapped wolves, and I went and shot the wolves, you know. And I had to learn all that at an early age. And how to do things in the fishing industry.

And how to lead the people when you come back to Greenville. And the first thing my grandfather used to do as one of the head Chiefs in Greenville is – the first thing he had to – he called all the chieftains together, whoever could make it in Kincolith, Canyon, and Aiyansh; call them down to share a meal with the community and all the people in Greenville.

I remember that, standing next to him when he used to speak as a little boy and that's how come I remember a lot of these things; those were very traumatic [times] in my case, you know, I sometimes – all the way through I was just scared to death I would do something wrong or stupid [laughs].

But I used to sit by his chair just like this [motions to position beside him] and it worked; that kind of teaching worked, so I was never shy, I was never shy to go up in front of people and talk to the people and explain something to the people or else talk about a new invention.

I didn't get any training for that but I knew how to do that. I knew how to public speak by the time I was twelve years old and I was quite fluent in Nisga'a at that time, you know, because they taught me. Those old people taught me, 'You listen what we're saying if there's any questions you ask afterwards.'

And all of my uncles at that time so that's the – that is the education of our forefathers. So they really had no formal education by the facts, hey, not unless there's a bunch of relatives being trained by a bunch of uncles and aunts and that's what happened to a lot of us there because ours was a big family so there was a lot of us there that were trained in public speaking." (Allison Nyce 2010, 62–63)

Moses goes on to express the importance of his mother's cultural teachings and how his cultural teachers, his older brother, his late uncle, and his mother, were examples of the real statesmen and scholars in Nisga'a society:

“My mom did the same thing whenever I go to see her on a daily basis. When she moved back to Greenville we built her house and moved her in. Even though I was in my forties and my fifties, my education still continued. There were a lot of things that I didn't know that was passed on to me in my younger years but I'd forgotten. Mom and my brother, Jacob, brought it forth again. I remember those things now as I get older. Things start coming up, I remember a lot of the things that I heard when I was young. Their (ancient wisdom) are re-surfacing and how the old people could talk. They were the real statesmen and the scholars in our society.” (Moses McKay)

Moses intimates through reflection the importance of ancient knowledge transmission and how lengthy some sessions used to be:

“In the olden days, many ladies had the knowledge that was imparted to us while we were sitting in the gathering – that could be band council, or in the feast hall. They would go at it (sharing knowledge of ancient wisdom) all night. In those days, we used to sit and talk until two or three o'clock in the morning. No one got up. Nobody left. They were all there, everybody stayed to listen. They knew that was the time that knowledge was given to the people.” (Moses McKay)

Moses is very aware of the ancestral obligations that descend to him and now, how he too passes on ancestral wisdom:

“That’s how I try to keep that knowledge alive. The only thing that I regret was being away (from the homelands) for about twenty years. I missed the teachings of my other uncles and my grandparents that were still alive at that time. By the time I came back they were no longer alive. When I left they were busy, they were still going strong in the community. Both up here (upper Nass River) and down in Greenville. Lots of people gave me advice and told me what to do, what not to do and why these things happen. Why they do certain things. When I went away for high school I got cut off from that, and I stayed away for twenty years. There was a big gap in my traditional knowledge that triggers lots of concerns. I had a lot of catching up when I moved back. I was fortunate that Jake (Moses’ older brother) was there, and I was fortunate that my uncle Gordon was there and of course, my mom. My dad died before I moved back, but mom was here and I was fortunate to have her.” (Moses McKay)

Moses fondly remembers his mother’s jovial teaching style and his appreciation for all his Nisga’a traditional advisors:

“Bringing up certain things in our culture that people used to do. I had to laugh a few times. She’d ask me a question in Nisga’a and she’d say a certain (Nisga’a) word I hadn’t heard for a long, long time since I was a little kid. She’d look at me and see what my reaction would be and she’d ask, ‘Xnayan anheeya’ (do you hear or understand what I am saying)? Sheepishly I’d say no, what does that mean? ‘K’ay’ (colloquial Nisga’a word expressing annoyance), she’d say, ‘you dumb Indian.’ Oh, she used to just bug (tease) me! She would always tell me, then she’d explain. I’d remember after that.” (Moses McKay)

Moses also draws on the wisdom of others to assist him information he seeks:

“I enlisted the help of my uncles, my mom, my aunts, and my cousin – sisters, Emma and Peggy (Nyce). That’s helped quite a bit. I usually talk to Emma (Nyce), she’s a wealth of information. She has that knowledge and she offers it without any hesitation when I ask her. I’m glad that she’s there because I don’t have anyone else with that kind of knowledge because there’s a lot of things that I don’t know and a lot of things that I’d still like to know.”
(Moses McKay)

Moses expounds on sharing the knowledge and describes his experience seeking by asking questions of his family wisdom keepers and how he retains the ancient traditional knowledge he acquired.

Knowledge, to Moses, is all inclusive as he describes below:

“We shared that knowledge continuously with our people on how to follow in their footsteps. I had a lot of questions when I was real young, when I first came back, when I first started walking on this road. I had a lot of questions for my mom, my brother Jacob, my uncle Gordon, Joe – Sim’oogit Hleek, and Emma (Nyce). That’s how I kept the knowledge. It doesn’t just include the Nisga’a ayuuk (laws) and protocols that we follow. Knowledge to me includes everything – the knowledge that we’ve managed to keep all these years includes everything in our lives. Knowledge includes how we live and goes back to who our families are, the environment, food gathering, and all that is involved with that. I can remember a lot of those things that we used to do when I was small in regards to gathering our food. We need to know about the lean times of the year. Why we do certain things with the different foods we gather. Why we have to be very careful while we’re, while we’re working.” (Moses McKay)

Moses gives us an example of the importance of emphatically teaching and sharing his knowledge through offering advice to avoid a negative consequence:

“I remember telling my kids ‘Aama ga’ana wilaa wilsim, ni hasagan sgiks an t ligitnaa’ (play close attention to what you are doing, you do not want anyone to get hurt). I remember them telling us that. Once you get hurt doing something. It all goes back to early years, the early days of our ancestors. When somebody gets hurt, that creates a burden on the rest. The person who gets hurt can’t help in gathering their food as they usually do. If one is incapacitated that creates a burden for the rest. I say it myself when one of my boys got hurt. ‘You’ve created a burden for everybody in the family.’ If anyone in my family gets hurt, in our House, that creates hardship, emotionally and physically. I tell the boys why I say that, especially, if they have their own House, or their own Houses. They have their kids there and if you get hurt what’s going to happen, who’s going to feed your children? Sure you have compensation these days, but that’s not the point. Our ayuuk tells you ‘Hagwil wilin, hagwil wilin’ (take your time) ‘nindii hasagan dim sgiksin’ (you do not want to get hurt).” (Moses McKay)

Moses continues to share his advice that we should also pay close attention and be diligent when at the work place where we are employed:

“As in all the things, through the ages and ages because life can be tenuous in certain times of the year when supplies and provisions are really low. I keep telling them, when you’re working, don’t get distracted, you don’t go to work half cut, or especially if you guys were out the night before. Go to work with clear mind; that helps you, as you advance in whatever you’re doing. My thoughts goes back to same thing my dad, and my grandparents taught me to ‘be careful in everything that you do. But work, be diligent, in you’re doing, be diligent in your employment, in your job.’ When you look at it, when you go right back, nowadays and the old days compared, it’s still the same thing. You work to the best of your ability now and you do the same thing when you were, back in the early years. Our ancestors they did the

same thing, they acquired the knowledge, they worked hard, they survived, they worked themselves up the social ladder, and worked themselves up towards being a leader. It works today as it did in our past history. All the people that worked the hardest in those days are the ones that were the leaders because they acquired the knowledge. They knew what to do, when to do it and how to do it and they had the most. Because they listened to the knowledge that was given to them, they were successful and that's how they were strong leaders.” (Moses McKay)

Moses emphasizes the obligation that leaders share – to pass on the knowledge to guide the next generation. He stresses that it is important for leaders to be in a position to guide their family as head of the Wilp (House) and family:

“Some people talk about leadership these days where the person doesn't have the grooming that is required to take a big name – a big Sim'oogit name – a real Sim'oogit. Some of the people don't have that, especially the young ones. How can they pass that (traditional) knowledge on if they're not familiar with it or they don't know. The (Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a) Committee of Sages are concerned about that, like me I'm concerned about it too. I agree that the people who have been living in outside world for years, take the name and they go back out again. I know of one instance in Laxgalts'ap that happened. The House was left without leadership in the community. I think it's really important that if you are going to have that name, you've got to be living where people can learn from you, where you can guide your House. People with names should not come up just once in a while on special occasions, and do this and that and then gone again. To me is not real leadership. Leadership is being an active leader, it is a full time job. I know because I've been doing that with my House. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed but thanks to the teachings – the talks that I had with my

uncles, and my brother Jacob and my Mom, and all the other people that are close to me. That helps me with my role as a leader in my House.” (Moses McKay)

Moses addresses a necessary attribute and distinctive requirement needed by Nisga’a traditional leaders:

“You have to be knowledgeable in the ayuuk (Nisga’a law). Leadership were very, very knowledgeable about the Nisga’a ayuuk – one of the most important attributes is being able to understand and know your ayuuk.” (Moses McKay)

Moses worries that our young people don’t understand, or choose not to understand, exemplified by uttering the following quips such as ‘that’s old fashioned’ or ‘that doesn’t apply to our situation here’:

“I mentioned at one of the feasts that we had; it was a mak’a’am lo’op wagin, gimxdy (a stone moving feast for my late brother and sister) an dim mak’sa’ahl k’aylimksit (and to teach the young people). During the tribal (Clan only feast held the day before the main feast the following day) I asked all the young people – young ladies, girls, and boys stand up. I wanted to do that because another traditional leader told me they did the same thing in one their tribal feasts. In our House, and our belief. I asked the young people to all to stand up and you look at each other’s faces. I instructed them to ‘remember who you are,’ ‘remember these are your brothers and sisters’ when you’re in here (feast hall). You’re all Laxsgiik (in the Eagle Clan). That’s one of the most paramount ayuuks (laws) in Nisga’a society is not to marry in your own tribe, which is like marrying your own sister or brother. That’s what I said at that (tribal) feast.” (Moses McKay)

Moses further teaches us by using an example:

“My grand-nephew and his partner feel that it’s not important, but it is. It is really important. I’ve seen instances where something happens to that family that married into the same tribe. It creates havoc, especially when something happens. You are both wilksilaks (father’s family). Because you’re married to an Eagle, so your wilksilaks are Laxsgiik, it’s all one. That’s not the way it goes. That’s not our ayuuk (law). That’s wrong. They don’t understand or don’t want to (understand) because they say it’s not really important and they’re wrong when they say that.” (Moses McKay)

Moses continues by listing characteristics leaders must have to lead well:

“Another thing we need to look at with regards Nisga’a cultural leadership is the character of a person. Morally, you have to be strong. That is one of our ayuuks (laws) to be morally strong. Another one of our ayuuks is to be honest: honest with yourself and with people around you. I’ve seen a lot of instances where people have not been truthful to one another and it creates so much trouble, that in the end families break-up. People get hurt. You have to be very honest. To be honest is one of the attributes of traditional leadership. Compassion is another attribute of traditional leadership – to be compassionate with each other when you have problems, or when there’s a need to help somebody else. You have to be able to do that.

“Another important Nisga’a leadership characteristic is to be knowledgeable of your culture and knowledgeable in your personal House history is so important. You have to be knowledgeable about the environment. Our ancestors were all great environmentalists. If the ancestors were not environmentalists, we wouldn’t have the resources that are available to us throughout history right to the present. If our forefathers weren’t environmentalists, we wouldn’t have the bounty that is made available to us. We would be like the, like the other people that came and ‘discovered’ North America. Look at other parts of their world where they depleted their resources because there was no environmental control throughout history

until recently. That is one of the reasons why a lot of them came to North America. They lapped up and depleted the resources in their homelands, because they did not practise conservation. They weren't conservationists. A lot of them came over, you know – I remember that saying – 'All they had on them was the dirt under their fingernails.' ” (Moses McKay)

Oscar Mercer reflects on the important role grandparents have in teaching their grandchildren. Grandparents are known to study their grandchildren to guide them so they can manoeuvre successfully through their world:

“When I was growing up here, I spent most of my time with my matrilineal and patrilineal grandparents. I hardly seen my own parents. I was always with grandparents. In those days, that was just the way we lived – a way of life. The houses were usually quite large. There's always room for grandparents to be with the parents. I spent a lot of time with my grandparents both sides of the family. They were always talking as I was growing up. It was always: 'You have to do this or this will happen to you.' This is how they lectured to avoid any mishaps. They watched everything you do and then they'd call to you, 'Gom' (go ahead, start, begin). 'Let me tell you this, I saw what you did now if you do that here this is what's going to happen to you.' ” (Oscar Mercer)

Oscar, like Moses talks about the importance of the cultural law of not marrying someone within your own Clan:

“This is how they train you to prepare you (for your eventual leadership role). They always tell stories, even community stories. They tell you who these people are, who your relatives are, who you can be in love with as you grow older. Who you can court or who you could just

be as brother and sister – especially in your own House (Wilp). This was one way of preventing some of the things that are happening today like k'aats (prohibited same-Clan marriage). They taught you at an early age who your relatives are, even though it's not close blood relative but they're still part of your House – that way you don't make any of those mistakes. K'aats (prohibited same-Clan marriage) complicates our way of life especially in times of feasting or in times like marriage or death.” (Oscar Mercer)

Oscar raises the important cultural issue of k'aats, of marrying within one's own Clan, which warrants further explanation. When a Killerwhale Clan member marries another Killerwhale Clan member (even if they are from different nations) they are considered k'aats, as same-Clan members are considered siblings, meaning your brother or sister. This Clan cultural law is recognized by all British Columbia coastal Indigenous folks from Alaska through to Alert Bay. This also includes Haida of Haida Gwaii, Nisga'a from the Nass Valley, Tsimshian from the Skeena, Gitksan of the upper Skeena, Heiltsuk from Waglisa (Bella Bella), to as far south as Alert Bay and Campbell River. Clan membership can only be obtained by birth and Clans are recognized and respected by all groups. You can change many things but you cannot change your birth. Nor can you change your bloodline.

Where Clan members have married into their own Clan (k'aats), and in an attempt to avoid embarrassment to birth the Houses, one of the couple may be adopted into a close relative's (but different) Clan House. For example, a k'aats wedding where two Eagles married each other, the bride was promised adoption into her grandfather's Killerwhale House. In another instance of an Eagle k'aats wedding, the bride was adopted into her father's Wolf House. It is awkward and stressful for the adoptee as they are not as familiar with their new Wilp (House) history as they are with their own birth House. Not all members of their new Wilp (House) agree with k'aats adoption and may chastise the k'aats adoptee and their spouse.

When children are born as a result of k'aats unions, the children often return to their mother's original Clan. It becomes further complicated when the children's families begin to have functions. They would normally call upon their wilksilaks (father's family) to carry out cultural duties but they do not have wilksilaks (father's Clan) to call on because their parents are in the same Clan. No natural wilksiw'itkw (father's Clan) exists. In lesser, but equally complicated instances, children assume the adoptive mother's new Clan House membership and separate from their birth blood.

After a couple of generations through a matrilineal system the lineage becomes very blurred. They too can be chastised as having come about because of a k'aats union. According to the ayuuk (law), the k'aats and their offspring should never (under the ayuuk [law]) assume leadership positions because they deliberately chose to break the ayuuk (law). There are other contortions and scenarios where most end up in the same hiding place, often now in large cities where a couple can quietly remain anonymous.

Please note, that it is not just the couple, who chose to break the cultural law that erodes the culture. Their children may never receive names from their birth Wilp (House) nor will their grandchildren or great-grandchildren born from the k'aats union.

The following quote by the late Wahlingigat Sim'oogit Wii Gadim Xsgaak, the late Eli Gosnell emphatically reinforces all statements by the interviewees regarding k'aats:

This is the story about the clans which were the foundation of the Naas River. According to what was told, the Wahlingigat were very big in stature in time immemorial. The women folk too were very big, because in those days they carried out the teachings set forth for them, the laws of the tribal clans. The Wahlingigat proved that there is strength and power in the clan system.

My father held both of his fists together and told me as a youngster that two of his fists were the size of one that the Wahlingigat had. Their feet were very big as well and they did not wear shoes.

They lived on a diet of fish, berries and water. Neither did they wear any clothing. Cold weather did not bother those people at all because they were in good health. This was why the clan system was instigated.

My father defined the word 'clan' as one blood representing the root of a family tree right from its origin. This root, therefore, binds the clan as one body and one blood. So the clan system segregates different blood.

The law of our forefathers was never to marry a member of your own clan, because Laxgibuu, Ganada, Laxsgiik, or Gisk'ahaast are each of the same blood.

The example of marriage laws of the Nisga'a are as follows: Laxgibuu would marry a Laxsgiik; there is different blood between these two clans. Gisk'ahaast would do the same to Laxgibuu or Ganada; these four clans would intermarry.

So that there would be strength and power – this was the purpose of these families to form clans.

Our Wahlingiat ancestors believed that when a clan member married his own kin, their offspring would suffer for it.

It was only within recent generations, my father told me, that the people began to marry within their own clan. Some people did outright k'aats – married their own kin, which was just short of incest. When this happened then, people in adulthood did not grow to the original stature of our ancestors. Their stature gradually diminished with the generations. K'aats was the main factor in the diminishing stature-growth of the Nisga'a people and their power and strength also decreased.

At the beginning of coming of the staple foods of the white man, the Nisga'a consumed these food commodities. Their strength and stature diminished considerably and noticeably so. My father said we were not blessed in drinking tea, or taking sugar, coffee, bread, salt. He said that when we ate those foods it stunted our growth.

It was previously arranged that we drink only fresh water and dayks – a blend of oolichan grease and powdery snow with any kind of berries added for flavor. All wild game meats were consumed after being barbecued. We thrived on all food products which were the natural resources of the land. That was the reason for the longevity of the Wahlingiat.

This was also why the clans were there, so that the blood of one clan would not mix with its own kin, but intermingle with other clans, so that their children would be in good health in Nisgah.

Each clan took various animals to be their crest or emblem. It often happened that members of each clan were lured away by animals. When such a person returned, the clan naturally adopted that animal as its crest. The significance lay in the fact that all those received were given great honour in the midst of their captures. These animals also provided, or rather showed, foods which were edible; that was the reason for adopting them as crests. These clans were truly the foundation of the Nisga'a.

If the Nisga'a were wrong, the eagle would not be flying today. There would be no eagle, if they just told stories about the raven, killer whale, wolf, and the bear. But because the Nisga'a's told the truth, these animals still thrive today.

So this was our foundation. Do not relinquish the clan system as long as you live on our land. Pass this on to the generations to come. This was how our Chief of heavens gave it to us. Through the clan system we will be recognized on our land.

The people who recently came to our country from Europe do not know the history of our land. They do not believe it; and why not? Because they do not belong here in the first place.

And we too do not know the entire history of the land from whence they came. No one from Nisga'a knew the entire history of these people. But they themselves know about it.

Then too we have our dialect which they do not understand. We too do not

understand their language.

These are important things. But the tribe is our foundation. The tribe is the truth. The tribe was why the history of our land was made known and held by our people. Our history is the truth. The stories of the killer whale, wolf, raven, and eagle, there was no lying, this is the truth. This was how our forefathers told us these stories.

Stand on the truth, you my Chief, you are a brother so stand on the truth. Do not leave the stand that you have taken if you are a Gisk'ahaast. Remain as one and develop the ways of your forefathers. Do not release it as long as this world remains. As soon as you relinquish the ways of your ancestors, you will be as nothing in this world. When this happens you will be disregarded by all and looked upon as a raggy thing when you release the ways of life that your grandfather followed. It has happened outside of our valley. So do not do it.

This is what I can say of this beautiful story of ours about the clans: it is our foundation on this land. (Nisga'a Tribal Council 1995b, v-viii).

Oscar Mercer shares his childhood teachings by his family and the community and how these teachings affected his sensibilities as an adult in important ways:

“I could say everyone in the community brought me up. When I'd go and play out on the street at the old village of Gitlaxt'aamiks, someone would holler out from the house. It could be one of my distant grandparents or uncles or aunts that tells me that my mother would want me home right now – ‘It's time for your lunch or your supper.’ If you did something wrong even if you're quite a ways from home and you figure your parents aren't going to see you doing wrong, there's somebody else watching you and they'll come out and take you, ‘Look, you can't do that, you shouldn't pick on someone smaller than you,’ or if you are throwing sand at someone else you would hear ‘Don't, don't do that.’

“Before you leave the house, you get lectured on what not to do. They'll tell you if you are allowed to go to the river or if you are allowed to go into the woods. You have to try to be safe. They will tell you which animals you have to be aware of. You are warned to not bother animals such as bears. We were always told of how we should act if we should see a bear. We were told not to go look for the cubs because you're not to go between the mother and the cubs because the mother will get vicious. You go around the other side – it's safer to go around the other side of the mother.” (Oscar Mercer)

Oscar goes on to tell us how he as a child, learned to treat animals and fish with respect:

“The other thing they tell you not to kill an animal unless you’re going to eat it. You are not allowed to make fun of an animal. Animals are always referred to almost like human beings. You have to treat them with respect and that way K’amligiihahlhaahl (we call our God) will not curse you or prevent you from obtaining game that you will survive on. If you make fun of animals then you may not be provided with a certain animal for our food. When you are fishing, you don’t play with fish. It is haw’ahlkw (culturally forbidden). It’s just like you at home attending kindergarten or Head Start (nursery school) is the new way that gets used to teach children of how to live.” (Oscar Mercer)

Oscar illustrates how education starts at home and the importance of family teachers:

“In our time, everything started at home, your education starts at home by your immediate family, by your uncles or your aunts. If it’s your sisters, it’s the aunts, or it’s the uncles if you’re male, or your grandmother and your grandfather. That is our way. That’s the beginning right from when you are able to understand the language. You are taught what you should do and what you should not do and how to conduct yourself if you are with other people and if you are with your other family members. In other words, you were taught how to get along with people and as you grow older.” (Oscar Mercer)

Oscar reflects at length on the changes occasioned by formal schooling:

“I should go back and mention that I was seven years old when I started attending day school, at the old Gitlaxt’aamiks village. Our school was at the Mission House. There was no regular school back in the early 1930s. I was seven years old when I started attending school.

“I never left old Gitlaxt’ aamiks and Old Aiyansh while I was growing up. The parents started going to the fishing canneries outside of the Nass Valley. The younger children and those that were attending school, stayed behind with grandparents to continue their education. The parents left them behind. So I was always home all year round. I never did go out to the canneries with the parents, even after the school was closed at the end of June. We assisted the grandparents with domestic farming. We had to tend to hay fields because at that time they had cows and horses and we took part. At the early years you took part in, what we call, ksijapkws (add on an adjacent structure to a building), to prepare for food and materials for shelter for the winter months. (Oscar may have meant sayt hahlals which is a term used for a work bee or working together.) (Oscar Mercer)

Oscar goes on to tell us how they used their own produce and meat for feasts:

“At that time we had the missionaries already amongst us. They assisted in supplying the seeds for farming or agricultural supplies and during that time. Up to the fifties, people were still living off the land through farming. They had their own cattle and horses to do the heavy work. That made it easier when we conduct our feasts. We get all our vegetables right off the farm. If you need meat or beef, you just slaughter one of your cattle. At that time, there was still an abundance of wildlife and fish so we had plenty of everything.” (Oscar Mercer)

An important consequence is Oscar’s ambivalence towards the role played by Residential Schools in lives of children and their families:

“Some people condemn Residential Schools. I don’t. There’s just a few like Bert McKay who don’t condemn it, the reason being, like I mentioned earlier, people migrate. During the fishing season everybody flocks to the canneries. They were concerned about continuing the

education of the children so they were leaving them behind with the grandparents – those people don't have to go to the canneries. They leave the children with the other family members to continue schooling until they're out and then they travel with their parents. Some of us stay right at home all year long. I didn't miss not being out there until later years I started going out.

“The Christian missionaries, worked with the government. When they saw hardships in families, especially large families, they make arrangements. I know that the parents are asked if it's all right for some of their children, especially the older children start to attend Residential School. This way they don't miss their schooling at the early part of the year and the latter part of the year when their parents have to migrate to the canneries.” (Oscar Mercer)

During the fish cannery heydays folks usually travelled from the Nass Valley communities to the canneries on the coast of British Columbia at the mouth of the Skeena River. Some of the cannery names were: Carlisle, Claxton, Standard, Morse Cove, and Port Essington. Later other canneries were established on the mouth of the Skeena, these included Cassiar, Sunnyside, North Pacific, Inverness, and Port Edward. Many families, like Oscar's, would live at the canneries from early spring season through to late fall (that coincided with the salmon runs – from spring fishing to fall fishing). Oscar continues to share his story of Residential School:

“In my case, I was about nine or ten years old. There were a lot of us, my siblings in my family when my father passed away. My mother couldn't look after all of us. So some of us were sent away to Residential School. That's how I got into Residential School. I was about ten or twelve years old then. Residential Schools were operated by the church, although the government owned the properties, I think they continued to pay the cost (of running the Residential Schools). The teachers were hired by the church probably at minimum wages.”
(Oscar Mercer)

Oscar adjusts to life at Residential School by embracing the experience:

“Because of the large numbers and lack of staff and faculty, we attended half a day in school. Half of the (student) population attended school for half day, while the other half of the (student) population worked around the school doing chores to maintain the school. The roster rotates every month. You go to school in the morning, and then the next month you go to school in the afternoon.” (Oscar Mercer)

As indicated by Oscar, St. Michael’s Indian Residential School (SMIRS) was an Anglican Church–operated institution. Most students who attended SMIRS would most likely have come from Anglican communities. Students’ familiarity and communication between the child’s home community and their Residential School would have increased when both were of the same denomination. Not all children were Anglican, Oscar explains:

“Some people (students) went to a Presbyterian (operated Residential School), like Lytton. I think it was a Presbyterian Church. Most of the Nass River children went to the Anglican schools. There were some Catholic (Residential) schools.” (Oscar Mercer)

“At that time the priests were called ‘Reverend.’ Recently they’ve changed the Anglican priest status in the Nass. We call them priests now like the higher church. In my time they were called Reverends. For example, we had Reverend (Samuel) Kinley as the minister in Old Aiyansh. They call them Ministers then. Now they call them ‘Father’ now like the Catholic Church that depends on how the bishop is if he higher church.” (Oscar Mercer)

Oscar shares at length his St. Michael’s Residential School experience during the Second World War. He embraced the regimentation the war brought to his school:

“We were fortunate during the Second World War in the 1940s. Everybody was gung ho (heightened support). For safety’s sake, we even had the (Pacific Coast) Rangers (Canada’s home guard) up here (in the Nass Valley) like Eli Gosnell and the others. My uncle Herb Morven and others at the schools enlisted in the cadet corp that was started up a retired major in the army. He was one of our supervisors and our house master at Residential School. He started a cadet corp and we all became members of that cadet corp. It was just like any cadets in the army. We didn’t have rifles, just wooden rifles. We drilled and everything. We practically ran the school like an army camp.

“In the morning you had to stand at attention and somebody said a prayer before breakfast. You had to take cod liver oil that came in big oilcans. Someone would volunteer to walk down the aisle. You almost look like a little robin. The volunteer would squirt a dose of the cod liver oil down your mouth for prayer or meditation purposes.

“Everything we did there was the cadet corp. That was good training, like army camps. You have to be neat and tidy. There was bed inspections. We had ranks like privates, corporals, advanced corporals, sergeant, and sergeant major. They inspected your bed and your lockers. This is the old way of being tidy like the army cadet corp system. We needed to be tidy, which was good for us. We did a lot of exercises to keep healthy. We participated in sports, like basketball, soccer, even softball.” (Oscar Mercer)

Like the sayt hahlals (working together – like community work bees) at home where everyone worked together, Oscar embraced Residential School culture:

“We also learned how to be farmers there. Some of us had to be up early in the morning about five o’clock. We had to get up to the farm by six and back by seven for breakfast. We milked cows. Most of those schools were self-sustained. There were Jersey cows to provide

milk for the school and farms where we planted vegetables. We also had rhubarb patches for making jam. We even go fishing to drag seine at Nimpkish River in Alert Bay – one of the Reservations inside the northern tip of Vancouver Island. We would can and salt the fish for use in the winter months. We also made our own jams.

“Some children, like orphans with no parents or grandparents stayed (at SMIRS) all year round. They were usually taken on a trip close by with some staff members. Most of the teachers and staff members belong to the Anglican Church who worked for the church. They were Christians. They had to have a boat or a vehicle to come and go. It was government pay between the church and the government. I went as far as grade nine. Bert McKay and them went to grade nine too and then off to high school for grade ten in Prince Rupert after six years in Alert Bay.” (Oscar Mercer)

After St. Michael’s Indian Residential Schooling was complete, Oscar and others move to Prince Rupert to complete grades ten through twelve:

“There were only thirteen of us Native (Indigenous) people from northwestern British Columbia. Some were Haida, Tsimshian, and Nisga’a – thirteen of us all together and talk about discrimination! I don’t think there was anybody (Indigenous students) in Terrace then because some of the Gitxsans had to go to Prince Rupert. It was iffy about Native people attending the schools. The first year I was there, Shirley (Morven) attended. There was a lot of discrimination when left your chair or your desk unattended. For example, in the industrial arts, and you leave the room for a period to figure your course of study – metalwork, carpentry, sewing, or cooking with the girls. When you return you would find some of your textbooks glued together. Discrimination in the boy’s class or shop; if you were not watching your books somebody would put a big spike right through your textbooks. It’s a good thing the Department of Indian Affairs were supplying textbooks otherwise we would be broke

buying textbooks. At that time, we were paying 50 percent of room and board and 50 percent of transportation costs. Fifty percent of our room and board was paid by the Department of Indian Affairs and you paid the other half at that time.” (Oscar Mercer)

Oscar’s school experience and its aftermath occurred in changing times of which he was well aware, and whose ethos he shares:

“By the time I left there (Prince Rupert) I had a lot of friends and discrimination was gone. We participated in sports and our teammates became good friends and watched out for you. They were not Native people. They used to say, ‘Oscar, if anyone bugs you, you let me know’ and they deal with that.

“That’s how we crossed discrimination. When you went to a movie, you (Indigenous folks) go to one side (of the theatre) and non-natives on the other side. We used to try and break it and someone flashed a light in your face, ‘Sorry, you’re in the wrong place, you’re going to have to move across here to the other side.’ It was same in the restaurants – some places wouldn’t even serve you. The Chinese mix with the Natives until after that big riot they had in Rupert that stopped the discrimination.

“The riot started up by our people like (past Nisga’a leaders) James Gosnell, Percy Tait and Bill McKay and them. The riot happened just before the (Second World) war was over when the police switched over from Provincial police (to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police a federal police force). At the time the Provincial police knew all the native people. They practically grew up with most of the police (officers). The Provincial police worked right where some of them were born and some of them used to follow as the head of the police in Rupert. I ran into him (later) when he started working in the Haney Correctional Institution.

I said, 'I remember that you used to be the head policeman in Rupert. Oh gee, nice to see you.'

He said, 'I was just a young guy, I got a job here. I didn't get charged in here. Nice to see you.'

I asked, 'Do you remember James Gosnell?'

'Yeah, I was just a young guy there. They were six or seven years older than me.'

He said, 'I think they instigated (the riot).'

He wasn't in charge then, it was after they were done away with and the RCMP (federal police) took over.

"The first year the RCMP took over policing in the province was when the riots started. This fellow was telling me that he used to be the head person in Rupert. He said, I remember I knew the people by their first names. He said, 'I knew Old Man Grandison, I started out with him. Old Man Grandison, Tim Grandison and his wife, that was when they first allowed the native people to go in to the bars.' The first time they allowed Old Man Grandison and his wife – you know how people are the first time after they were restricted – people overdo it. I guess the first time they went, they got caught walking on the street. The cops came along start asking them questions. They got mad at the police started talking harshly to the police. The police threw them in the dumb-wagon (police van). Jake Davis and the Dudowards from Port Simpson asked, 'How come you guys are in there?' Jake Davis and the Dudowards saw what was happening. While the police were dealing with some other people, they went over, unlatched the dumb-wagon and let the Grandisons out and told them to go home. When they were leaving, the police stopped them and asked who let them out. The police saw what was happening and they got after Jimmy Ross and Jake (Davis). They beat the heck out of the police. Chris Clayton and them took off and nothing happened.

"The police fortified the next weekend, there were no worries with the RCMP patrolling just up and down Third Avenue. The native people were in the bar and come

closing time everybody came out. That's when the trouble started. The RCMP started throwing people in the dumb-wagon and that's when James and Bill and those guys said, 'Enough is enough.' They were not involved with it. They were in the bar. When they came out, the disagreement had escalated and grown to Fulton Street (two city blocks away). That is where city hall used to be and where the riot started. People confronted the RCMP. The fire truck was there and the mayor was trying to take care of an illegal gathering (or something). They started throwing stones. We didn't have any (stones) and the police were trying to push the people out. Someone was right at the front (I remember Sidney Eli and them) said break the rank. The (rioters') line opens and a policeman goes right through and gets beaten by Percy and James. As soon as they brought out the fire truck with the hose, they took off. Everybody left the street and went into the restaurant to order food and pretend that we weren't even there. That was the riot and those people who were picked up – that was when the police changed their system about what to do with native people after that riot.” (Oscar Mercer)

Oscar Mercer continues on to make an important point respecting everyday life. Despite the changing times, customary ways are upheld in important ways:

“We didn't have to go to Save-On or Safeway when we have our feasts. Everything was just right off our own land, be it wild game or domestic animals. At that time, this is still in the 1930s and '40s, we didn't feel the hard times like recession and being short of supplies. We are still trying to do that today. We help other people out and there's a certain way you do that with your wilksilaks (paternal family).” (Oscar Mercer)

Oscar Mercer closed this section of his interview by reminding us that the Prince Rupert riot (1958) occurred around the same time as the Nishga Land Committee regrouped to seek social justice and to

deal with the Nishga Land Question. The Nishga Land Committee and the four Nisga'a Band Councils, being New Aiyansh (Gitlaxt'aamiks), Canyon City (Gitwinksihlkw), Greenville (Laxgalts'ap), and Kincolith (Gingolx), created the Nisga'a Tribal Council (NTC). The president, the secretary-treasurer, and the chairman were elected on an annual basis at the NTC Convention that rotated through Nisga'a communities. NTC leadership initially included the four elected chief councillors and an elected trustee from each of the four villages. Later, three additional Nisga'a societies formed and joined the NTC. First was the Prince Rupert Port Edward Local (vice-president and trustee), followed by the Vancouver Local (vice-president and trustee), then the Terrace Local (vice-president and trustee). Community reports and consultation with all communities consistently occurred on a monthly basis. The NTC would lead the court battles seeking rights and title to Nisga'a land and resources. The monthly reports were delivered in each community by elected officials, not their lawyers or consultants. Only the elected officials interacted with the Nisga'a communities.

Oscar Mercer continued his formal education, his doing so reflecting the changing times of which he was a part:

“After I left high school I didn't know what to do with myself after that so, I took a year out. Amsley was the Superintendent of Indian Affairs. There was no Indian Affairs office in Terrace. We had to use Prince Rupert's (DIA office). There was no road between Rupert and the Nass. Amsley was the principal at Lord Byng when I was at Residential School. After I left high school, he asked me, 'What are you going to do with yourself?' I took a general program without language – just general high school. He said, 'If you want to go on to university you have to take a language course.' He suggested I get a job and take French by correspondence when I was home. I stayed with my grandmother across the old village I had not lost the (Nisga'a) language.” (Oscar Mercer)

4.6 Maintaining connections and relationships

Maintaining connections and relationships is no easy matter. Willard Martin shares how he managed to remain connected to Nisga'a culture and language. He does so in part to rise above Indian Residential School atrocity:

“I look back when I went away to high school. Before that, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother, Elizabeth Watts. She always insisted that I sit down and listen to her. That was true with all of us cousins and brothers: Robert, Eddie, Alfred, and Eric – all of us. She would sit us down and tell us about our family, what we should be looking for in life, *ganwilxo'oskw* (to be knowledgeable).

“Because of feeling so much like I've been terribly violated in Residential School, I did everything to remember our language. I used to translate the news I listened to on the radio into Nisga'a. As I listened, I would try to think in Nisga'a. I did the same thing when I was reading. I could not find all of the Nisga'a words for some of what I was reading. That is pretty well what I did all the time when I was away from the Nisga'a community. When my kids were born, I used to talk to them in Nisga'a. I told them what I was told when I was young like them. That is how I kept my knowledge of our culture and our language.” (Willard Martin)

Willard has in consequence written family history and shared memories:

“Later on I started to write. I've got a lot of stuff written down, a lot of it is in Nisga'a. I shared it with my kids and now quite often, I share it with (grandnephews) Andrew and Shelly (Sheldon), (niece) Norene, and all in the family who are interested. I make a point of writing down in Nisga'a, a lot of important points and short stories that are related to our family.” (Willard Martin)

Willard also talked about how the importance of maintaining a spiritual foundation assists his Nisga'a leadership undertakings:

“This is where spirituality becomes important. I think one of the most important attributes of a Nisga'a leader is we all recognize a great need to be dancing in two worlds to be a good leader. I like the late Nelson Leeson's analogy of dancing in both worlds because of the similarity of Nisga'a spirituality and Christianity. Many of our leaders, past and present, demonstrate that they can proceed with a strong sense of spirituality. A lot of onlookers can't say that it's Christianity because I remember my grandmother always saying, 'Without the church, you're really no one whatever your aspirations in life will be for naught if you do not lead.' I remember her saying that when I was little. 'Each and every Nisga'a leader today demonstrates or displays that kind of foundation for undertaking leadership.' ” (Willard Martin)

Harry Nyce usefully reminds us of the difference between taking action and knowing respectfully when to step back. In doing so, he makes a statement on the importance of knowing relationships:

“So by verifying who you are and where you are, what you represent is important and given your knowledge of what has transpired. If there is any activity that deviates from activity that you know, the action would be no action, kindly say, 'Sorry I don't know, this is what I know and what I've been taught and if this deviates from that, then I cannot be involved.' Excuse yourself and be on your way. This came out of the qualities of leadership, so the qualities of leadership is the ability to verify who you are, to know your family history and all of its contacts as much as you can, people married into and people married out to.”

(Harry Nyce Sr.)

4.7 Keeping traditional knowledge

Shirley Morven and Lorene Plante reflect on retaining traditional Nisga'a knowledge. They do so separately on ways that complement each other. Shirley explains:

“I choose to use the term, hagwil huwilin, to mean ‘think carefully before you say something’ because many of our terms have the word ‘goot’ (heart). They also use the term, dim deexgoot n’iin, to (make sure your heart is balanced), and to use courage, and the use of deexgoot (careful thinking is intelligently using your feelings and your thinking). I just use those terms because it comes in the words themselves when you are being groomed. Remember I said in the very beginning how everyone treated you really well, but they were firm with you too. That is what we don’t have any more or very little of it. There is evidence in certain families, but it is not universal in our Nation any more.” (Shirley Morven)

Lorene Plante keeps traditional knowledge in a distinctly organized fashion. She listened to early advice to attend feasts to gain wisdom and knowledge about Nisga'a culture:

“Throughout the years I did a lot of listening and kept a lot of records. When I’m not sure about something slipping my mind, I go back to my documents. I have my grandmother’s books where she wrote stories. I read it and things come back to me when I’m doing it so I keep my knowledge fresh. I do not want to forget anything. When anybody brings a subject up that I am well aware of, things just start flowing. It flows because of what I remember and what I was told about it. The stories I recall and was told about how they do things way back when. I do an awful lot of listening. I like to attend all functions of feasts whether it be a stone-moving, settlement feast, or public gatherings. I collect knowledge.” (Lorene Plante)

Harry Nyce describes the occasional struggle traditional Nisga'a leadership has when for some reason, the next in line cannot fulfill their birthright role:

“Before contact, my sense of, the adage of ‘you are a born leader’ is truly when an individual is born into a role. Many times leadership works out naturally as intended. However, an individual for various reasons does not pick up on his or her role and doesn’t accept their leadership challenge. I think the attributes basically have been difficult at times to maintain because of the different uncontrollable events such as illness or sudden tragic events. During those times that’s when the leadership steps in.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Harry makes reference to how Nisga'a traditional leaders are born (by birthright) into and groomed into leadership roles they will eventually step into. However, in the rare event when a leader cannot step forward, leadership is drawn on to skip forward to the next leader in line to maintain Wilp (House) leadership.

4.8 Understanding the language

Elders spoke to the importance of the Nisga'a language in keeping the culture strong. Lorene Plante explains how:

“It is very important to understand our language. I was very fortunate to be able to hang on to my language despite what Residential School had done. I cannot speak confidently but I understand every word.” (Lorene Plante)

Willard Martin also stresses the importance of listening to and retaining the Nisga'a language:

“I think one of the most fortunate things that happened to me was that when anybody called me over to sit down. I usually do it and I listen. Then I started thinking for a while, especially when I started going in to high school, how can this help – to some people this is a primitive way of thinking. I start asking myself but then my kids, really showed a lot of interest in me because they started ask us about what is your Nisga’a? Like my oldest daughter says, ‘What does your language mean, like I hear you talking when you say something to us?’ I respond, ‘You know, well, I try to tell you what it means.’ ‘Does everybody speak it?’ ‘Yeah a lot of them.’ ‘Why?’ ” (Willard Martin)

4.9 Summarizing leadership attributes

Traditional Nisga’a leaders have many characteristics that assist them in leading their Wilps (Houses) and extended families. This was especially critical in the old days as families could have starved to death without leadership. The accepted Nisga’a leadership characteristics are as follows:

- Adept in Nisga’a language (algaxam Nisga’a), culture (wilaaloohl Nisga’a), and laws (Ayuukhl Nisga’a) to uphold their relationship to their sacred land (ango’oskw).
- Is well versed in the family origin stories and stories (adawaak) that demarcate his or her House’s land.
- Communicates well – listens, understands and speaks (or writes).
- Has the ability to see the big picture and make appropriate decisions. Is adept, with others, to move towards consensus decision-making.
- Coordinates resources (from the land) to be shared with family.
- Is patient.
- Is willing to assist others as is appropriate.
- Is an ambassador (promoter) and diplomat (tactful representative) for his or her House, family, community or Nation through action, poise, and dress.
- Is courteous.

- Is a good orator and can represent their House through stories and speeches. Can also offer up prayers on behalf of the family or of the House (or his or her people).
- Is knowledgeable about Nisga'a history.
- Has the ability to uphold the vision and cultural laws.
- Has integrity (moral and honest).
- Is compassionate.
- Is respectful to self, others, land, and animals.
- Is courageous and is a proponent of peace.
- Is every ready to extend hospitality and sharing.
- Is persistent and has the adept ability to stay focused.
- Is responsible to their family and House (Wilp).
- Is knowledgeable about pitfalls (what is haw'ahlkw).
- Learns how to be and practises being a good w'o'o (witness – not a guest) at feasts.

The above list is not intended to be an exhaustive list of Nisga'a leadership characteristics nor does the list dictate that a particular leader should have all of these characteristics. The list is intended to show the range of characteristics that taught to those born into leadership families to fulfill their eventual leadership duties well. As with anyone else in life, some leaders are strong in Nisga'a knowledge and some are less strong. Strength in this sense refers to how well steeped a Wilp (House) remains in truthfully upholding cultural laws.

Chapter 4 showed us how knowledge was retained even during time of duress, such as Indian Residential Schooling. We had an inside look at the importance and distinctive perspective on both maintaining and practising leadership qualities that are also required to groom leaders in preparation for the future. We learned about the important role of the family in becoming a leader and the attributes that are constantly reinforced and honed over time.

Chapter 5: Grooming Leadership

“You can’t dig your own grave.” (Moses McKay)

“... how I began to use my language.” (Oscar Mercer)

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, we look further into the concepts raised by the Elders in Chapter 4 by focussing on the grooming of traditional leadership.

The first discussion in grooming leadership is on the importance of family. Family connections provide a future leader’s first teachers, their parents, and then grandparents. As the child grows, the circle is expanded to the extended family group and to the community. The family teachings occurred at the dinner table, during times of harvest and food preparation, and whenever a child was seen to need direction. The Elders stressed that the role of a leader is to know the Nisga’a ayuuk (cultural laws) with respect to family, and most importantly, the ayuuk of k’aats.

Chapter 5 concludes with a look at the concept of preparing the next generation of leaders, as was done to each of the interviewees. Preparation took the form of adaawak’ (oral history), personal experience, and apprentice-like participation. The most important concept in grooming future leaders was to be gentle and constant in reinforcing the values and attributes that make a good leader.

5.2 The importance of family

In grooming leadership, family connections matter. Larry Derrick reflects on his early childhood and how living with his grandparents where only Nisga’a was spoken and very little commercialism entered his life:

“I was raised by my grandmother and grandfather, Steven and Jessie Woods. I was raised in Greenville. They took me from my mother at a very early age. As a result of living with my grandparents, everything that I remember was all in Nisga’a. All of my toys were made of wood – carvings made by hand. I just came back from picking cedar roots and I remember my grandmother she used to bring me out there to show me how to pick cedar bark. I was taught to do everything by hand, to live off and respect the land. The first thing that I remember my grandfather Stanley Wilson told me we have to respect land and nature. One of the first things they told me let’s take ha (air). The air don’t need you, you need the air.’ ”

(Larry Derrick)

Joe Gosnell describes some of the early preparations he learned from his mother, Mary Gosnell (née Moore), also Joe’s Wilp (House) Matriarch. Joe’s father, the late Eli Gosnell, was the senior Chief of his Wolf Wilp (House). This meant both were well trained and experienced leaders in grooming future leaders. Joe and his siblings would have received the similar instruction from both of their parents:

“One of the things I heard my parents say, ‘Gilo mi ji t’ipga’ahl gat, Gilo mi ji t’ipga’ahl gat, they said, Don’t look down on people, don’t look down on people. Nidii n’ihl wilaa k’yoolhl Sim’oogit tgus-di (a Chief does not act in this manner). Gilo mi ji t’ipga’ahl gat. Don’t look down on people.’

‘Gilo mi ji t’ipdidalk gat, Don’t talk down to people. Don’t ever do that. Gilo mi ji t’ipdidalk gat.’

These things are repeated over and over and over again at the supper table where we were taught not too far from where I’m sitting today.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

Traditionally, on daily basis, family dinner is an opportune time for teaching and learning. Dinner was a sit-down event where the family sat at the dinner table and ate together. All were expected to be dressed appropriately. For example, if someone returned from chopping wood or fishing, they would change out of their ‘work’ clothes into clean clothing before dinner. Joe explains the protocol of dinnertime lectures. The practice of being groomed for dinner instills a sense of formality and pride in one’s self. Joe describes their dinner and the transmission of wisdom and guidance from his parents:

“We were not allowed to speak at the supper table. Both my parents said that day after day. Nidiit naa dim alalgaxat sim ksaxw n’uum’ gans noon diyahl nigwoodiy’ dim al’algaxat dim amukws n’isim’ (No one will speak – just myself and your mother. You will all listen). You are going to listen to what we have to say and you are going to eat wisdom along with your food, Dim galgipdinhl gan wilxo’oskwhl dim giin’ama’a as n’isim’. You’re going to eat the wisdom that we’re going to transfer to you along with the meal that you will be eating. They would do this day after day, year after year.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

Joe Gosnell illustrates the importance of being knowledgeable about haw’ahlkw in grooming future leaders. Haw’ahlkw is a difficult term to interpret into English. Some say ‘taboo’ but in Joe’s words, taboo does not effectively give an accurate interpretation. Perhaps the closest interpretation would be “your life would be less if you do not heed warnings. If you do something that is haw’ahlkw, you will evoke misfortune to the degree of your infraction (Allison Nyce, pers. comm.) and as further explained by Joe:

“We have many haw’ahlkw in our Nation. Haw’ahlkw dim wilin as gun (bad fortune can come upon you), don’t do that, or don’t do this to people. My parents knew that some day in my future life as I began to grow older, I would hold the most senior name in our House, the House of Hleek. They knew that and so they began that grooming process even when I was a

teenager. I didn't know it then but looking back on my life I saw what they were doing. They begin to groom you for the day that you will called to the most senior name in the House. Gwildim-goot'indiit n'iin, diya (to prepare you, they said). Both mother and father, aunties and uncles play a role in this preparation process that I believe still takes place today." (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

Oscar Mercer tells a similar story in reference to his stepfather Ruben Munroe:

"I remember what he taught me, I fished right alongside him."

Oscar also recalls and describes important early learning and teachings he received from his uncles and grandmother:

"One day one of my uncles laughed at me. He says, 'So are you going to be a politician one day?' I said, 'Yeah,' and he laughed at me. He said, good luck to you, you're a dumb Indian. That's what he called me. I thought he was kidding at the time but he was serious. He said, 'You're a dumb Indian.' I asked, 'Why do you call me a dumb Indian?' The late Benny Munroe, my stepfather's brother said, 'You can't speak your own language, so you're a dumb Indian.'

"I went home and I told my grandmother about this and she said, 'He's right, if you could spend half an hour of your day of your time, before you go and play sports or whatever you do in the evenings, you come and sit with me and I'll teach you, how to say certain things, speeches, we'll start with the speeches, how to say them.' She did this for about six months.

"When I made my maiden speech in Nisga'a my uncle was sitting about four rows back in the hall with the people. He just sat there with his mouth wide open. As soon as I was

through, he jumped up, come right up and shook my hand and hugged me. He says, ‘You’re no longer a dumb Indian.’ And that was my beginning of how I began to use my language” (Oscar Mercer).

Oscar Mercer comments on today’s leaders and on his hopes for the next generation:

“Some of our leaders have a little bit of arrogance in them. They do not know how to be k’e’em-goot (kind hearted or compassionate) or how to be kwhliixoosa’anskw (respectful) to people. There are certain times to say things to people, even a little harsh. Leaders should be humble and have certain way of carrying on their speeches so that people will listen to them.

I guess that’s what we have to do to teach today’s leaders probably through workshops. Our young people today can all get together in a meeting place, we can have small groups for those that are interested. It’s no use trying to lead a horse to water if it doesn’t want to drink. Those that are interested, they’re the ones that are going to be future leaders – those that are really sincere. We need to show them how they can present themselves in Nisga’a way – gitwilaak’ n’uum’ is to teach them the way we do things.”

(Oscar Mercer)

Returning to his own learning experience, Oscar describes some important aspects of leaders’ behaviour:

“Those uncles that showed me how to do things, how to disagree and not offend someone. It’s like an apprenticeship right from the start. At the same time your rapport has to be good as well. Like I mentioned about the ‘thou shall nots’ of the Ten Commandments, thou shalt not k’aats (marry within your own Clan) and stuff like that, and thou shall not live a shady life. People are watched closely about breaking the law. I know there’s some summary

offences committed like impaired driving. That's a summary offence. If you kill someone then that's not a summary.

“Within our Nisga'a laws right now there is a moral of conduct in the code (you need to abide by) if you're going to be a politician or if you're a member of the Nisga'a government. It's the same way with the Chiefs. There are some laws (the ayuuk) of how we should be. It's almost the same as the ten commandments – the thou shalt nots. The main thing is kwhl̥i̥x̥oosa'anskw (respect) and gaydim-goot, you don't look down on anyone.”
(Oscar Mercer)

Oscar reflects on his own learning experience and his hopes for the upcoming generation that he learned while participating in public functions like public works. Public works was like a volunteer community wide work bee for building or repairing part of the village infrastructure for the benefit of all. It was also used at one time for constructing homes. The work day would begin as early as 6:30 a.m. with a breakfast to feed the volunteers before they set out to begin their work. There were planned coffee breaks at 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 pm. Lunch was also provided as was supper. It was usually through the supper meal when speeches were made. (The volunteer ladies usually prepared all the meals and the men did the physical labour.) Oscar shares his experience:

“I've had a lot of access to public functions, like public works. This is a public function where people make speeches or other Elders make speeches and you watch that. The recognition sinks right into your memory. I remember when I was small and I used to get bored with my grandmother telling me day after day. She used to utter, 'You're going to be lukw'il luubayt wil n'iin' (“recklessly, lacking proper seriousness and dignity” [Han'iimagoon'isgum Algaxhl Nisga'a, *Nisgha Phrase Dictionary*, 254]). 'You're not going to know what you're going to do when the time comes to you.' She said some things. Even though I was quite young, things come back to me. Even things when I was a young man. I

can still hear my brother-in-law Roy Azak and the late Percy Tait talk about things. They were older than I am, but they talk about some things like what they were doing as leaders. I remember that, and then I follow along with them. They lead by example. I remember what they used to do, I follow that, because to me it worked.” (Oscar Mercer)

In similar fashion, Moses McKay draws on his own learning experience to explain traditional pedagogy to his granddaughter:

“The reason why I tell you these things to all of you, is that I don’t tell you just to hear myself speak. I tell you for a reason so that you can have an easier life. You show your mother and dad respect because they are the ones looking after you right now.

“My granddaughter likes to help her Jiits’ (grandmother) make bread. She was there yesterday, when I was there. She surprised me. The kids were all playing around and she saw me sitting there. I was looking out the window and she came over and says, ‘Ye’e (Grandfather), I want to come to keep you company for a while. You are all alone here so I want to keep you company for a while ... she’s seven.’ ” (Moses McKay)

Looking ahead, Moses expresses his gratitude to Nisga’a education institutions for their roles in ensuring that Nisga’a knowledge continues to support upcoming generation:

“We are fortunate nowadays that we have institutions such our high school that has a component where culture is taught. Our children are exposed to, to what was written down by the people that came before us who were knowledgeable in everything that the Nisga’a’s did. We are fortunate to have institutions like School District 92 and Wilp Wilxo’oskwhl Nisga’a. Wilp Wilxo’oskwhl Nisga’a has become the most important institution in the Valley where knowledge is kept alive. Teachings are being recorded by the people that work here and those

that worked here before. And now it's being passed on, and that's where we're most fortunate for an institution like this." (Moses McKay)

5.3 Understanding Nisga'a cultural laws

Many Nisga'a cultural laws (ayuuk) need passing down from one generation to the next. One of the more strict laws is where a person is prohibited from marrying within their own Clan (or tribe).

Marrying within your own Clan is frowned upon and referred to as k'aats (incest).

There are four main Clans among the Nisga'a – the Wolf, the Eagle, the Killerwhale, and the Raven. Most Clans have Subclans that distinguish different families. Subclan membership does not diverge from the main Clan. For example, an Eagle Clan has a Beaver Subclan. They are known as Eagle-Beaver Clan members. (There are also variations of the Beaver Subclan for other Eagle Houses.) A person born into a Eagle-Beaver Clan is also considered an Eagle Clan member. An Eagle Clan member cannot marry another Eagle Clan member no matter where they originate. This strict law is recognized by Indigenous folks who have a similar Clan system along British Columbia's coast from Alaska south to Alert Bay. To reiterate, an Eagle cannot marry another Eagle Clan member. If they do, there are consequences to pay.

The consequence of marrying your own Clan member was very harsh in earlier times. As noted previously, marrying your own Clan is called k'aats in Nisga'a. In ancient times, the two culprits would be banished from their families and community. They would be stripped of all clothing, food, utensils or water and put on a canoe with no oars and pushed out from shore. This is referred to as ukwst'isim giiks (pushed far away from shore). If they survive, they are no longer welcome in their families or communities.

Today, the consequence of k'aats marriage continues to be severe. The folks who choose to break this cultural law, lose their entitlement to family names and rank. The price they pay is also suffered by their subsequent children who will be born without entitlement to family names. Neither Eagle Clan member is allowed to attend any of their spouse's feasts. If they do, they could be asked to leave the event.

Many, if not all, Nisga'a Elders warn young folks about the consequences of such actions in k'aats. Young folks are reminded to think very hard about the choices they make. Elders will point to examples of folks who k'aats, who chose to marry their own Clan member and the price they (and their subsequent children) pay for that choice. K'aats law is a very strict law that is observed by families.

5.4 Mentoring the upcoming generation

Moses McKay takes great care to pass on Elders' teachings to his House (Wilp) members. "I was talking to my nephews and grandnephews from our House about our ayuuk (cultural law), especially with regards to marrying within one's tribe" (Moses McKay). Although leaders work to pass on the wisdom of the ancestors, Moses, like most Nisga'a leaders, worries about the subsequent generation's access to ancient Nisga'a wisdom:

"Nowadays with young people, I think that they're not really to blame for their lack of understanding of their knowledge of how they do things like food preparation. They weren't taught why things are done a certain way. A lot of them don't know the ayuuk (cultural laws). There's so much that they don't know. I'm not afraid to admit there's so much that I need to know." (Moses McKay)

Wilp (House) hierarchy usually work together as a team to address issues, protocols, and general overall teaching. When the family loses leadership, it is felt strongly, Moses McKay explains:

“I really miss my discussions with Jacob (Moses’ late brother and past House Chief) and my mom (Christine Lenni McKay, née Douglas). We would talk about certain things in our ayuuk (law) that we practise. Many young people have not been taught about food gathering or food preparation. Or perhaps they just didn’t listen to what their aunties or grandmothers used to tell them.

“I teach my little granddaughters, when Claudia (Moses’ wife) and I are outside and doing oolichans or washing salmon, the youngest ones really want to help with making digit (smoked oolichans). They are pretty good. We say to them, ‘Don’t you guys just sit there and wash them, make sure you do it the right way, otherwise it will go meex (sour or spoiled) if you don’t do it the right way.’ ” (Moses McKay)

Like Moses, Larry Derrick also speaks about how the old teachings are not as prevalent today. Larry takes responsibility for not teaching his children or grandchildren:

“I remember how I felt when I was brought out there to get hat’al’ (inner bark of the cedar tree used for weaving baskets and for stringing oolichans for sun-drying), and just yesterday I went out to get roots and I still had the same excitement. It’s the child in us. As leaders we have to refresh our way of life by getting out there and actually doing it.” (Larry Derrick)

Larry challenges his grandchildren’s wilderness survival knowledge:

“I asked my grandchildren one day about survival and I asked them, ‘Which one of us would survive, if one ended up on a little island?’

“They figured they would.

“And so I say, ‘Okay, let’s go. We’re not going to carry anything.’

“They ask me, ‘What are we going to live on?’

“ ‘I know what I’m going to live on but I don’t know what you will live on. You’re going to have to run to Safeway to get your survival stuff.’

“So I told them and I actually brought them in for a little walk. I told them here is a dandelion.

“ ‘You can survive on a dandelion. Here’s a growth from a spruce tree. You pull the end off and you can survive on them. You can survive on worms.’

“ ‘Are you crazy?’ they asked.

“ ‘You can survive on snails. You can survive on squirrels.’ I started to name all these different things.

“I said, ‘What are you going to survive on?’

“ ‘None of those!’

“It shows you where my grandchildren are today.

“Now I say I had a lot to do with it (the lack of his grandchildren’s traditional knowledge learning). I’m guilty ’cause I didn’t pick them up. But, what about their (his grandchildren’s) parents? I taught my children all these things. There’s my oldest son, my two daughters, and my younger son. They’re all trappers. I taught them how to trap. I taught them to survive. Why didn’t they teach (their children)? What kept them so busy? What’s happened to that generation, yet they were all taught too.” (Larry Derrick)

Larry Derrick refers to adaawaḱ (storytelling). Through telling us stories, Larry teaches us about the importance of always being patient, using respect when asking, and giving counsel or instructions to avoid misleading or hurting someone:

“(We went) seal hunting at one time, so we *sisatkw* (cleansed ourselves). We got ready. My dad and my grandfather slept in the thing (a makeshift cabin on a boat). You’re not allowed to sleep with your spouse before the hunt. The wives are not allowed to go out in public. That’s their excuse that as long as your husband’s out (hunting), the whole village knows that, and they respect that. So if somebody stays home, it’s not because they’re lazy – no – they have to abide by the protocol because their husband’s out there. He can die or get hurt if they do something wrong.

“So we were out there already. I was so excited I just couldn’t wait to use this .22 (rifle). It’s a single shot, and my grandfather said, ‘We are going to come across some seals, don’t miss; you shoot it.’ Then there was one (seal) on the log taking in the sun as we were drifting down. I didn’t want to tell my grandfather about the seal.

“I took the gun, I put the bullet in, and I aimed. I was so quiet, I remember I couldn’t even see the seal. I was just too excited and I was doing it behind my grandpa’s back. He was busy sleeping.

“He said, ‘If you see anything, wake me up.’ He was laying there against the motor.

“I said, ‘*Jih!* (in this context is an expression of surprise like ‘Great!’ [Harry Nyce, pers. comm.]) I see that seal. I fired, I looked up, and the seal’s still sleeping.’

“He (grandfather) reached over, put the bullet in there (the rifle), and he says, ‘This is the way it’s done. Look, watch.’

“The seal rolled over and he killed it. I sat there behind his back. I was too excited and though I can see the squirrels jumping from tree to tree, hey, and yet I couldn’t see the seal. I was so excited. I just couldn’t, just couldn’t hit it!

“So patience, they told us. ‘*Gilo ji k’asbaa sa huwilin*’ (do not be too quick to move or act). Now that’s lost. People are *k’asbaa sa wil* (act out of turn), people are *k’asbaa sa*, and just talk out of turn. We do everything out of turn now. We’re tied!” (Larry Derrick)

Larry shares his concern of practices employed by new leaders today:

“As a Chief, I feel our hands are tied to today’s generation. The new leaders now, they try to want too much. They’re taking it off the internet. They’re taking it from different culture other than our own. I see that and I feel really bad about it. I don’t know how to stop it.”

(Larry Derrick)

Larry Derrick reflects on a difficult situation:

“Gwilks dax̄yukws is the term to describe when someone you’re talking to is holding themselves way up too high. Everything, anything they see they, they, they claim that! They take everything they see or hear and claim it as if it comes from them. It didn’t. I can tell anybody where I got my knowledge from that I have. But these people that are out there, we call them luu n’aḵ no’ogam goot.”

Here, Larry Derrick teaches us another term ‘luu n’aḵ no’ogam goot,’ which literally means a ‘person with a hole in their heart.’ It also describes people who exaggerate and stretch the truth to lift themselves higher than other people:

“About luu n’aḵ no’ogam goot, this one Elder was getting tired of luu n’aḵ no’ogam goot. Luu naḵ no’ogam goot is ‘con artist,’ that’s what it is. They’re way up there. They lipwil sdo’oks n’idiit (they choose themselves). They hold themselves up there and where are the rest?” (Larry Derrick)

Emma Nyce advises leaders when they are in a situation to correct a person, young or old, who is speaking inappropriately and in error towards someone else, in public. When providing counsel to the

person, the point is to speak to them quietly so they do not get worse. Speak to them to correct their behaviour in a gentle way:

“If you see anybody’s not in the right, you don’t have to stand and mention it in public. (A Matriarch and/or a Chief) take that person aside where it’s quiet somewhere and gently talk to her or him. Of course Matriarchs and Chiefs, ‘Dim hagwil didalga dim xtk’aldipdalk, didalga n’iin, nidii aamhl wilin’ (Speak to them carefully, you talk to them about what they are sayin gi public, you tell them that ‘it is not good what you are doing’). You don’t use it as, you know, this is another thing I hear when people talk. They speak in public, you know, xtk’aldalkdiit wil hidiit, diya, xtk’aldatkw means you were mentioning what you see or hear about this person, you’re using him or her that’s not all right, and it’s not good. Instead you, that’s what you do, you take her or him aside, ‘Gom, I will talk to you outside’ and that’s when you say, ‘Hawit, that’s not good what you are doing or saying’ and this is what I hear them say. I used to hear my dad say it a lot.” (Emma Nyce)

Alice Azak is a Matriarch who reminds us of Chiefs’ (or Matriarchs’) obligation to teach the younger folks. This grooming would happen in the feast hall as is appropriate:

“A Chief should be sitting down and let the younger ones do the work because they’re teaching them. They’re supposed to be teaching them. That’s the way you start learning. They keep telling them to do things. You can’t take that (knowledge) to the grave.” (Alice Azak)

As Matriarch in her Wilp (House), Shirley Morven proposes an immersion experience to groom younger university students to replicate teachings from ancient Nisga’a society. Her suggestion echoes how years ago the grandparents lived in the same home with their children and grandchildren.

The Matriarch in this setting would be offering constant and gentle instruction – often to her successor and the successor’s successors. Many, many stories would be shared:

“Assign one of your students to live with an Elder for six months. They do a daily journal of what they’re observing and what they’re experiencing. Just simply stay there and sort through what they see in traditional learning and other learning. How do they see if it’s helping to make the person a valued, wiser person, even just looking for one thing.” (Shirley Morven)

“The role of the Matriarch is to know both her own role and the role of the Chief.” (Shirley Morven)

Harry Nyce reinforces Shirley’s wisdom above while he emphasizes how traditional leadership grooming of future leaders starts at a very early age. He highlights the importance of the Matriarchs’ role in grooming a future sim’oogit (Chief) or sigidimnaḵ (Matriarch):

“Nisga’a cultural leadership, for me, comes from listening to family members, listening to Elders of the communities. I think that the reinforcement especially by the Matriarch has a very important part of maintaining how to be a leader. Also there are practices within the community, rather the family, of a grandmother or great-grandmother reinforcing what they would become as he or she is growing. They’d say, ‘Oh hello, Sim’oogit’ (Chief), ‘Oh hello, Sigidimnaḵ’ (Matriarch)! Then they’d go to explain to the child, while the child may not be able to understand. ‘Some day you are going to be a strong member of this community, of this tribe!’ Throughout their lives these youngsters will continue to hear that. I think that cultural practice would take place during visitations at the home, during harvesting, and while doing various activities such as processing fish or fur- or hide-bearing animals, like wolf or moose. These (early teachings) would come during the various harvest times. During the

fishing seasons of early spring, summer, or fall. During the fall with the moose or mountain goat and with the winter trapping. During those harvest times. The harvest is being produced with clothing or food use, and the reinforcing was ‘someday you will be a leader.’ I think that’s the cultural part that helps an individual develop and helps them to maintain how their own life is to be lived.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Grooming for leadership is concerning to the Elders, as well it should be. Their observations and suggestions emerge both out of life experience and out of their sense of responsibility to the next generation.

Chapter 6: Honouring the Land: Leadership and Food

“You’re going to eat the wisdom.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 6, I will explore the Elders responses to two more research questions:

5. How does cultural food gathering and preparation help to sustain leadership?
6. Do you know any stories or personal situations relating to the environment, resources, or communities’ survival in which the knowledge of leaders is exemplified or reflected? If so, would you be willing to share these?

Each Elder had stories that emphasized knowledge of the *ango’oskw* (Wilp [House] owned territories) and stewardship to conserve and protect the environment. Elders’ stories focus on the preparation, patience, and persistence of harvesting and preserving traditional foods that were both learned during their personal grooming, and then later shared by them to younger generations, as a part of Nisga’a leadership. In this chapter, the Elders expand on the ‘apprentice-like’ participation of being on Nisga’a lands with several examples of Nisga’a resource gathering and preserving (e.g., oolichan, berries, salmon, etc.).

At the end of Chapter 6, two Elders voice concern about the misuse or consequences of not following cultural teachings for land use and harvesting practices, both from within the Nisga’a community and from outside forces on Nisga’a lands (human, mining, and logging). Both conclude that it is the responsibility of Nisga’a leadership to step up and protect the land and resources.

6.2 Taught as children

Chapter 6 turns attention to the critical human resource of food. My fifth question to the Elders I interviewed was: “How does cultural food gathering and preparation help to sustain leadership?”

Question 6 was related: “Do you know any stories or personal situations relating to the environment, resources or communities’ survival in which the knowledge of leaders is exemplified or reflected? If so, would you be willing to share these?”

Sigidimnak’ Hlguwilksihlgum Maaksgum Hlbin, Matriarch Emma Nyce opens Chapter 6 by teaching us about angu’oskw (traditional family territories) and food gathering. This particular part of her angu’oskw was known for its big cedar trees and gathering berries. Folks would live on their angu’oskw long enough to complete processing what they gather. The old Chiefs named their places. It is important to note that these place names are also reflected in the names that high-ranking folks assume. Emma provides most of her own interpretations as she speaks about one of her House’s traditional territories:

“The Simgigat (Chiefs) up at our angu’oskw (traditional hereditary family territory) at Nass Camp, call it Sgasgan’ist (on top of the mountain referring to a specific mountain that belongs to her family). There’s a lot of berry-picking areas there. That is where you get your maay’ (berries), and gather your food. They dry it (the berries) because there’s no deep freeze, no jars, no salt; they dry it. They use skunk cabbage (*hiinak*, *Lysichiton americanus*) that grows big. They gather that and clean them. Granny said you just wave it over the flame of the burning cottonwood (*dim si’ mihlins lakw*) *dim wil anwilaagwit tgun* (that is the way she taught us). And leave it there. Pile it up and let it cool. When it’s cool, that’s when you layer the berries between the *hiinak* in a wooden box. It’s got to be a red cedar box. There’s no bugs come in there, *nidii* (nor) flies. It keeps (preserves) it (the berries). This (traditional family territory) is really important to the Simgigat (Chiefs). That’s why we often hear, ‘Oh

where is your angó'oskw, I'm talking about where is your hunting ground where you get your food from?' ” (Emma Nyce)

Sim'oogit Niis Yuus, Willard Martin, reinforces Emma's wisdom by describing how Nisga'a became stewards of their lands and how he, as Chief of his Wilp (House), has the responsibility to conserve and protect his family's angó'oskw (ancient traditional family territory). This responsibility is paramount. Angó'oskw are sacred to families, as these lands have sustained them since time immemorial. They nurtured the land and the land nurtured them. They work hard to protect the lands:

“I guess the first thought that comes to mind is that our Elders adamantly teach us that we have to, we need to respect our surroundings. Therefore we become stewards of our land and everything in it. We almost unconsciously become environmentalists and protect the ecosystem – the entire ecosystem. We were taught as children that everything that lives around here whether it's trees, leaves, water, or air – it keeps you alive. I recall when I was given this (chieftain) name, I was terrified.” (Willard Martin)

In response to the question “How does cultural food gathering and preparation help to sustain leadership?” Willard clearly recalls his mother Clara's teachings:

“I think of my mom on a daily basis. She used to remind us that when you get up remember what you have to do, what you need to prepare, because it isn't going to walk through your door – you have to get it, prepare it, store it. I think that teaches you discipline. Discipline to create a regime for life that is going to respond to your every need. To me that is what she meant. These are your chores, this is the routine, you do it and you never have to be bothered concerned about it by putting your priorities in place.” (Willard Martin)

6.3 Patience and persistence

Patience and persistence go hand in hand. Larry Derrick's early learning from processing food and using the resources prompts him to adaawaḱ (to tell stories) to teach leadership tools like the importance of patience, exercise and listening.

“Ha’ (air) sbayt ha’ (often interpreted as ‘amongst’ – in this sense he is suggesting we focus so can be interpreted as ‘about’ the air), air does not need you, you need it, the trees, the plants all that stuff that we brew, don’t need you to go to, you need it to survive to sustain your lives! ‘The water, does not need you,’ my grandfather Stanley Wilson told me, ‘You need it; you need that water, and everything that is in the water. The fish don’t need you, you need the fish.’ So right off the bat, kwhliixoosa’anskw (respect) was taught (to have or show respect to someone). I have to respect. Then another thing that was taught to me foremost was, hlo’omskw (honour). Honour the people that are around you. From there follows one of our strongest beliefs (he also told me) was what we call biskw, biskw (expectation) was one of our Nisga’a’s highest belief, you know with God.” (Larry Derrick)

Larry explained further:

“Biskw is one of our highest beliefs and biskw is expectation. When biskw was first introduced to me, it was through a tribal gathering of Ganadas (Raven Clan). I was told I was Ganada (in the Raven Clan).” (Larry Derrick)

“Biskw can be interpreted as ‘expect’ or in feasts it is often heard in speeches like ‘nidii biskwgiw’ ” (I was not expecting [Harry Nyce, pers. comm.]).

Many years ago (1990–1991), we were preparing to host a stone moving feast to move my father in law's, Maurice Nyce's, father, Peter Nyce's stone. Our late Ye'e (grandfather), Peter Nyce, was from my matrilineal family. Peter named my son, Harry Jr., as inheritor of Peter's traditional name Sim'oogit K'am ayaam. Harry Jr. assumed this name when Peter passed in 1982. While we were preparing for the 1991 stone moving feast where the Sim'oogit K'am ayaam name would be strengthened (which means it would be blessed again), Maurice advised me, "if you are going to do something, we do not expect (nim dii biskw n'uum') people to come and help – we do it ourselves. If people come to help, that is great, but do not expect them to." (Maurice Nyce, pers. comm.)

In keeping with biskw (expectation), Larry Derrick interprets ax'an biskw as unexpected and goes on to tell a story of how food processing taught him patience. He shares a story of how his grandmother taught him patience through processing ax (spiny wood fern, *Dryopteris expansa*):

"Ax (spiny wood fern, *Dryopteris expansa*), I don't know what they call it in English. It is a big root of big fern. They call it fern with big roots. When my grandmother first introduced me to it, I called it Indian banana because you peel it back just like banana. 'Patience,' she said. 'You see this, it's really hard, you can't even put your nails in it. Okay, we eat that.' I said, 'Really?' "

"There was a whole bunch of us – my sisters were there. We were wondering how we can eat that and we couldn't even peel it off. She showed us how to pick them. We picked a whole bunch and then she had a big boiling pot (of spiny wood fern) at the house. It teaches you patience. 'This plant you are going to eat it teaches you to be patient.' It (ax) smells good when you smell it. You see all the ingredients already, the grease, you see all the sugar there, you see all the stuff that are going to go with it so you're anxious to get at it like right now. But, it takes time to boil it. I forgot how many hours you really boil it. I gave up waiting after a while and I simply gave up! I ran out of patience. I want to eat it right now. When it was

twelve to fourteen hours after it boiled. Then it had to cool off and those things don't cool off right now. I was ready for bed by the time I was to have a nibble. We were anxious to get at it. It taught us to be patient. It was a real long wait, but you know after I ate it, I enjoyed the taste all night. First thing in the morning I could still taste it, so it paid off.” (Larry Derrick)

Larry goes on to talk about ‘hunting on the land’ and the necessary preparation before hunting. He also tells us about storytelling food and its importance:

“We were taught how to be prepared. You have to exercise. One of the exercises we did was rowing. That’s what adaawaḵ (storytelling) is when we are using the resources. Everything is adaawaḵ (telling stories) and there are so many different stages with adaawaḵ (storytelling). It isn’t just one. There’s a term that you’ll always hear especially in memorial feasts where different kinds of foods that would be served whether it be seal, bear or whatever. You were told to come back and they would feast the whole day. My grandparents were in there and one of the things my grandparents always told me, ‘Don’t miss that feast tonight. Be there and listen, because in every feast – every animal that came in there (and was served) was ‘adaawaḵed’ (anglicized term meaning storied) – about the food that was sitting on the table!’ We go to Safeway now. We come home. We can’t adaawaḵ (tell the story) about that chicken or, what do you call that beef – hamburger so mixed with what you call that cholesterol – yes.” (Larry Derrick)

There are many feasts in Nisga’a culture and blessing ceremonies as well. Feasts listed in McNeary (1994) include: lift one’s self up feast, cleansing feast, coming out feast for girls, wedding feast, public work feast, feast to launch a large canoe (or boat or car), housewarming feast, tribal feast (planning feast for Clan), settlement feast (to settle estate immediately after a funeral), and stone moving feast. Larry explains how Nisga’a feasts serve multiple purposes:

“The feast was to share the food whether they were building somebody’s house. When they built Arthur and Wilma Moore’s house that was through feasting like public works. Public works was also used when they were building a church or working on a post or it’s public works. If somebody trips and falls, and they gwilkws haldim guukws (host a pick-up feast), or gwilksyo’oks (host a cleansing feast), you name it, they were there. It was practised, it was explained. We eat with the adaawak (stories). We eat with culture. We walk the life. We take the life in. It was who you were as you were.” (Larry Derrick)

6.4 Cultural food gathering and leadership

The responses to the two questions respecting the relationship between cultural food gathering and leadership were both similar and diverse, as answered by Alice Azak. Like Emma, who opened the chapter teaching us about the importance of food gathering in traditional territories, Alice, also Matriarch of her Gwiix Maaw’ Wilp (House), teaches about food gathering and processing and how she was taught pit cooking:

“Well, you start from, right when the oolichan season (March) is starting to be like this – there’s still snow on some parts. My mom used to call it ax (spiny wood fern, *Dryopteris expansa*) these are from the earth, and it’s the ferns. You dig them (the roots) out of the ground. They are like bananas, the roots. The first thing, we roast the ax in the ground (pit cooking). The k’amksiiwaa (this word was adopted from the Haida word meaning ‘the colour of driftwood’) used to think that the skunk cabbage is poisonous. That was the main thing we used for storing food and cooking food! You take the centrepiece off and then you throw that away. Then you wave this (the skunk cabbage leaves) over the open fire. It’s just like paper, it’s just like a shroud.” (Alice Azak)

Ax (spiny wood fern or spreading wood fern, *Dryopteris expansa*) is the same plant that smells like bananas when cooked and peeled, that Larry Derrick referred to earlier.

Alice Azak goes on to describe pit cooking the ax (spiny wood fern) using rocks heated by a wood fire in the pit. The excess burning wood would be removed before the food is put in, then a small amount of water was poured into the pit to create steam. The food is covered and the pit is closed to allow the food to cook:

“You dig it (the pit) about a foot wide and two feet long and foot deep. You build a fire to heat the rocks that you throw into the pit. Next is the skunk cabbage. You get all these fern roots and you wash them real good – you take all the dirt out and cut the roots from the plant. You use this (skunk cabbage) in the ground (which may also be bound to enclose the roots together). After the rocks are very hot you put them (the skunk cabbage) in your dugout (pit). If you need two layers, you make two layers (over the hot rocks) but if it’s just enough for one layer that’s it. Then you put the skunk cabbage and fern root bundles over it and make sure it’s covered really good with more skunk cabbage. (After pouring water in the side of the pit to create a very hot steam), then throw some sand over it (the well-covered food) until it’s even with the ground. You have it cook for about four hours.

“It steams. The steam would come out from underneath from the fired (hot rocks below) that shows you it is cooking. As soon as you smell it, it smells really good, almost like bananas. You take them out, if they’re not done you put it back and do the same thing. If it’s cooked the peelings come off easy. That means that it is cooked. You peel them. That’s the first thing my mom used to teach us besides plucking gewin (seagulls).” (Alice Azak)

Gewin (seagulls) are harvested only after they have fed on oolichans in late March or early April.

Around this same time of the year, in April, Nisga’a will have been gathering and eating t’ipyees that

grows on the lava (also known as stonecrop, *Sedum divergens*). Alice told me that t'ipyees can be preserved, even for a short time:

“There is t'ipyees (stonecrop, *Sedum*) that is edible. One April, I picked some and I just threw it in my fridge. When I got back home in September, they were still good. They were in that new Ziploc bag I used. In May you start getting ksuuw' (inner bark of the hemlock tree, *Tsuga heterophylla*). Ksuuw' and haadiks (also the inner bark of the hemlock tree) are almost the same.” (Alice Azak)

Others have had very different life experiences. Residential School survivor Lorene Plante, acquired her traditional food processing knowledge initially from her mother and later from leadership of others:

“I remember as a young girl my mother making me do fish. We had to get the water. We had to make sure the oolichans were clean. To this day I still use that method. When we're doing oolichans, we have to wash it seven times. I still use that method which really works for me. It takes all the slime away. This is how to look after the fish.” (Lorene Plante)

Lorene describes being mentored by others and then she in turn mentors others and shares her knowledge:

“When I first moved home my sisters-in-law Betty and Millie (Wright) took me under their wings to teach me how to ts'al (filleting salmon) but I already knew how to fillet fish. They see it in me that because I was really good in filleting that it wouldn't take me long to learn how to ts'al (fillet) the fish. I did it that way and my poor fish – the first fish I did. I had it all tied together and so proud of it! Now I can do up to a hundred fish in one sitting because I

start right away after a few hours of salmon sitting (after caught) or overnight sitting (draining). I then get people to gut (dress) the salmon. If I have helpers, after dressing them we begin hanging them (in the smokehouse) for three or four hours. We then start to make ts'al (half-smoked salmon) and make k'ayukws (thin, flat-filletted, partially smoked salmon strips from the inner meat of the salmon).

“It was very important that when we hang the fish that we had to keep moving it to make sure that every part of the fish get some smoke on it. I used to wonder why – when my mom (Ruth Wright) used to make us go out to the smokehouse to move the fish a little bit – just little bit. She would show us how. In my mind I think, ‘Oh, I wonder why we have to do this?’ When I started to do my own fish I started to realize, remembering what I was taught and the meaning of doing fish. I realized how important it was to make sure that the fish doesn't go sour. You always have the smoke going.” (Lorene Plante)

Lorene took the lead to ensure her knowledge of food processing and preservation is passed on to others:

“Doing fish is a real relaxation for me. I enjoy doing the k'ayukws (lightly smoked and dried thin strips of the inner salmon flesh) and I enjoy teaching. Anybody who wants to learn how to do fish can come to my house and I'll teach them right from scratch – how to gut (dress) the fish, how to hang it, and how start working with the fish to get k'ayukws and to smoke it. A lot of my nieces and nephews have learned from me by doing that.

“My daughter comes all the way up from Vancouver to do her fish and that was very surprising to me. When they were kids they didn't like doing fish but I used to make them eat fish. Now they crave for fish, they crave for k'ayukws and for half-smoked salmon. But she comes up and almost lives in the smokehouse. I teach her that every two hours we've got to turn the fish. We've got to turn the k'ayukws so it's got to smoke on both sides. She plans for

herself that 'in such and such a time I'm going back into the smokehouse.' Sometimes I'll give her a break but most of the time she'll do it herself when it's her fish." (Lorene Plante)

Lorene took special pride in the leadership she exercised to ensure her daughters learned the traditional ways of which she had been deprived by virtue of being sent to Indian Residential School:

"I teach both my girls how to do fish. Sherry came back into the smokehouse last summer and Lana's been in the smokehouse now for about three years. Friends of Sherry's came to do fish up so she pitched in. She took her knife and started doing it. I was really happy to see that because she had learned before and she didn't want to deal with it. I told her, 'Nobody's going to do it for you, you're going to have to do it yourself.' Now she's doing fish." (Lorene Plante)

For Lorene, fish production gives a natural self-confidence that Indian Residential School could not take away:

"When we start doing fish, it's about two weeks of doing fish. I have to do about seventeen cases of (jarred) salmon and maybe two hundred smoked salmon. I'm doing some with the kids and they have to go away with at least twenty to twenty-five fish each. Like Sherry now, I've got her doing hers. I used to do it for my uncle Jimmy and I used to do it for Charlie. Charlie would come and gut (dress) the fish and look after the smokehouse, so I would do about twenty-five for him. And then I'd get orders from down Rupert, like I'd do some for my sister Carol. I love doing it." (Lorene Plante)

Lorene has taken so fine a leadership role in respect to traditional food processing that in the course of the interview, she described the process step by step. The conversation illustrates how leadership and traditional food processing go in tandem:

D. How long do you wait from catching the fish till you start to process it?

L. One night, to let the water drain. You gut (dress) them early the next morning.

L. You hang it and smoke it for about four to six hours.

L. We usually ts'al (fillet) it early in the morning and complete it by noon. We can start again by supper time to do the ts'aling for k'ayukws.

L. The k'ayukws are hung over the poles and then you turn them over.

D. And then how long does it take from there to put the k'ayukws on sticks?

L. When you feel they're dry. You monitor them. When you feel they are starting to dry enough to hold, the k'ayukws on the rod. If you do it too early while they are still wet, they'll break. You wait until the tips are starting to dry. It's usually about two or three days. If it is really nice out you can do it on one day. It depends on the weather, depends on how hot it is outside." (Lorene Plante)

At this point, Lorene explains the process of canning fresh salmon. In response to the question: "How long did it take for you to remember how to ts'al (fillet) fish?" Lorene said:

"It took about three days and then they let me go (unassisted). First of all, all I could do was just humpback – just ts'al humpback. Then I got promoted to do sockeye and I thought, 'Oh wow! I'm going to do sockeye!' And I'm going to get it (master it)! It is a lot of fun. When I'm doing fish, I just about live in the smokehouse. I'm outside. I'm close to it. We put tents up. We live outside, we eat outside, we do everything outside – even the phones go outside. Unless I have guests, I have to stop to feed them. When we are doing canned salmon, we can

gut (dress) the fish right away and put them in water. We start filling the jars up. Everybody starts helping with filling the jars up, making sure the salt goes in there after putting them in clean jars. Then turning the stove on its usually the second day, after you've done your ts'aling (anglicized term for filleting). I still do my traditional four hours of the boiling. I don't use cans; I use jars." (Lorene Plante)

Lisims (the Nass River) continues to offer up an abundance of fish from the oolichan in the early spring, followed in late May by the spring salmon (Chinook), later in early June the sockeye salmon, near the last week of July the Coho, pinks, and dog salmon runs. The prized, richer fish (Chinook) in the early spring and sockeye through the summer is what Lorene referred to above that she and her family preserved for their winter supply. It is a very busy season not only for processing the fish but all supplies to process the fish are needed too. Smokehouse cleansing, fire pit preparation. Fresh wood to optimize smoking the fish has to be hewn and cut to the appropriate size. Alder is usually used for oolichan and cottonwood is usually used for salmon. It is an exciting time of the year with the wild berry harvesting in late July and August.

In keeping with the knowledge holders' advice and in keeping with advice from ancient times of the past, each is reminded to conserve and not to over harvest food resources. Each is instructed to take what we need and use what we take. Food is so precious that it is almost spiritual. When fish come to feed people, they also come to spawn. When you go to the river, you can smell the spawning fish (for the next generation). It is referred to as ootsin (spirit) of the fish. Moses McKay so aptly reiterates the Nisga'a ancestors' words of caution:

"When people take too much from the land, not enough returns. We are warned and reminded by our forebears – the real conservationists to avoid the problem of over harvesting. Our

forebears were great conservationists and the leaders had to know when enough was enough, to take enough to sustain his House on his traditional hunting territory.” (Moses McKay)

Like many leaders before his time, Moses shares his concern regarding resources:

“That’s one of leadership attributes to be able to know that. It’s really important now too, because of the decline in our resources. Not only around here, but it’s all over the place. I think the whole world is affected. We’ve been fortunate that we still have what our ancestors had, as far as resources is concerned. We still have the berries, a lot of fish, oolichans, and birds. People that still trap although the number is greatly reduced, trapping can be done. And I think it came to me from past cultural leaders, past Nisga’a leaders who were able to recognize you can only take so much, and then – what you have can be depleted. There must have been instances where they say that if you take too much of something the returns are greatly diminished.

“I remember what Joe said, our people were natural conservationists, and scientists because of our ability to observe what harm can happen to our environment if you took too much or destroyed some places where we can get the resources. When you brought up the landscape we have nowadays – everything has been clear-cut – habitats for the different animals, different birds, different berries – things that were harvested by our people.” (Moses McKay)

Moses is encouraged by the traditional conservation that has continued to be practised by Nisga’a oolichan fishers:

“The leaders of the oolichan camps nowadays, have been very strong in using the traditional methods of harvesting with few little modern innovations, but the traditional way of doing things have been maintained by these people.” (Moses McKay)

The Nass River oolichan (*Thaleichthys pacificus*) fishery was commercialized 1910 to 1920, a situation that Nisga’a leadership of the time worked hard to stop. The Alaska commercial oolichan fishery was stopped about five years ago. The Fraser River had a commercial oolichan fishery that lasted for years which is blamed for the decline of that fishery (Harry Nyce Sr. pers. comm.). Moses is concerned with the Fraser River overfishing and effluent dumping that has all but eradicated their oolichans:

“Where there used to be big oolichan runs and the waterways, rivers and streams are polluted down in the Fraser River – there’s nothing there now. There’s no oolichan run there now. It’s up to all of us to make that effort to maintain the health of the Nass River – our Lisims provides everything that we have.” (Moses McKay)

One of Canada’s largest log drives took place on the Nass River in the early and mid-1970s. A huge amount of money was earned by independent operators and by the province of British Columbia. The logging companies, with the approval of the BC provincial government, blasted many sacred places in the Nass River, like the ancient stone funeral pyre that stood in the canyon near Gitwinksihlkw, and many petroglyphs. The BC government and these companies could not see that sacred sites existed and blatantly refused to listen to the Nisga’a concerns. The same company and government tactic was used with mining, such as the Anyox Copper Mine and the Kitsault Molybdenum Mine in Alice Arm, both of which were located in Nisga’a traditional territory, that also adversely affected Nass fish.

Moses is impressed that the Nass River fishery was able to somewhat recuperate from the early onslaught of its habitat:

“When the logs were going down the river there was so much pollution in the river because of soil erosion and everything coming off the trees. Holy smokes – it’s amazing that we have the good run today. Thanks to the work of Nisga’a Fisheries, it’s brought up again and its improved. I’m glad I can still get my fresh spring salmon in the spring.” (Moses McKay)

Nisga’a Tribal Council established Nisga’a Fisheries in 1990 with a mandate to conduct assessment of the Nass River and its watershed of all salmon species and fresh water fish (like trout). The purpose was to study and learn about fish habits, habitat and behaviour. This mandate continued with Nisga’a Lisims Government, in 2000, and with the passing of the Nisga’a Treaty that agreed to a guaranteed fishery and stringent environmental protection measures. Nisga’a Fisheries also monitors the catch of shellfish and bottom fish (halibut, cod, and red snapper on the edge of the territory) and all salmon species. To date, Nisga’a Fisheries has won five awards for the research they have conducted and the research is ongoing. It is interesting to note that Nisga’a Fisheries’ scientific studies reaffirm local wisdom of fish study.

Moses recalls a wonderful memory of fishing with his dad (Victor Vincent McKay) and the ancient cultural practice of sharing the first of the resource of the season. Many fishers and families continue this sharing practice today:

“I remember that Dad and I used to go fishing for first spring salmon. He would cook it up. He did the cooking of the fish. The excitement that it caused in those days! When somebody catches a spring salmon the first one was always shared. He took a part of it and gave the rest

away. I remember him cutting the pieces up and sending it over to his brothers and sisters so they could get a taste of it.” (Moses McKay)

Moses draws on his life experience to teach us, through example, about anlayt’ix (nature’s natural science of its signs) through innumerable physical markers and bird behaviour of upcoming harvest season. Observing anlayt’ix by studying a winter moon, physical and other of nature’s messages on a yearly basis. Observers would also keep a mental note of what transpired in the past which may suggest more conservation practices may be necessary or conversely a bounty may be expected or in this case, the return of a fishery:

“We used to have that house right on the Nass on Main Street (in Lax Galts’ap) – where Jake’s house is. Look across. Our anlayt’ix (a physical marker – on the mountain or sky or something) was the sunrise’s position as a prediction of when the oolichans are going start running. I remember my dad used to take us to sit there and watch it.

“He’d say, ‘You see where the sun came up?’

“ ‘Yeah,’ I responded.

“ ‘We’re going to be getting oolichans pretty quick.’

“He was usually right. Later on in the year, he’d look at our anlayt’ix. It has to do with different signs that we have that the people have observed through the years – like different activities that happened in nature. The old people used to look at, keep an eye, keep a mental record of when things like this happened, what can happen, what will happen after that, if it doesn’t happen at a certain time or it doesn’t happen at all then we see the consequences.” (Moses McKay)

Moses impresses on us that Nisga’a leaders need to be observant of these signs from nature (Nisga’a Science):

“I think that’s part of being a good leader. A strong leader is to know these different signs that is given to us and interpret it a certain way. For example, across from us, in Greenville, we have anlayt’ix up on the mountain. Every year we gauge when the river is going to come up (rise). As soon as that thing starts. There’s a waterfall that comes that is dry most of the year. For example, in wintertime it’s all frozen. When it starts running you know the river is going to come up. Or if the waterfall comes gushing out really bad, in great volume, that river is going to come up really quick. So you get prepared.” (Moses McKay)

Moses reminds Nisga’a leadership to be cognizant and observant and prepared for the signs that anlayt’ix (signs from nature), Nisga’a environmental science that continues to inform us:

“I’d remember Dad and them say, ‘Ye’e (grandfather), talked about when it starts running like crazy, boy, you better get prepared. That river’s going to come right up and if you’re not prepared, you’re in for a lot of trouble.’ That affects the fish run too. In the spring, the spring salmon run. It is part of the cycle. The old people witnessed signs of things that happen certain times of the year with intensity or lack of intensity – it depends that indicates whether it will be a good year fishing or mediocre or poor fishing. So I think they adjust and adapt to those changes.” (Moses McKay)

Moses speculates about the added value of oolichan oil:

“I think the oolichan oil in there helps to preserve the wood. I remember when they used to have a big tub – the big old Hope barrels just full with oolichan (digidim gangahldigit) cedar sticks for smoking the oolichan. Smoked oolichans are called digit. The oolichan sticks used to last forever. Those weren’t short ones. Mom and them used to make long ones about four feet – if they are any shorter, they are useless.” (Moses McKay)

Smoking oolichan continues to be practised every year in the Nass Valley. Moses' story continues to describe the sun-drying of oolichan, as illustrated in Figure 2 and Figure 3. Figure 4 illustrates the oolichan sticks Moses refers to in his interview.

Figure 2 Harry Nyce Sr., Harry Nyce Jr., and Wilson Nyce hanging oolichans on ganee'e
Figure 3 Ganee'e (rack for sun-drying oolichans)



Source for both images: Starnita Raven Nyce, 2016

Figure 4 Starnita Nyce, Lori Nyce, and Kaitlyn Nyce hanging oolichans on oolichan smoking sticks, with Harry Nyce Sr. in background



Source: Deanna Nyce, 2016

“The same (oolichan oil preserves the wood) with your sun-drying racks. The ganee’e (three-poled structure used to string oolichans around the three-pole structure for sun-drying oolichan) is faced a certain way so the sun gets all the way around. You see it in Fishery Bay, you see the way it’s done. That’s a prime example. People knew how to put them up. You didn’t just put it up any old way, you put it up so the sun gets on it all around.

“The sun has to hit all sides. You can’t just leave one side in the shade all the time. So they face it a certain way. The only way you can do it – is three sided. That is how it was, used to be years ago So they (the oolichan) can dry evenly. When the sun comes up – it hits it

(the east side) first and it travels it hits the other side and before it sets it hits the other side.”

(Moses McKay)

Moses talks at length about leadership and conserving the Nisga'a environment:

“In our environment you don't see big monuments out in the forest there up and down the Nass. You don't see monuments out in the forest and we've been here for hundreds of years because of the type of building materials they used goes back to the earth. Because they were moving around all the time, they didn't need to make use of things made out of rock that would last for thousands of years like the Ancient Ruins of Europe. It is really evident, First Nations people, like us, have lived here for thousands of years, they built houses, we had canoes for transportation, and lands. When we were finished with it, we let it all go back to nature like we've never been there and it's never been used. That was the way it was before.

“I remember when I was a kid I went over to the old village (Gitiks). I never saw old totem pole tied with knots, big boxes with anything on it, it's totem poles, old houses – you don't see that any more. They are all gone. They all went back where they came from. It is the same at Ank'idaa (place to rake oolichans). The only thing that remains at Ank'idaa right now is a stone monument about four feet high. That's all there is. There is no sign of houses – yet there was a big community there. That is where my grandfather came and brought us from.

“When my grandfather moved over to Greenville – there were a few holdouts at that time – hold outs from Christianity. When he moved over he just left everything. He left that life behind and started a new one across there to accept Christianity with a solid heart. But now you would never know there was a village there. It's like that all the way up and down the Nass. You would never know where the villages were up and down the Nass. You can only imagine how many thousands of years that's happened.” (Moses McKay)

Oscar Mercer describes his relationship to the land and to the traditional titleholders who steward those lands over many millennia. Leadership and stewardship over family lands requires respect of cultural observances. Oscar intimates how to teach respect of the land by knowing the land. Edicts would have been taught in regards to history and laws that were originally stored in peoples' memory. The gift of storing memory may be lost as we 'modernize' technologically and move increasingly from oral to written culture:

“They were always close to me. Every time my grandpa goes somewhere – if he goes hunting, he'd say, 'Come on, son.' I'd go with him. At the same time he's showing me different areas. He's tells you the names of different places. 'This is so-and-so's ango'oskw' (traditional territory). He tells you, 'We don't go there.' He's teaching you respect of the land. He's teaching you that someone else goes there. Although we don't have it on paper on a piece of property like we do today, in those days they still respect that so-and-so's property is here. 'This is Baxk'ap territory' – you could tell or know who rightfully hunts in a certain area. It is a no-no if that person asks you to come and hunt which is another thing that happened in those days. There are some of our Houses that don't have anything or it is scarce on their hunting grounds. The others say, 'Oh, come, take what you want over here but be careful, don't destroy the land or destroy the animals or nothing – just take what you need.' That is how they survive.” (Oscar Mercer)

6.5 Leadership in food production

Harry Nyce offers a good example of how leadership must be in place before food harvesting. Although Harry is involved in leadership on many different levels, he continues to be actively engaged in food gathering and preparation. Much emphasis is put on preparedness before the harvesting season begins. The oolichan season is incredibly short often during inclement weather that

needs to be factored in. Often they will gather all high energy foods and have a ‘cook’ whose sole responsibility is feeding the crew:

“In March we’re into the saak (oolichan) harvesting and preparing the saak for storage. The leader needs to be very much aware of the activity that surrounds the requirements for harvesting and preparing the saak for smoking, for sun-drying and for storage. The leader needs to know what to do, and of course, know the preparation – as with any for food (gathering and preserving). The net has to be in good order, the boat and the motor has to be in good order, the supplies that are required, the oars, the communication devices, there’s ropes and containers for harvesting the oolichan.

“For example, if the leader is the camp captain in Fishery Bay then he or she would need to have the camp building or camp cabin supplied for the crew. The individuals would assist in the food gathering. All supplies would be need to be acquired and the leader is responsible to ensure the preparation has to be done is complete. That’s the beginning of our gathering for the food of the year.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Harry illustrates that leaders must prepare well in advance of the anticipated harvesting work:

“If you’re going to pick berries, then berry-picking containers need to be intact. Supplies required for the journey to get to the place will have to be collected and stored and ready for the event. Before the salmon-fishing season, all equipment, right from the containers for the fish, the knives (sharpened) that are used for processing, the bins for storage, and all the smokehouse wood needed. All these things are important and these need to be done well in advance of the harvest times.

“Everything would have to be acquired. Also personally, a person personally needs to have the proper gear – rubber boots and snow pants nowadays but it was woollen pants in our

day, it was woollen underwear, woollen sweaters, vests, and toques for the warmth because you're on the water and the water's cold. So all these things have to be prepared and well kept for the times of operations for harvesting.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Moses McKay looks ahead to another dimension of leadership in food production. He fears the consequences of resource misuse and the consequences if some folks do not change their misuse behaviours:

“What scares me now is where we're headed, especially with the younger people. People who do not have the teachings that we (the older generation) all had in regards to conserving what we have by taking what you need and not taking it all and selling it. That's not the way things work. Taking and selling for personal gain is contrary to our ayuuk (law). And I think that if it doesn't stop, it is going to get worse and worse and worse, until, until we have nothing.”
(Moses McKay)

To emphasize the point, Moses McKay reflects across time as to the necessity to learn from the past and honour the present in order to survive into the future. Moses says there is a human cost to not listening to wisdom of the past:

“Without these ancient way of seeing and reading the signs nature offers, they wouldn't survive the year. Families die out and we have people that suffer because they don't know or they don't want to recognize this. But these are the things that will happen and that's what my dad used to tell us that there are people around here that are going to face great hardships because they will not listen. He always told me, 'You've got to learn to listen.' ” (Moses McKay)

It is not only the immediacy of food production that is cause for concern. Responding to Question 6 respecting “stories or personal situations relating to the environment, resources, or communities’ survival in which the knowledge of leaders is exemplified or reflected,” Harry Nyce explains:

“The recent environmental concern that I was involved with is the molybdenum mine in Kitsault back in the 1970s. The mining company bought mining rights in a valley adjacent to the community of Kitsault. The company was called AMAX, who were approved for operation by the federal and provincial governments of the day. Our group, the Nisga’a Tribal Council, were informed that the federal government, under the Fisheries Act, approved the tailings of the mining operation to be dumped into Alice Arm – the tidal waters of Alice Arm. Nisga’a leadership found that it was over the limit and ten thousand times more lethal – the tailings were lethal for sea resources. The sea resources (in that area) that the Nisga’a people relied on were cockles, crab and halibut, and salmon. The leadership, then the Nisga’a Tribal Council, gave the history of how Nisga’a survived from the use of those resources from that area. And that the AMAX company needed to redesign their tailings to land or even stop operations all together. So the combination of the traditional knowledge of the area and the uses of the resources of the area by Nisga’a helped to stop the mining. But at the same time, fortunately for all concerned, the market price for molybdenum was not at a price that the mine could sustain the operation so they stopped operations.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

The following recreates a dialogue with Harry regarding the AMAX mine controversy:

“A prominent member of the Anglican Church owned enough shares in the company to qualify Nisga’a leadership attendance at the annual meeting of the company in New York City to explain, to the other shareholders, of Nisga’a’s dependency on the resources – the sea

resources of the area that the tailings would contaminate. The Nisga'a's would have no more food resources from the area.

D. Was the Anglican Church a shareholder or (was it) a priest (who was a shareholder)?

H. I believe the shareholder was a member of the church. Ian Mackenzie (Anglican Church priest appointed by the Nisga'a Tribal Council) was the liaison between the church and the Nisga'a Tribal Council and the AMAX company along with this member. I believe that the AMAX shareholder (member) was the daughter of the owner; I could be corrected but I believe that's how it worked. The daughter sided with the Nisga'a's concern. It was the church that assisted in getting that mine to stop operation. The Nisga'a Tribal Council leadership was the then president, James Gosnell, vice-president Bill McKay (chief councillor of Greenville), Rod Robinson, vice-president (chief councillor of New Aiyansh). During this time, Rod assumed the executive director position (for the Nisga'a Tribal Council). The two main leaders were James Gosnell and Bill McKay. If I recall correctly, the legal counsel that accompanied the NTC to New York was Don Rosenbloom." (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Harry recalls this critical decade for Nisga'a leadership:

"The 1970s marked a critical decade in the history of Nisga'a territory resource extraction and Nisga'a leadership. The 1960s was the decade of vigorous clear-cut logging in the Nass Valley.

"The other more recent destructive commercial activity, resource activity that disrupted the Nisga'a food gathering was the Canadian Cellulose Company. They conducted forest harvesting under Tree Farm Licence Number 1. In the mid-1960s, it was taken over by Twin River Timber, who used the river to transport logs to the mouth of the river to save on trucking. The Nisga'a leadership took exception to that method and began to research the

damage to the fish, the fish habitat, to the river bottom regarding bark, tree bark, and log jams along the river itself. Logs were pushed off the cliffs from four hundred feet high above – pushed into the Nass River. Logs were also trucked down below Ts’oohl Ts’ap by Ksedin Camp, stockpiled on the sandbars as high as you can, as high as, as high, over fifty feet high the logs were stockpiled. There was a weigh scale on the lava beds near the Ts’eax River and their logs were piled on the lava beds ready for transporting to the river. A huge clear-cut (deforestation) in Ksiluux area was flattened. Logs were stored in that location ready for transport to the river. They were trucked to a place called the A-Frame on the edge of the lava beds and dumped into the river and floated down the river to Nass Harbour, where oceangoing log ships were being loaded. This went on for years. I’m not sure how many years until we, in my view, we became involved as a family because our dad Maurice Nyce was the chief councillor. He objected with other leaders at the time and won the case for a bridge to be built for the community of Gitwinksihlkw to the lava beds. (There was a ‘landing’ spot there where folks used to park their vehicles after driving in from Terrace.) The company installed a cable suspension bridge. The argument being that, due to the log drive, there was too many logs to transport people and supplies back and forth on the river (by boat, which was the only access into the village at that time). It was too dangerous. So that began the whole engagement of the Nation while many of our Nisga’a fellows were fully engaged in working for these companies, knowing quite well the damage that was being done. The government stepped in and the environment issues were explained about the damage and requests that the log drive be suspended. The company suspended the log drives in the 1970s, I believe; you’ve got to check on the dates. That’s how the suspension bridge in Gitwinksihlkw was built. It opened February 1969.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

The log drive Harry refers to ran from 1962 to 1976, some fourteen years. Logging and deforestation began much before that time – around 1958 at the mouth of the Nass via routing from Prince Rupert.

The road (now Highway 113) from Terrace to the Nass Valley opened in 1958. It was built by the logging companies of that era as part of their agreement with the provincial government. Residual effects of the deforestation and the log drive during the two decades Harry refers to still exist in the Nass Valley. The logging-truck weigh scales have been removed from the lava beds. There will be no return of the blasted-stone Nisga'a funeral pyre in the canyon near Gitwinksihlkw or of the petroglyphs. Two manmade 'temporary' islands, created to build a 'natural' booming channel, were supposed to be removed. These islands are still in that same location near Ts'oohl Ts'ap some forty years later. The chum or dog salmon that used to spawn in that area are all but eradicated. Maintenance of the swinging suspension foot bridge (constructed in 1968 and opened February 1969) was taken over by the Gitwinksihlkw village government well before the Nisga'a Treaty came into effect in 2000. A commercial "vehicular bridge opened on October 16, 1995" (Lori Nyce MA thesis, 114) is located upriver from the swinging suspension bridge. The latter is now a tourist destination for northwestern British Columbia.

Food gathering, preserving, and production have many dimensions ranging from the familial to regional, national, and international. The everyday is far more complex than daily life might appear to make it out to be.

Chapter 7: Respecting the Environment

“When the stars walked across the sky.” (Moses McKay)

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 7, the Elders expand on the knowledge presented in Chapter 6 by providing answers to the questions:

4. What resource observances help you to be a leader?
6. Do you know any stories or personal situations relating to the environment, resources or communities' survival in which the knowledge of leaders is exemplified or reflected? If so, would you be willing to share these?
7. What qualities of leadership have sustained Traditional Ecological Knowledge in the Nisga'a Nation, and how does tradition-based leadership enable people and our lands to remain strong even during times of change?

Respect for the environment is the theme of Chapter 7 and, like every other leadership attribute discussed this far, begins with knowledge of the environment.

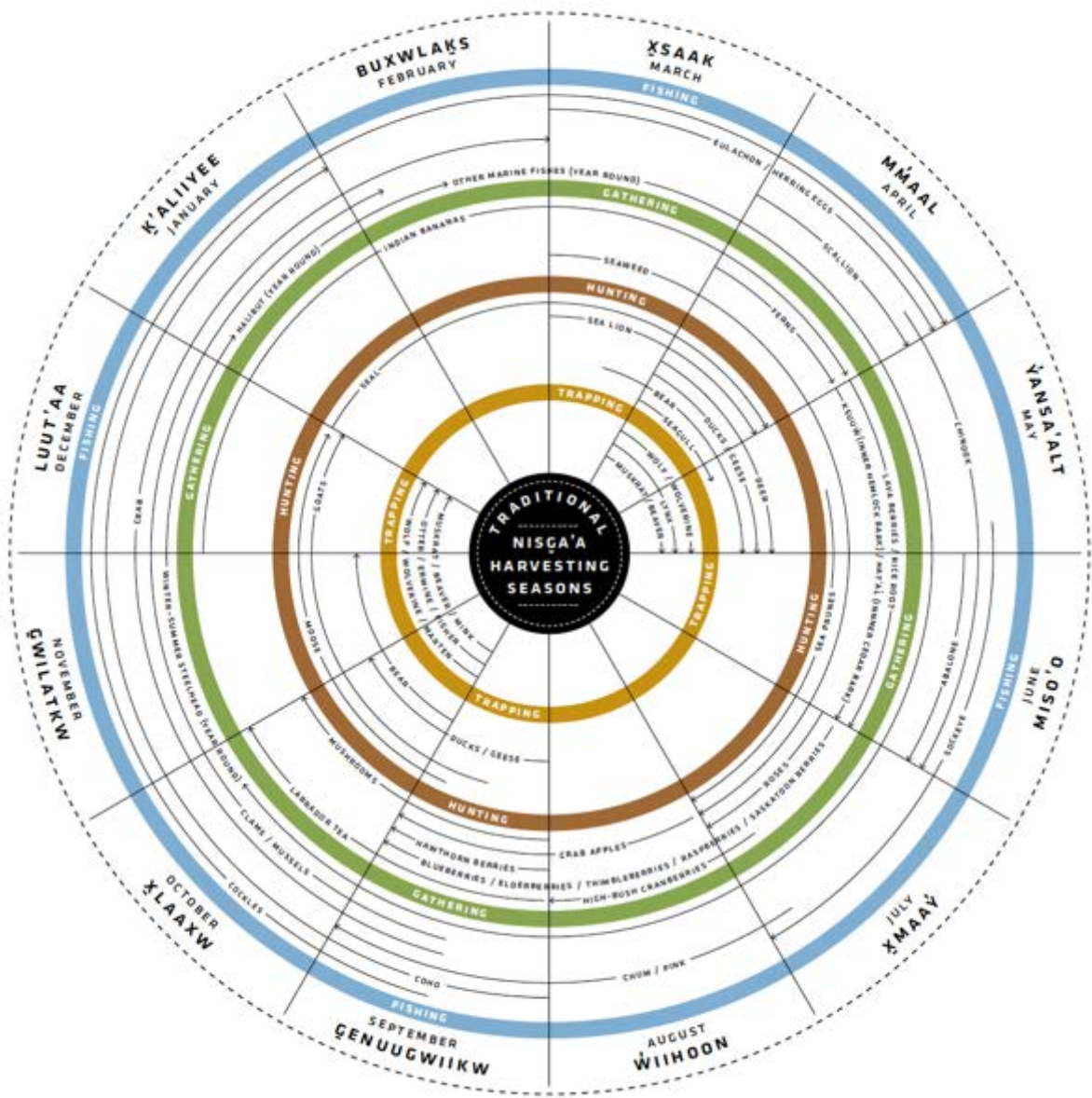
The knowledge needed by traditional Nisga'a leaders was of their own *ango'oskw* (Wilp-owned traditional territory) and the resources within those lands. Leaders also had to know about land that belonged to other Wilps (Houses) in the Nation so that they could respect those boundaries and possibly also help them to conserve their food sources as well. The examples provided by the Elders emphasize that this knowledge was not obtained by books, or any other physical form, but by

experience, they learned about the land and resources by being on the land and traditional food gathering as they were taught by those who went before them.

The intimate knowledge that was transferred to the Elders by their parents and grandparents resulted in an unwavering concern for the environment and resources that respected the ayuuuk (Nisga'a law) and the importance of the seasonal round. As in Chapter 6, this chapter provides detailed examples of resources harvesting and preparation (particularly of oolichan, salmon, seaweed, berries, and moose).

The following food-gathering wheel, designed over time by the Nisga'a Fisheries and Wildlife Department, depicts the seasonal gathering of Nisga'a traditional food sources. As shown in Figure 5, the food-gathering seasons can be short.

Figure 5 Traditional Nisga'a Harvesting Seasons



Source: Nisga'a Fisheries and Wildlife Department, Nisga'a Lisims Government

7.2 Knowing the land

Sim'oogit Hleek, Dr. Joseph Gosnell emphasizes that leaders must know the land. He speaks intimately, so much so we feel ourselves in his presence, about the important role of family in respecting the environment:

“My father took us out on the land, many, many, many times. He took us on the water, to the fishing grounds, took us all the way to the Fraser River to the Queen Charlotte Islands – places where we had never been before he took us there. He always used to say to us, ‘Gilo ji mi ksax mahlihl wilaa wilhl ts’eets’iks’, don’t just talk about the land, don’t just talk about the land. ‘Gilo ji mi ksax mahlihl wilaa wilhl ts’eets’iks’, don’t just talk about the land. He said, ‘Dim n’iiyeetgwin lax ts’eets’iks’, he said. ‘You must walk on the land.’ How many people do that today? To walk on the land, I hear so many people talk about their land and I have to ask myself did this person actually walk on the land?

“He took us to our hunting grounds down river, Hlgu Isgwit, showed us all over, over the land down there, the metes and bounds of the hunting grounds and where the cabins were set on the mountain where we would sleep. And we did the same thing on our hunting grounds north of Gitlaxt’aamiks – Sgasgin’ist (Sgasgin’ist is Sim’oogit Hleek’s ango’oskw). He showed us the different places and the place names of Sgasgan’ist and the names of the mountains, and the animals that we would hunt.

“We used to sleep outdoors in January when the temperature dips to minus twenty, minus twenty-five below zero Fahrenheit and I remember many times down river we used to go halfway up the mountains where the traplines laid. We had three different lines on the mountain down river from us. In January, you only have five hours of daylight. So by the time you finish one line, it’s getting dark and you’re trying to make it back to the base camp. The next morning we would climb up to the next level and the next day to the next level higher up on the mountain.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

Joe continues his story:

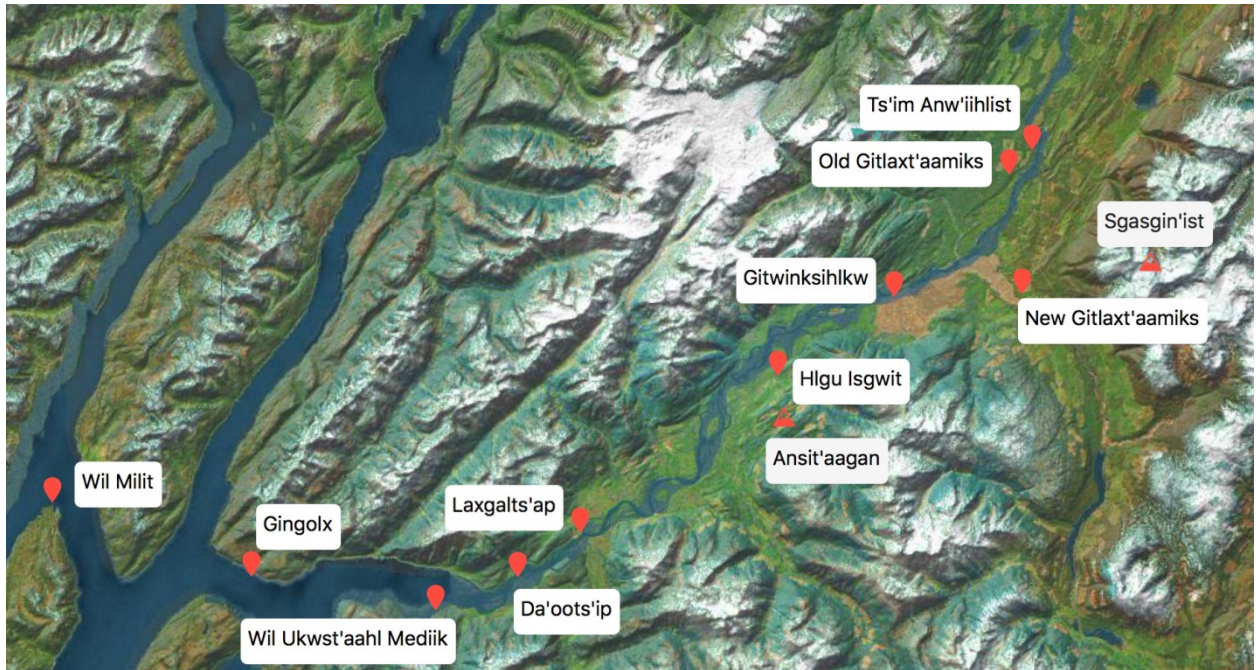
“At night when we would camp out on the mountain he would tell us stories – adaawak. Adaawak – what else could you do, you had no radios. And so he would tell us adaawak. He

would tell us the story of this woman who was placed in the trees – hanak', luut'aahl hanak' ahl ts'im gan, where she was placed. You could hear the trees – it sounds like a woman crying up on the mountain, hugaxay' wilaa wiyitkwhl hanak' – just like a woman crying when the wind is blowing and bending the trees. You would swear that there's a woman out there crying and yet it's not a woman, it's the trees that are doing it.

“People have to go out and walk on the land. As a leader, you have to know that there's about fifty place names from Ts'im Anw'iihlist (above Old Aiyansh) to the southern boundary they called Wil Ukwst'aahl Mediik (bear sitting on the shore), our most southern boundary of our territory (on Pearse Island). Many, many place names that people are not even aware of today.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

Leaders must be cognizant of the land with first hand knowledge by walking their territories. Through that understanding, they will also know all of what the land is renowned for, including what flora and fauna exists there. Figure 6 shows a map depicting locations that Joe refers to above.

Figure 6 Nisga'a geographical sites (mentioned in Chapter 7)



Source: Deanna Nyce

7.3 Environmental concerns

Concern over the environment has its basis in food resources and its preservation, the subject of Chapter 6. Leaders foresee depletion due to over harvesting and its impact on the environment and the people.

Perhaps it was not always that way. Willard Martin recalls being corrected, guided, and cautioned from the time he was small when his family was food gathering:

“Even with everyday things, don’t waste. Don’t take more than you need. I remember them telling us not to play with even seaweed because what goes around, comes around. You’re violating that part of the environment it’ll come back to you. Even when I was small, they used to holler at me, ‘Quit playing with that! Don’t destroy it!’ We used to pick up seaweed that looked like whips.” (Willard Martin)

Direction extended from the water to the land:

“It’s from the logging and I was involved in the logging. You think I’d go back out there logging again? I’ve seen so much damage in my logging career that I don’t know. I was reading the question here, how do you manage to keep the knowledge? I try to live the life. I hung on to it. I just got through picking ham’ook (cow parsnip, *Heracleum maximum*) two weeks ago. I keep up with that. It was all in the house for our eating. We managed to come by here and pick t’ipyees (stonecrop, *Sedum*). The only thing I always wanted to keep up with is ksuuw (a food made from inner bark of hemlock, *Tsuga*) but I haven’t had the time to go out there. I still got my grandmother’s tools, but I didn’t have the time to go out there.” (Larry Derrick)

“When we went berry picking, we used to just break them (the branches) off and eat them later. He said, ‘You know when you come back next time they won’t be there, so you got to quit being lazy and pick them, don’t just break them off.’ (Willard Martin)

Reflective of changing times, Moses McKay describes how the lack of environmental regulation and monitoring threatens the Nass River’s oolichan and salmon stocks:

“Right now we have the best, biggest oolichan run in North America – in the world! We’re the only ones that are making (oolichan) grease. There isn’t any sort of controls by the people themselves. There isn’t any controls set by us, as individuals. Those are going to be, that’s going to be gone too. The same with the salmon run. The same with our water rights

nowadays. I have to apply for a permit, and it comes by lottery to get a moose every year now.” (Moses McKay)

Moses’ concerns extend beyond the water to the land and to its onetime abundance of animals to be shared with others as is the customary rule:

“Now they’re talking about discontinuing moose hunting because some of our people are doing what they’re not supposed to be doing. That’s (over harvesting) against their ayuuk (law). I remember my dad used to tell us – we used to get a lot of stuff. We’d get a couple of moose. He didn’t keep it to himself. He gave it out to his family. He shared. You don’t see the sharing with people much anymore.” (Moses McKay)

Moses decries wasteful attitudes towards hunting:

“Some people are getting a lot of moose. Some guys knock down – I’ve heard of people taking down four or six moose at a time and selling it! This is contrary to what I was taught by my dad and my grandparents. And, they shoot everything – they shoot the cows. Those cows are the ones that perpetuate the species. So how can we change that? Like right now, they’re saying shut down the moose hunting all together. Maybe that’s the only resort we have now. Because, before you know it, that’s probably the only option to save the moose species. All the rest is already gone. I don’t know what the answer is to that – times have changed. I think the people that are doing that are taking too much. If they listened and learned our ayuuk (our law) things like this could not happen.” (Moses McKay)

Emma Nyce was taught to conserve by her father, Eli Gosnell:

“ ‘Gilo mi ji sim ksax saagoodin (don’t clean them all off).’ He took us to where they pick hla_k’askw (seaweed), and he said, ‘Pick enough from here and go, don’t take them all off.’ ”
(Emma Nyce)

The term Emma used – ‘saagoodin’ – is a good word to show how contextual a language Nisga’a can be so interpreting clearly is important. According to Harry Nyce, Saagootkw is also one of several edicts found in the Nisga’a language used as advice or when something goes wrong, they say they did not listen. The word changes it’s meaning depending on how you use it. Lip saagootkw – is making your own decision . Aamhl sagootgwin – you are doing good thinking. Nidii aamhl sagootgwin – you are not thinking well. It can be a positive action or a negative action you are saying to a person (Harry Nyce, pers. comm.).

Shirley Morven describes traditional ecological knowledge and, at some levels, its erosion:

“I think much of our ecological views on our knowledge is very narrow, because of the recent past where missionaries did so much to control and take apart many of our practices. When you talk about ecological knowledge certain families had. The ones down the coast had their own big rocks where to get seals and sea lions. They had their own rocks where they got their seaweed. They had their own rocks where they got whatever they needed.” (Shirley Morven)

Shirley aptly describes how territories and their leaders are renowned for particular resources highly prized by all Northwest Coast peoples and selective harvesting:

“There’s one place here called Ansit’aagan, which means that the owner of that territory must have had a humongous stand of majestic cedar. It was almost exclusively where the people got their cedar for building houses or bentwood boxes, or to either trade it. The ones who needed it had to establish rights of access through arranging marriages into these territories. When you imagine that for every single home in the Nass Valley, every single means of transportation, for example the canoes and its equipment, every single the storage boxes for interiors of the home – everything was cedar. I am assuming that one Sim’oogit (Chief) supplied the Nass Valley because they knew how to use selective harvesting. I don’t know that they ever ran out this particular resource. They knew the ecology of the land and they were able to do this.” (Shirley Morven)

Shirley explains that conservation of resources was persistently practised:

“It’s the same with the oolichan. There isn’t a single oolichan camp owner who doesn’t respect one of our natural laws which says, we take only the first two runs of oolichan, and

they share that with everybody. They let everybody know that even though we don't all harvest the oolichan, they make sure everybody else knows. This way no unrealistic demand is made on the camp owners to take lots and lots of whatever. There is that conservation consciousness inculcated into every Nisga'a. I believe that although some of them aren't Chiefs, they're grooming to be Chiefs and they practise. This conscientious way of taking care of the land – they and I know we can't do this or we can't do that because we're stewards of our land. You don't need a steward if you use the resources you have to be trained to know how to conserve.” (Shirley Morven)

7.4 Importance of the seasonal round

Harry Nyce ends this chapter with a similarly holistic perspective on leadership respecting environment through seasonal harvesting of oolichan, salmon, and berries. He tells us how critical it is to be mindful and respectful of food sources:

“Fish spawning would be late September and October. Throughout the year there's harvesting of various things. There's a pattern of harvesting of saak (oolichan) beginning late winter from February, March, and April. There are preparations to do by gathering supplies needed to carry out the harvesting of the saak (oolichan) at Fishery Bay.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

The oolichan harvest season is a very short season and is often completed in three to six weeks (weather and sometimes ice floes permitting). The leader ensures that all anticipated needs are met. They will not have time to take a break to gather items needed as they may miss optimal fishing tides:

“Oolichan harvesting marks the annual beginning of the resource gathering. So the leadership there would be able to be prepared and that there was enough supplies – dry goods for meals, for shelter, for, equipment; and, that the net is restored and prepared for the season. Those

preparations (is the responsibility) of the leader of that group (who) would have them ready. From there, there would be the entire family, male and female would be engaged in preparation. The Matriarch would have the dry goods the other household items prepared to assist with what the journey of the harvest time needs.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Harry explain how leaders’ preparation is important and also holds true for the salmon harvesting season:

“So once the oolichan season is done, there’s other resources that comes. The salmon starts in May and goes right through to the end of October – November. And the same (process of necessary preparation) applies to harvesting. You need to have your canning equipment ready. You’ve got to have your (smokehouse) wood requirements for smoking. There’s the host of supplies to be prepared, to be ready. The leader has to give direction and advice to get those done. And it’s likewise with all the other harvest of the resources.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Harry continues to illustrate preparedness as we progress through the berry harvesting season:

“When harvesting berries, the preparations are the similar. You need specific locations within the territory that is, to travel to. Travelling is important – you need to organize that and prepare for overnight stays if that’s the case. Supplies have to be organized.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Harry describes the Elders’ role in cultural food gathering is to provide leadership in overseeing the work until its completion:

“Again it’s the leadership who give that direction. After cultural food gathering, there is important advice that Elders would reinforce food-gathering preparedness. Elders say to the leader again, when they return home from when it’s out of the community, like Fishery Bay. They would gather and they’d calmly and respectfully say, ‘Is the net clean, is the net prepared and ready for storage, is the camp tidied up, is the camp secured?’ So it’s reinforcing the preparing for the next year that’s part of the preparation with respect to food gathering. It is also important to clean your equipment. I know that during our commercial fishing days, Grandfather (Eli Gosnell), who was our leader, would come and check, he says, ‘Is the net prepared?’ If your net wasn’t off your boat and hanging on the rack ready for repairs and stuff he’d say, ‘It has to be done. You won’t catch fish with holes in your net,’ he’d say. And it’s off, prepared, washed, dried, and at the end of the season exactly the same advice. And then say, ‘You can’t be rushing around when the time comes next year you got to be ready.’ And for readiness, once you’ve done your fishing, that’s taking care of your equipment is important. So the leader that does those things reinforces it him or herself exactly that, what is advised.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Harry uses the salmon season to speak about families working together:

“In food preparation, I’ll use the (salmon season, as an example). During May through July and into August, the family as a whole participates. The young children are there. They may be washing fish if it needed to be done or helping with the cleaning and organizing. The Elders would continuously be saying and reinforcing the importance of the fish for the family and where the fish is being prepared and cleaning – continually saying – ‘This is how to do it.’ The other part is the preparing of the things to be used – like jars to be cleaned – to always be ready with the clean equipment that’s ready for use. I think those are the parts that the Elders or the advice of the leaders would say, ‘It’s easier when everyone has their hand in

preparation. Things are much easier.' It's reinforced all the time – that's how it's done.

Everyone works together and eats together, and the leadership, the leader provides that and continually reinforces. As one old timer would say years ago, 'Fish don't wait, fish don't have time off, fish don't have sick time, you've got to be prepared for the harvest.' ” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Harry gives a good sense of how the various elements of the natural world are interrelated:

“Mudslides that run into a fish bearing river impacts the whole river. Some of our rivers in our territory are one hundred kilometres long, so if there was a mudslide on one of those rivers that impacts our fish. The gills of the salmon can't process the silt through their gills when they are trying hard to get up to spawn in the late summer or early fall. If it is late summer when the fish are carrying on their business, natural business, and if these things (mud slides) happen, that's when you start to lose the fish. If the fish are not spawning there's a loss of salmon for the next cycle of a four-year cycle. The fish are dying. They are literally choked from the silt in the river from the mudslide. Their gills are filled up with silt and the gills are their breathing apparatus.

“Then a whole chain reaction happens, there's no fish, the bears are not fed, the other life in the river are displaced and they need to find somewhere else and that's where problems arise regarding the larger animals that are trying to find food for winter storage – if you will – or hibernation if bears are concerned.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Chapter 7 examined understanding the critical relationship between Nisga'a leadership and respect for the environment. Nisga'a like other folks need food to survive. Nisga'a leaders harvest to sustain their families. They were taught to harvest and to always employ careful planning and preparation, careful harvesting, being cognizant and caring to conserve for future generation and care of the

environment that sustains regeneration. Leaders harvest and preserve foods. Leaders share food with their families and others not so fortunate. The Elders interviewed here are concerned with the change they are witnessing in new leaders who have little or no respect for practices their grandparents taught them.

Chapter 8 looks towards the future in linking the past, present, and future.

Chapter 8: Moving Ahead

“We can’t just forget who we are.” (Alice Azak)

8.1 Introduction

In Chapter 8, the Elders expand on the notion of respecting the environment by exploring the link between the past, present, and future in answering the following questions:

1. After all of these years and through all of the changes, how did you manage to keep the knowledge?
2. How do we ensure that that knowledge continues through future generations to people who are going to be following in your footsteps?

Each Elder emphasized that knowledge of the past was the key to ensuring a future of the Nisga’a Nation and the Nass River environment and resources.

Throughout the changes to Nisga’a life, the biggest threat that continues to affect the Nisga’a is the adoption of non-Nisga’a ways of living (e.g., excess and over harvesting). Each leader reflected on advice they give younger generations, both their own children and anyone who is sincere to listen, that cultural traditions are important for every day life, not just in a feast hall or at times of harvest and food preparation. The Elders provided examples from Nisga’a history where advice was not heeded and negative environmental effects continue to reverberate today.

The Elders look to the future with caution. They stress the importance of knowing and understanding the Nisga’a language, knowing and understanding the ayuuk, and knowing and understanding that

there are consequences for one's actions. As stated by Dr. Joseph Gosnell, "I will caution our people, 'Be cautious of what you are doing.' It could be the downfall of our Nation. Dim lak n'uum' (you are going to take us apart), dim lak n'uum', dim lak n'isim' (you are going to take all apart),' nidiyahil w'ahlingigat (that is what the old people said), you will fall apart, you will fall apart." Joe's words cannot be understated as we go forward.

In his master's of business administration project, *The Importance of Change Management for BC First Nations Treaty Implementation*, Harry Nyce Jr. offers insights to incorporate change systems:

The paper has outlined issues with existing Treaty Implementation Plans, and ways of overcoming obstacles to change. The literature shows that there are many tools capable of initiating and sustaining change efforts while recognizing that the change effort will continue to evolve. The reports of efforts occurring at current Treaty negotiation tables reveal the efforts of leaders beginning to incorporate change. There are also examples of what has worked with other groups and examples of systems that are working. In providing examples that change is attainable, useful, and needed, stakeholders begin to internalize new systems. As stakeholders recognize the benefits of change efforts, the new culture of the organization emerges.

Treaty nations can also build on their success in negotiating agreements to implementing change. All groups have a well-informed team of specialists that have been working on Agreements. The continued use of experts can establish the new and required change efforts. Treaty negotiation staff often becomes implementing staff as well however monitoring of implementation plans is critical to success. Similarly, the use of planning is key to realizing what the agreements are intended to do. In planning the implementation of the various Treaty chapters, and testing plans and dispute resolution mechanisms, leaders establish communication channels important to permit the exchange of ideas.

Recommendations

- (1) As First Nations and government negotiate treaties, it is important to take stock of existing systems and to plan for the replacement of those elements that require change.
- (2) The Implementation plans should be supported by plans capable of identifying required capacity and issues that may arise.
- (3) Change management includes change of individuals as well, and it is important that proper funding is achieved to enable the implementation plan to succeed.
- (4) Communication is a key element to have stakeholders aware of pending changes and to coach individuals, no matter where they are in the hierarchy, on a continuous, high level basis.
- (5) A short time frame should be utilized to analyze the change effort and implementation plans to ensure that what has been agreed upon is known by all.
- (6) The actions of leaders will determine success of the change effort, and even though new systems are established, a coaching effort is needed.
- (7) Political will determines success as well since talks are only closed when the contributions of all departments and ministries review and comment on the change effort.

- (8) Permitting the establishment and hiring of entrepreneurial, creative bureaucrats in place of careerists would permit an innovative element to implementing Treaties.

(Nyce 2007, 53–55)

Chapter 8 looks to the way ahead. This research focuses on Elders as cultural refugia, in the sense that they retained ancient ancestral knowledge while enduring disruptive events. Dr. Nancy Turner's description of cultural refugia as: individuals who understand the importance of that knowledge for the future of their people, describes these Elders.

Two of the questions were related to this area. Question 1 asked: "After all of these years and through all of the changes, how did you manage to keep the knowledge?" Question 2 was more specific: "How do we ensure that that knowledge continues through future generations to people who are going to be following in your footsteps?"

8.2 Linking the past, present, and future

Sim'oogit Ksim Xsaan, Oscar Mercer opens Chapter 8 by offering sage advice to younger folks regarding the importance of maintaining Nisga'a language and cultural practices:

"It's a different world right now, the main thing is to maintain our language and the way we do things in our culture. (For example), what we do when there's a death – to settle over a death or to make amends. We always go back to feasts to maintain our system of how we conduct our feasts so that the young people can continue to do that by making sure that they attend. Sometimes just by observation, I notice that people who don't bother to attend feasts, when it comes time for them to do it, they don't do it right because they haven't been around to see what's done. I always try to tell my nephews, 'You guys always make sure you attend and see what goes on because some day you're going to be the one.' And that's respect too, you respect people when they do something, when there's a death, attend,

because some day that might happen in your family and the people will repay you that respect. They'll come and give you a little boost to encourage you if you get into the same sort of situation.” (Oscar Mercer)

Sim'ooqit NiisYuus, Willard Martin stresses the importance and benefits of successfully listening:

“I think one of the most fortunate things that happened to me was when anybody called me over to sit down I usually do it. I listen and then I started thinking how can this help. Some people may think that this is a primitive way of thinking. I start asking myself, my kids, really show a lot of interest because they asked about Nisga'a, like my oldest daughter says, “what does your language mean, like I hear you talking when you say something to us?” (Willard Martin)

“I still try to hang on our traditional stuff. I'm still carving.” (Larry Derrick)

“It wasn't like (that) in our time, it is totally different now and I can see why. There's so much on our children's plates now. The walk that I'm walking as a role model, I notice that a lot of our children are what we call *hiskadihl* (crybabies). I hate to say it but they're like crybabies. If they don't get their way, they cry and we fail. I've noticed this for a long time.

“What's missing is the *adaawaḱ* (storytelling). I hear the teachers need something to teach the children – *adaawaḱ*. *Adaawaḱ* comes in many forms in many different stages. I see it missing. Our tables are empty now, we have nothing to *adaawaḱ* about. This is the way my grandmother and my grandfather told me.

“Before, I was so excited to go on my very first trip ever – to go hunting. They told me, ‘You have to be clean – *dim k'ax̄ sisatkw n'iin.*’ I had no idea what *sisatkw* (to cleanse)

was so they send me to my grandfather Andrew Robinson who said, ‘Oh okay, meet me early in the morning – four o’clock in the morning.’ I went there to see him. I had the shock of my life. Part of cleansing is getting in the water – cold water – to cleanse yourself to get your spirits high – to get your spirits induced. I had to drink wa’ums – medicinal stuff. (The wa’ums drink Larry is referring to is a specially brewed tea made from the inner cambium of wa’ums – devil’s club, *Oplopanax horridus*.) I had to be clean after – very clean before I went into the bushes. Before my hunting we had to take cedar (*Thuja plicata*) leaves and put it all over our body so we wouldn’t give that scent out.

“Our children can’t (prepare for hunting) for survival. Take one of these kids out in the bush, the first thing I noticed *hiskadihl* (become cry babies). They can’t do it? I often ask myself why? I reflect back to what my grandmother and my grandfather taught me (to exercise). You row; there’s motors there, but you row. Why did they make us row? Like there’s a motor there, were they trying to save gas? No. We had to build our bodies to prepare. So it wasn’t only in words – we weren’t taught just by words. No. We actually went out there and did it. So preparation – yes. We had to be strong in our minds as well as our body. When we were doing these, there’s rules, there’s a lot of rules in preparation in hunting.

“We checked the weather – we had to know how to read the weather. We look into the sky, we see the clouds, which way the wind was blowing, north wind, south wind, everything – we begin to look. I was taught (how to tell) time (without a clock), we call it *waats* – clock. When you’re away from the clock we used *andahl sa*, we measure the sky. *Way gom’*, *ant’aahl wilaa wilhl sa gi* (what does the day look like)? And, when they’re testing us – *hanii hiihlukw wil huwilin* (you are in the morning), *hanii silkwsax wil huwilin* (you are in the noon hour), or *hanii yukwsa wil huwilin* (you are in the night time), *hlaa gehlxkwhl* (shout loudly) *ant’aahl sa* (dawn of the day)! Measurement of the time was one of the things that was taught to us – that’s lost, it’s gone. If we don’t get those kinds of measurements back again they’ll be gone forever.

“Like in the winter time when it’s just snow – yet they can tell you what time of the day it is using shadows.” (Larry Derrick)

“We’re too busy – we’re not doing what our Elders always tell us. They say, “slow down.” They say, “hagwil hiyeen, dim saganyatskwahl n’iin (walk slowly, you might trip). You’re going to trip or fall through that loop hole,” and that’s exactly what’s happening to us – we’re getting lost.” (Larry Derrick)

“When my grandchildren come and visit me, they say, ‘Hi Grandpa, hi Grandma’ and they run and beeline right passed me, crawl through my legs if they want to. They go straight to the computer, straight to the computer and bang, bang, bang and they’re going to be there for hours. They’ve lost time, lost valuable time – so that’s on their plate. I noticed that. How do we stop that? I know that it’s valuable but how do we slow down to take, to take the time to, how do we get our, our culture in there, how do we?” (Larry Derrick)

“When you go through a village, when you go through a town – it’s not an excuse, they just don’t have it. We call it his gagwee’etkw (poor people anywhere who cannot help themselves) – they can’t help themselves. I’ve noticed that, I’ve been there.

I’ve watched them (his grandchildren), they’re so happy to get the phone, they will not get off the phone. They’re what we call ‘his gwii_x axhl ga’askw’ (they are all always focusing) they’re so happy they are almost clowning around. They are just overjoyed – happy to have the TV or computer or whatever. So there’s a good side and a bad side. There’s two sides of the coin here – shall we deal with both of them or do we deal with just the one?” (Larry Derrick)

“We have to find a way to get into the homes. I remember a time when I was going to school

and we had what they call an 'improvement association' in Greenville (the village has reverted to its traditional name and is now known as Laxgalts'ap). My parents and my grandparents had some issues where the children were not cooperating with the teachers so the improvement association got together with the PTA (parent teacher association) members in Greenville. They requested the students – I was one of the students to go from house to house visiting – just a normal visit. When they came to our house, I know my grandmother can't speak English, neither can my grandfather the respect those kids gave my grandmother made me proud. We went from house to house literally visiting. I was amazed how much stories we got from each house. They talk about the animals, they talk about the worms, they even sang a song. They taught us everything. I would like to see the homes work with the school and parents to work with the teachers because the parents are the teachers themselves. The grandparents are the guidance that guide that teaching.” (Larry Derrick)

“Hlo'omskw (honour) you got to work with the soul of the people. There's so much distraction now. Those (new) leaders are happily distracting themselves. They are role models big time to our children. So I would say they are walking on thin ice because the children see that, the youth see that, adults see that, Chiefs, Matriarchs see that, and so they walk a difficult life, very difficult, as a role model. I can almost feel some of the roads that these guys have to walk on. And, the only way I see is, they are walking on thin ice – so they have to be very, very careful because each step, each movement they make they can crack that ice and if they fall through that's it. It's pretty tough to resurface through thin ice, like when you try to crawl on thin ice it just keeps breaking. I've fallen through thin ice I know what it's like – so wilt'inskw (obedience) from the leadership is foremost. Ax wilt'inskw means you don't pay attention, wilt'inskw is paying attention.” (Larry Derrick)

“As one of the Chiefs, I find that it’s not that easy to walk. I don’t want to say this but I’m going to say it. The new Chiefs and Matriarchs are not ready. The luuanyee (refers to one inheritor – Chief or Matriarch who is literally the next person in line) are not ready, they are not ready and some of the Chiefs that are out there now are really not ready. For example you hear a young Chief speak and they’re trying to use our language. Just the way they speak our language is, difficult to put together. I’m spending more time trying to piece together what they’re trying to say than to hear what their, what their message is put out there. I was fluent by my grandparents. One of the foremost advice given to me by my grandfather’s family was “One day you’re going to stand up and you’re going to try and make a speech, but before you do, dim guudinhl algaxan (you have to take your speech), ii hasbaxbagan, ii hasbaxbagan_dim algaxan, you feel out your speech (think about your speech), dim ii luuga’ahl hlits’eew’ihl (look inside your speech), gilo ji hasbisaa algaxan they say, ‘Don’t just speak out of turn. It’s got to come from your heart, not from your lips.’ And that’s what’s happening with their speeches; some of these young Chiefs now, they’re guessing and they’re not – they don’t make sense.” (Larry Derrick)

“We have to go back and look at this word – respect – here, because it’s a teeter totter.”
(Larry Derrick)

Larry shares his observation of some changes that he, as a trained traditional chieftain is concerned about:

“What they call sayt jaga ga’adiit, sayt jaga ga’adiit txaan’itkws agu – you just overlook it, that’s what I see they just overlook the whole thing and what happens – we can’t straighten it out now.” (Larry Derrick)

“I was always taught that a tribal feast was a place of teaching – where they teach you all these things. They discuss everything. They make sure everything is run smooth. That’s where all the adaawak (stories) are supposed to come out and they haven’t, they haven’t and again, we’re too busy we haven’t learned how to slow down. I don’t know if we ever will.”

(Larry Derrick)

“ ‘Han’iit’aa niya’as where the Chiefs sit.’ Only top Chiefs, high-ranking Chiefs and Matriarchs sit there.” (Larry Derrick)

Larry is referring to the ranking order that is traditionally used for seating Chiefs and Matriarchs in the feast hall. Larry is concerned that the traditional feast hall seating is not culturally observed as it should be. Larry goes on to recount a story he heard as a young person. Other Elders say they have heard this story of unity as well:

“One time we had a little gathering in Port Edward. There was Emma Adams and Nox Maluula – were in there. Part of our teaching was to sit there and listen and observe and they were discussing. The very thing that we were talking about and this is the way they told us. Before the flood there was no such thing as Tsimshian, Nisga’a, or Gitksan. There was no such thing as that. Instead this river here before it was called Lisims, before they labelled it. [Larry’s interview took place at Wilp Wilxo’oskwhl Nisga’a on the Nass River.] And the one in Skeena, they were Si’wiihoon (Tsimshian term for twins) tsim kalii aks, si’wiihoon means they were twin rivers” (Larry Derrick)

“That’s where the twins come from, Si’wiihoon sim kalii aks, that’s the way I remember it. So there they weren’t labelled Nisga’a, they weren’t labelled Tsimshian, they weren’t labelled Gitksan. According to these elderly people that were sitting there, (there was a few others I

couldn't remember who their names were but they were fairly old people) were saying along came this big flood, bax yeehl aks (the water was rising), and this is Sim'oogit Lisims story comes in. Elizabeth Watts told us this story of Lisims and the flood when I first got married to Peggy. Elizabeth Watts told us the story of Lisims. It fits in with the story of the big rock behind Greenville. It's called Lax Ts'ineekhl. There's a reason why it's called Lax Ts'ineekhl. When my grandmother was telling me, telling us about this, there was no, there was no – we were all one, we were one. I guess they called it gyaanmx (old language). The language – they were all just one. They used to walk and be amongst each other. They were more closer (at that time) than we are today and yet we got (easy transportation). But, but they took the time, they took the time to, to be with one another. So there was no difference with them. They were sayt k'ilim goot (one heart), sayt k'ilim k'yolim sga (one people), they were as one people and then this flood came and wiped everything right out – totally.

“I don't know when but it was surprising to hear that there was such a thing as a big, big, big flood where they wiped this place out. And then, to cut the story short, well, in the, in the, the story there's so few survivors. The rest were living amongst ghosts. The ghosts even helped them out. In Lisims story, the ghosts were helping them but it wiped everything out. Just a very few survived on one of the mountains. So it was after the flood the people came back off the mountain. There was so few of them. They were confused going up there, disturbed going with this flood and just as easily confused coming back down to the land. They were looking for where they came from but there was nothing but debris, nothing but damage. They were walking and I guess that's where their cannibalism came in. They were eating people, anything they can. In the stories I remember shivers just listening to how they were eating anything that just floated by.

“How it happened? They would hook them over and they eat. They would eat it raw because they can't build a fire inside or on top of a log. They just call it survival with anything they could find and they were totally amongst ghosts. The ghosts were helping them, sbayt

luulak (among the ghosts) they called it. So after the flood the few that came down here (the Nass River or Lisims), the few that popped out in the Skeena River and the few that went up the Skeena river denied it. It became a triangle, and my grandmother told me, or told us that the word for that triangle is k'ow. It's easy to spell triangle. The triangle is there she said. She showed me no matter which way you turn this triangle we are one. It's like a ball, no matter which way you turn this triangle, no matter it's Gitksan, Tsimshian, or Nisga'a, they're one of the same. We still are one of the same.

“So prior to that we spoke one language and they maintain it whether they end up in the Skeena or upper Skeena River we understand one another, slightly changed but, but there were so few people that survived it did change.

“One of the things that I've noticed now, we're going back there, as one. We're labelled Nisga'a, we're labelled Gitksans, Tsimshians, that ball is still there but you know what, our blood, our bloodline is going back through intermarriage.

“I remember at a gathering when one young lad got up and he said, 'Oh! I'm part Nisga'a, I'm part Tsimshian, I'm part Tlingit, I'm part Plains, I'm part Norwegian,' and then he went on, and he says, 'and I come from a long line of Chiefs and Matriarchs.' ” (Larry Derrick)

Larry draws on an analogy of offering ancient words of hope during a time of dealing with great personal loss:

“There's a term you will hear especially in memorial that they use. When we are covered by fear and tears. Our hearts are covered and one day he said to me, 'dim miin jixjooks gagoots'im' (your hearts will re-emerge). Dim miin jixjooks, jixjooks how the last time Gadim Galdoo'o explained this. I heard it from my grandmother Lily Alexander too and she explained it. She showed us a rock in Arrandale, 'You see that rock? Let's say that's your heart. And the

tide came in and covered that rock with salt water. That's your heart in death or in tragedy. Your heart is under water. One day the tide will go down again and that same particular rock will re-emerge. Miin jixjooks means it's starting to expose itself again. It is back – it's almost back to normal.' Miin jixjooks means it survived, it's no longer submerged under tears and sorrow and anger, so that was being taught to us.” (Larry Derrick)

All the interviewees link the past, present and future – a more holistic view of leadership as Sim'oogit Naaw's, Harry Nyce Sr. illustrates how the history of environmental change also has its place in the present and possibly in the future:

“We saw the fishing industry the middle of the nineteenth century to the 1970s was a boom for commercial fishing (along with) the impacts of the other industry development on the land itself, on the spawning or on the larger rivers of the Nass has taken its toll. Logging has been in the Valley since the 1950s, in the late '50s mining happened in a place called Observatory Inlet, a copper mine (Anyox) established itself and that whole inlet lost its fishery for over forty years. There's mining activity at the headwaters of the Nass River. A large tributary of the Nass River is the Bell-Irving River, it is absolutely inundated with mining exploration which could lead into mining extraction at a later date that will have a huge impact to the fish resource.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

As explained in the previous chapters, interviewees variously linked the past, present and future. Sigidimnak' Angaye'e, Shirley Morven, makes a perceptive observation about transitions:

“The impact of the mainstream depends on how strong components of our original culture are in place. How strongly they are influenced is what guarantees what will survive and what won't because we're becoming, at the moment, huge consumers of stuff.

“In the old days, for instance when the first Russian cast iron pot came in, we didn’t just throw out all our land just to get a bunch of cast iron pots. Nisga’a took what they needed and continued traditional practices. They simply just changed the technology somewhat and that’s usually not just the technology itself, because they knew the distillation process that was originally our contribution to the world because how long have we been here in North America. We perfected distillation. Yes we changed some of the implements we used, but the contribution remains.

“In some places, for example, childrearing was hit really early as the 1920s. Residential Schooling was a major impact and invasion on childrearing. Because children are the most impressionable age that (Residential School abuses) made that particular component of Nisga’a life more fragile. It’s going to take a real conscientious effort to revitalize childrearing and education in our valley.” (Shirley Morven)

Shirley offers a warning in respect to Western trends adopted by some Nisga’a people. Nisga’a culture stresses the importance of sharing where hoarding is counterproductive. In the end, Shirley offers words of hope from those who practise traditional ecological knowledge:

“Now we are getting to be really big consumers. When you walk through certain parts of our communities you’ll see where there’s so much stuff. Nothing is used and nothing is recycled. It’s just like they’re hoarding. Our people say if you’re *luw’* (greedy and refuse to share), it’s because you have a *luuk’oomhl goot* (stingy heart) and you’ll be poor. People who are hoarding – I think that’s a Western practice. I know that our people gathered lots of food and they prepared for feasts and whatever but always it’s for distribution. No matter how much money there is, it’s always given to the family for support. It is always immediately dispersed. Yet there’s still a few who developed the traditional ecological knowledge and

discovered the common sense of it – that’s another area that needs to be revitalized.” (Shirley Morven)

Sigidimnak’ Lootkw – Lorene Plante, and Sim’oogit Ksim Xsaan – Oscar Mercer, highlight the importance of continuing cultural traditions in the every day. Drawing on her strengths, Lorene Plante explained in the course of our interview how she gently mentors the next generation by teaching best food practices:

“Every time my children come, I tell them, I repeat it, I tell them how we go about it. Now I was really surprised this year. We were doing oolichans and Charlie said, ‘Auntie, we’ve got to wash it seven times.’ So it’s embedded in his mind that oolichans have got to be washed seven times. We had a new helper this year, Valerie Morgan and she asked the question: ‘Why do we have to wash it seven times?’ I told her, ‘We have to make sure all that slime is off it, you feel it, you look at the fresh oolichans and you look at the ones you’ve done seven times you’ll be able to tell.’ Valerie said, ‘Oh okay, nobody told me that before.’ You know, but it’s nice to know and to try and use different methods of making sure the kids remember what to do and how to mix the brine when you’re working with oolichans.” (Lorene Plante)

As occurred earlier in the interview, Lorene was soon once again gently leading into best food practices:

“Same with the salmon, if you’re going to fancy up your salmon – your smoked salmon, you have to know what it is that’s going to go on them and how long they’re going to hang for. A lot of people use teriyaki sauce, a lot of people use different sauces too to make the salmon tastier. It’s messy but it’s good, you do the same with the k’ayukws (lightly smoked thin dried salmon strips made from the flesh of the salmon). The k’ayukws are the hardest thing to

do. You have to really know how thin they have to be so they could dry. If they're too thick when you cut them too thick you have to teach them how to thin them out after. It takes a while for them to dry and you have to thin them out. And it's always good to have a very sharp knife. If you don't have a sharp knife you're killing the fish – the fish will just fall apart.” (Lorene Plante)

In much the same gentle manner, Lorene ensures that knowledge of traditional ways continues into future generations:

“You have to teach them about the wilksilaks (literally interprets as ‘where you come from’ and is used in reference to one’s immediate paternal family). When you’re born you have a wilksilaks and wilksiw’itkw (is in reference to one person in your paternal family). When there’s going to be a feast you choose one of your wilksiw’itkw to cook for you. You usually go for someone who knows how to cook. You always pick somebody who knows and they’ll usually bring a younger person with them and you allow it because they’re teaching them what to do when it comes to feasting.” (Lorene Plante)

Traditional Nisga’a feasts may feed up to five hundred people or more. Lorene impresses in addition to selecting a knowledgeable senior cook, it is also important to know about the necessary ingredients and especially the due diligence required to the task at hand in order to successfully complete what you were called to do:

“Making soup it’s important to know what ingredients you need for the soup that you’re making and it’s very important to monitor the soup, you don’t just leave it. You have to be constantly stirring it. The bull cooks (male assistants who do the heavy lifting) have to be constantly stirring it, so that it doesn’t burn underneath. I went to one feast in North Van with

one of our own people at Hobiyyee (Nisga'a New Year, during the rising crescent moon in February) and their soup was burnt and yet they served it and I never forget that. I told Lana (her daughter), 'Taste my soup' (the North Vancouver soup) so she tasted it: 'Oh! It tastes awful!'

"That's why I said I'm always telling you guys when you're making soup, you monitor it, you stay close to it, you don't just leave it and walk away from the stove. You watch it every few minutes you stir it." (Lorene Plante)

Actions have lessons embedded in them, whatever the occasion. Lorene emphasizes how in preparing the food for special feasting occasions, hierarchical rank matters and needs to be taught to the next generation as integral component to the process:

"Some of our people don't understand that, they don't understand why for instance when you're asked to do something and because the other two sisters aren't available, you have to pick the third one and the other girls from the other sisters' daughters. They frown about it – we're the oldest girls of the oldest mother. They have to be very knowledgeable. Sometimes things are said and usually the person is not thinking. You have to remind them. We can't help it if we're the oldest ones in my mother's family. You're behind me when comes my other auntie Peggy's children who lived down the coast. They tend to be left out and I often remind our other family, 'What about so and so and so and so?' And then they'll think, 'Oh yeah okay, if they're here then they'll do it' then we go to the next one (in birth order)."

(Lorene Plante)

In looking ahead, Oscar Mercer similarly links the past with the present and then with the future. His proposals are purposeful, resourceful and reciprocal when observed appropriately:

“It’s a different world right now. There are other things that we could do. Right now the main thing is to maintain our language and the way we do things in our culture. What we do (Nisga’a cultural practices) when there’s a death – like, say, to settle over a death or to make amends. We always go back on feasts, maintain our feast halls and our system of how we conduct our feasts so that the young people can continue to do that, and making sure that they attend. Sometimes just by observation I notice that people that don’t bother to attend feasts – when it comes time for them to do it they don’t do it right because they haven’t been around to see what’s done.

“That’s why I always try to tell my nephews and nieces, ‘You guys always make sure you attend and see what goes on, because some day you’re going to be the one.’ And that’s respect too. You respect people when they do something. When there’s a death, attend because some day that might happen in your family and the people will repay you that respect. They’ll come and give you a little boost to encourage you, if you get into the same sort of situation.

Remember when Joe said, ‘Our canoe has arrived?’ Now we’re going to get into it and continue to journey after everything – like nothing’s stopped, actually even more so now. We own our own problems now.” (Oscar Mercer)

8.3 Looking ahead

Interviewees have specific suggestions for moving ahead. They do so with caution, as with Oscar Mercer voicing concern over the current generation of leaders:

“Some of our leaders have a little bit of arrogance in them and overlook how to be k’e’em-goot (compassionate), how to be kwhliixoosa’anskw (respectful) to people. There are certain times to say things to people, even if a little harsh, or humble. You have certain ways of carrying on your speeches so that people will listen to them. We can have small group

meetings for those who are interested for the ones who are going to be future leaders who are really sincere. We can show young people how they can present themselves in Nisga'a way, gwɪn wɪlaak'ɪls n'uum' (we can teach them) the way we do things.” (Oscar Mercer)

8.4 Nisga'a governance

Joe Gosnell talks in somewhat similar fashion in 2012 when all the interviews for this research took place. Joe speaks about the importance of looking discerningly at how we conduct business in the Nisga'a world and offers an example of how leadership is exercised. In doing so, he makes the important point that in looking ahead, we also have to look back. The past informs the future, and future leadership must also inform themselves and become educated:

“We're twelve years into our Treaty, the Nisga'a Final Agreement, and I think people forget that the decision-making at times sometimes are different to the decision-making today. Our people are going through a different experience. It was the Simgigat (Chiefs) at times who made the decision as to what to do, what direction the community would take, or what decision the family would take. It was the Simgigat (Chiefs) who were the decision makers – the senior Chiefs. Since the treaty came in to force the decision-making process has changed and that's not something new to me. I heard, when I was a teenager, when Frank Calder revived the Land Committee, he and his colleagues renamed (the Land Committee) to Nisga'a Tribal Council. I attended almost all of the 48 Annual Conventions that the Nisga'a Tribal Council called in those days. They talked about not only the land, they also talked about the governing process. Ndahl dim wilaa hahlo'ohl gat (how will the people walk together)?” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

Having a common goal to work towards to improving life is the purpose of governance; its intent is to unite people to walk in the same direction. Joseph recalls valuable early discussions regarding Nisga'a governance planning for our people:

“How are we going to govern ourselves – they talked about it for years and years. I was fortunate to listen to the most senior Chiefs of our nation talk about the land, talk about the governing process that they would see take place in the event that we would reach a treaty with the senior government and the provincial government. So in this process that we have in place today is different from the ancient process. Every four years or so we enter an election mode where people are nominated. Hopefully they are nominating qualified individuals who would lead our nation, who would lead our communities and our outlying locals.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

Joe's and other leaders' concerns intersect with recommendations from Harry Nyce Jr.'s master's in business administration thesis, *The Importance of Change Management for First Nations Treaty Implementation*. (Harry Nyce Jr. 2007):

“Permitting the establishment and hiring of entrepreneurial, creative bureaucrats in place of careerists would permit an innovative element to implementing Treaties” (Harry Nyce Jr. 2007, 55).

8.5 Mentoring for leadership

Reflecting a shared concern over the upcoming generation, interviewees offer various guiding suggestions and advice as to how best to mentor for leadership.

High on the list is learning the language. Sigidimnak' Kiigyapkws, Alice Azak, stresses the importance that Nisga'a leadership of all ages learn to speak their language as it identifies who they are as Nisga'a. Nisga'a identity is important:

“I think that’s why I’m still trying to push the (Nisga’a) language for them to realize they’re not white people. They think that the one (English language) that they are using now is the only language that they can use, but they have to know where they come from. I’m eighty-three years old and I should be sitting back and doing nothing but it’s the children that I look at.” (Alice Azak)

Alice’s son is luu’anyee (the next in line), which means he is in direct chieftain line. Alice appreciates her sons (who will likely rise to her House chieftainship one day) learning and practising Nisga’a language in the feasts in preparation for their future when they assume senior leadership within their Wilp (House):

“I told them yesterday, both of them have been doing the announcements, dealing with the money part and calling the peoples’ traditional Nisga’a names out. The ones that are giving in money and there’s still k’amksiiwaa (English spoken) there, so I said, ‘Okay, you guys, even when you have one hour come to my house,’ and they looked at me, and I said, ‘You’re going to learn how to speak Nisga’a.’ ” (Alice Azak)

Sigidimnak' Hlgu Wilksihlgum Maaksgum Hlbin, Emma Nyce, raises another important issue also raised by Moses McKay earlier. The next generation of Nisga'a traditional leadership needs to move home:

“That’s why it’s real important to give a big name. They train the ones that are growing up. They talk to them, they train them, ‘Look, you know you’re not going to be greater than anybody else but you’re going to have a big name coming.’ That’s what they say to me that’s why I know it. ‘You’re going to have children, you’re going to be mothering the Chiefs. You can’t get married in Vancouver or Prince Rupert, you can’t get married there, you stay right here.’ That’s how I know, that’s why they’re so mixed up nowadays because people don’t grow up in a place where they should. They don’t keep up anything what they have there. They talk about it yes, that’s all they do, but they don’t live it.” (Emma Nyce)

Emma is also concerned with naïve young leadership’s lack of preparedness (education and successful life experience) for elected office and leadership: “They’re kids. No kids should lead the community, its simgigat that did that.” (Emma Nyce)

Sim’oogit Naaws’, Harry Nyce Sr., cautions against giving too much advice too soon. It is in his view, it’s important to assess the situation before proceeding to act on important decisions that are before them. Some issues, Naaws’ illustrates need to be addressed by leadership as a collective:

“Traditionally a leader would wait and listen to whatever is taking place to determine whether or not he or she would be of any assistance. For the most part in getting into a different area, a leader would follow the protocol. The leader would hear what is being suggested or brought forward for change to be had. So I think for the most part, it is still the same and offer advice when the opportune time arises during meetings or sessions. Offer advice, or suggest that there are options that could or should be considered depending on the issue at hand. And, it would also depend on the seriousness of the situation. Or if there was a violation of action or property was damaged. That’s an occasion where you’d listen to determine whether or not to

confirm and provide advice on action. I think at that time, it would be, leadership as a collective to work through the options and then provide the advice.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Harry responds to an additional question about providing advice for his nephew or nieces, his *luu’anyee* (the person who follows directly behind him), in preparation for their subsequent leadership roles. Harry’s advice holds true for elected leadership as well:

“Uphold yourself as an individual. You need to show very much right from the start – respect – from where you are. Respect for who is present. Respect for the colleagues if you’re in a group. So for a nephew or niece the advice would be to be respectful towards the work that is to be done. And there are times when they are young people, the advice is – don’t make light of this. Don’t be laughing around when you are doing this. If you’re going to be asked to do something, show up on time, and be respectful of the place you are in.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Harry suggests careful and deliberate strategies to assist future leadership. He gives examples of Nisga’a terms that are difficult to translate their meaning into English: *haw’ahlkw* and *haw’ahlgum*. They often are translated as ‘taboo’ or ‘strictly forbidden’ or ‘evoking bad fortune’ but it means more than that. It suggests one could evoke a bad spirit depending on the degree of their infraction. It also suggests your life would be less if you do not heed warnings. These terms also suggest that there may be “lifelong consequences although some go beyond your own person to subsequent generations” (Allison Nyce, pers. comm.). As we struggle to translate the terms above, in context, we get closer to a clearer interpretation of complex Nisga’a philosophy. Harry Nyce Sr. continues:

“There are some of Nisga’a language that hold all those sentiments. One that’s always heard when advice is being given is ‘haw’it’ meaning stop, or ‘gilo’ is to wait. ‘Don’t be too quick with those two (words), when providing advice. I think the language in itself has very specific

direction. When the Nisga'a language is used to say some of the edicts like haw'ahlkws, it pertains to (be reminded) not to be disrespectful. That's part of the advice that is provided.”
(Harry Nyce Sr.)

“For example, in the case of humans taking resources and overharvesting. For example like fish and taking more than you need. The Elders would say, ‘Haw'ahlkw, haw'ahlgum’ – this is not right. The safeguarding of areas for resource activity helps to be a leader to stand up for areas of significant importance to family, community and the Nation as a whole. Offering supporting advice that, for example, during the spawning time of fish no activity should be happening in and around where fish are spawning. That's part of haw'ahlkw, because the fish are preparing to reproduce. I think those are the kinds of support when resource development, to enforce those important roles because there are times when the resource don't return. People think well maybe the area was disturbed and the tributary perhaps was disrupted in some fashion. I think those are, as a leader, to assist and reinforce the protection of those special areas.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Harry adds a cautionary statement that is not wholly idealistic but reflects what is and also what should be considered when extracting resources:

“It's the balance of use when sharing the resources that we have. The difficulty about it is – yes, there is a need for the use of the precious metals in the mountains but at the same time there's also an argument to be made of the benefit of the extraction of those precious metals. Our people will still be here when those companies that are operating to extract the precious metals are on their way to wherever they live in the world.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

“So the argument is to try and balance. We can assist, yes, maybe you can harvest that but leave something behind that’s going to maintain our peoples’ survival at the end of it too. It think that’s the balance, that’s the critical part of the extraction of the precious metals and the disruption of our mountains in the north part of our territory.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

“It is a challenge to stay engaged, it is a challenge, the sacred sanctities have been amended over time and it does change. It will change, and perhaps that’s just the way things are, but for the foreseeable future in the next years that will be the telling that from where we are today as First Nations with the common goal of what we are hearing in the Nass Valley, Skeena, Haida, the Tsimshian, Haisla, the Tahltans, and the rebirth if you will, of these things brings change and hopefully that change coincides with historic establishment of culture and cultural activity.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

Harry reflects on the importance, for all the changes, of maintaining everyday life in the community:

“No, it’s an argument I’ve been making as a leader. It doesn’t matter where I am, when people ask ‘Are you aware of the commercialized farms?’ or ‘Are you aware of the mining activities?’ and I say, ‘I’m there and I hear these things’ and I say to them, ‘What I’m concerned with is that I live in Gitwinksihlkw. We’re at the bottom end of the Nass River and these developments are upriver. We are going to feel the impacts and the grandchildren that I have there now will feel the impacts, grandchildren to come and children yet to be born to the Nisga’a will feel the impacts of these things that are happening, not the grandchild of any of the companies that are there or grandchildren of the investors or grandchildren of the governments.’ Government investments in my view have to change. As a leader I’ll say that to the protection of our lands, protection of future generations to come, to utilize our

resources that we now are enjoying still and at the end of the day retain the overall ability of the survival of our people.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

In closing, Harry draws traditional practice to guide the future he hopes for the Nisga’a people:

“When called upon in any situation a leader has to carry him or herself to the point where by making and recalling their (collective) background from where they are – that’s the only thing they can do to strengthen each other. I think that’s what the Nisga’a Nation leadership has done when they’re called upon and I think that’s the basis of assisting each other.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

8.6 Preparing for the future

Leadership is not only about the past and the present, but also about planning ahead. Using the examples of everyday life and the seasonal round, Harry Nyce emphasizes the importance of consistently preparing for the future:

“Clean the equipment after use. You know your needs for the next coming season. For example, if a bana’a (dip net) collapsed during the oolichan season and breaks then you know that you need to make another one during the off-season. Dip nets are made of a very strong wood such as maple (k’ookst, *Acer glabrum*) or crabapple tree (skan milks, *Malus fusca*). The net portion has to be carefully measured and made and hung by hand. During the off-season you repair what can be repaired, or replace equipment. If you need four or five of them, then you make sure there are four or five ready well ahead of time for the next season.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

“The same is true for the berry season. Containers or boxes are required to store berries for transporting them back to the home community. If one is broken then it’s replaced as required. Tools wear out and need to be replaced and ready for the next harvest time.” (Harry Nyce Sr.)

In closing and in reflection, Sim’oogit Hleek, Dr. Joseph Gosnell, offers a very strong caution to future Nisga’a leadership of how vital their work is but how precarious it can become if they do not carefully consider the impacts of their decisions well into the future:

“I will caution our people ‘Be cautious of what you are doing.’ It could be the downfall of our nation. Dim lak n’uum’ (you are going to take us apart), dim lak n’uum’, dim lak n’isim (you are going to take all apart),’ nidiiyahl w’ahlingigat (that is what the old people said), you will fall apart, you will fall apart.” (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

In Chapter 8, the Elders address two questions:

1. After all of these years and through all of the changes, how did you manage to keep the knowledge?
2. How do we ensure that that knowledge continues through future generations to people who are going to be following in your footsteps?

In conclusion, Chapter 8 offers some very stark warnings for Nisga’a leadership from Sim’oogit Hleek, Dr. Joseph Gosnell – “you will take it all apart” – and some sign posts that should be considered as offered by Sim’oogit Naaws’, Harry Nyce Sr., with resource extraction that the companies and Nisga’a leadership “at the end of the day retain the overall ability of the survival of our people.” Harry looks forward as well reiterating an ancient way to deal with issues, “when called

upon in any situation a leader has to carry him or herself to the point where by making and recalling their (collective) background from where they are – that’s the only thing they can do to strengthen each other.”

There are many lessons in this chapter for new leaders to consider if they come to listen as Sim’oogit Niisyuus, Willard Martin poignantly illustrates. The importance of speaking and using Nisga’a language at all times is repeatedly reiterated by Sim’oogit Ksim Xsan, Oscar Mercer, and Sim’oogit Ax̄dii Anx̄smax̄, Larry Derrick, Sigidimnak’ Kiigyapkws, Alice Azak, and the others.

These are the teachings shared here: specific and rich examples of Nisga’a knowledge. For example Oscar talks about knowing how to conduct a feast at times of settling the estate of a loved one; Larry talks about the importance of time and to be mindful of your thoughts, words and speeches. Larry’s advice for new leaders is to be mindful that they too are role models who appear to be “walking on very thin ice” so that they not abandon the ancient leadership teachings as they become mentors to the next generation.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

“Ndahl dim wilaa hahlo’ohl gat (How will the people walk together)? (Dr. Joseph Gosnell)

The purpose of this study is to look at Nisga’a leaders who shared their experiences, stories, oral histories and leadership practices, so that new Nisga’a leaders will gain an understanding of traditional Nisga’a leadership. Each example incorporates Ayuukhl Nisga’a (Nisga’a traditional laws), knowledge and understanding of Nisga’a language, and most importantly, knowledge and awareness of Nisga’a history and culture embedded within geography as seen through these Elders’ eyes. The information refers to teachings offered by Elders long passed. In the same spirit from generations of sharing, and with exemplary compassion, these Elders are following their forebears by offering this information to current and future Nisga’a leadership.

Notable among the Elders’ accounts are cautionary adaawaks of the repercussions from: not listening, or being disrespectful, or not speaking the language, or not knowing the geography of the homelands, or the practicality of food gathering, preparation, and sharing on a first hand basis. Like Larry says, “Your table may be empty if you rely on food you cannot adaawak (tell stories about).”

The questions, as laid out in Chapter 2, are reiterated to remind us of the questions Elders answered:

1. After all of these years and through all of the changes, how did you manage to keep the knowledge?
2. How do we ensure that that knowledge continues through future generations to people who are going to be following in your footsteps?
3. What are significant attributes of Nisga’a cultural leadership?
4. What resource observances help you to be a leader?

5. How does cultural food gathering and preparation help to sustain leadership?
6. Do you know any stories or personal situations relating to the environment, resources or communities' survival in which the knowledge of leader is exemplified or reflected? If so, would you be willing to share these?
7. What qualities of leadership have sustained Traditional Ecological Knowledge in the Nisga'a Nation, and how does tradition-based leadership enable people and our lands to remain strong even during times of change?

As encapsulated by Sim'oo^git Naaws, Harry Nyce, the Elders each shared traditional leadership qualities based on age-old wisdom:

“I think the recording of these things is critical for future generations to know that the leadership of the day provided arguments for the survival of our people. Once the resources have been extracted I think it has to be said and it has to be known that there wasn't just a 'yes' answer provided. There was consideration – the environment has to be respected and at all cost. The resources that are in the area must be protected too, so that we have those resources for the future. I think that's leaderships' role today and that's what's happening.”

(Harry Nyce Sr.)

The Elders interviewed are listed here in alphabetical order:

Alice Azak – Sigidimnak' Kiigyapkws, Wilps Gwiix Maaw'

Larry Derrick – Sim'oo^git Axdii anx^smax, Wilps Axdii anx^smax

Joseph Gosnell – Sim'oo^git Hleek, Wilps Hleek

Moses McKay – Sim'oo^git Bayt N'ee^khl, Wilps Bayt N'ee^khl

Willard Martin – Sim'oo^git Niisyuus, Wilps Lax^ha, Gitalabit

Oscar Mercer – Sim'oo^git Ksim X^ssaan, Wilps Ksim X^ssaan

Dorcas Shirley Morven – Sigidimnak' Angaye'e, Wilps Keexkw

Emma Alice Nyce – Sigidimnak' Hlgu Wilksihlgum Maaksgum Hlbin, Wilps Hleek

Harry Nyce Sr. – Sim'oogit Naaws', Wilps Hleek

Lorene Plante – Sigidimnak' Lootkw, Wilps Duuk

The Final Chapter

“Ts'im gan wilaak'il's wil luu sigihl gandidils” is the philosophical basis for Nisga'a education.

Translated literally, it means “within the pursuit of knowledge therein one will find the true meaning of life.”

It's all about the heart – goot. In their words of wisdom, they gave their heart. The stories give ancient advice to leadership. The heart – it is in every adaawak. It is honesty, as Shirley so aptly tells the story about the heart.

As a caution to future researchers – take great care not to misinterpret these words without understanding the background. For example, Larry tells us how wives conduct themselves when their husbands are out hunting. His story is about the sanctity of marriage in traditional Nisga'a life. The spiritual bond between the husband and wife is amazingly strong. It is not a story about inequality, but rather, it's a story about feminism at its strongest. Traditional Nisga'a wedded unions are sacred and held in that regard.

“To thine own self be true” were words given to me by a retired superintendent of schools when I began my education administration journey many years ago. I had asked him what advice he would give to an education administrator just starting out. Truth is at the centre of his words. It is not perfection, as there is no perfect reality. This is a story about truth in guiding leadership in the hope to continue to carry the ancient leadership wisdom into the future.

The hope is that leadership will always draw strength from these words and practise the ambassadorship of the past with grace the office holds. The advice to be cautious when making

decisions is vitally important. “Rise up” the Elders advise, encouraging leadership to take a stand to support your educated and practised talent, rather than trusting outside counsel. The primary reason for this is that outside counsel is ‘outside.’ It is outside the Valley and outside Nisga’a society. A further consequence is that when talented Nisga’a are pushed outside the Valley, then the talent is pushed away from the Valley as well.

The final chapter leaves many opportunities for others to discover from the wisdom of these Elders. With grace, diplomacy, ambassadorship, they lived that life and continue to live that life. It is with hope their words will be heard.

To encapsulate and put this in context, Nisga’a philosophy is drawn from the ancient wisdom of past Elders, “Ts’im gan wilaak’il’s wil luu sigihl gandidils” ... “within the pursuit of knowledge, therein one will find the true meaning of life” (McKay and McKay 1987, 64).

McKay and McKay go on to say: “The Nisga’a believe that any programme of working with people must be based on sound philosophy. It is in the quest for knowledge that one will find wisdom and this realization will open up the world of life, the world of living. This is the Nisga’a philosophy of education as a total way of life” (ibid.).

And they end with: “By itself, this paper is empty. The vital ingredient of interpersonal interaction is absent. Hopefully, in the time ahead, the contents of this paper may be shared with others and the resulting discussions lead to some new ways and new directions for Nisga’a education” (McKay and McKay 1987, 85).

In closing, I must reiterate my gratitude for the rich relationship I have with all Elders interviewed. I believe it is because of my relationship I receive so much teaching from these Elders, as the

'interpersonal interaction' is the vital ingredient. And as Bert and Alvin McKay say, it's not the end of the conversation but an ongoing discussion to look for 'new ways and new directions.'

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