

A Tribal Journey: Canoes, Traditions, and Cultural Continuity

by

Tamara Marshall

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We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

Dr. Joshua Guilar, Thesis Faculty Supervisor
School of Communication & Culture
Royal Roads University

Date

Dr. Jennifer Walinga, Thesis Coordinator and
Internal Committee Member
School of Communication & Culture
Royal Roads University

Date

William White, External Advisor
Xalemath/Kasalid
Coast Salish (Nanaimo/Cowichan)

Date

Abstract

In addressing the necessity of cultural transmission from one generation to the next, this ethnographic study examines ways that Indigenous canoe journeys enable communication of ancestral teachings and traditions, particularly to Kw'umut Lelum youth. The objective is to identify how experiences and interactions within Indigenous canoe journeys, specifically Tribal Journeys, can connect youth to traditions, environments, Elders, other individuals, and each other. Drawing on interviews with adults and participant observation, I consider relational themes of self and identity to explore the cultural impact on the young people as they participate in Tribal Journeys 2010 and symbolic ceremonies within it. Through qualitative inquiry and inductive reasoning, this interpretive epistemological approach includes concepts specific to the Indigenous research paradigm and uses a performative narrative to present results. Kw'umut Lelum Child and Family Services is a society committed to the well-being of Indigenous children residing within nine Coast Salish communities on Vancouver Island. The agency focuses on family, community, and sacredness of culture as guided by the Snuw'uy'ulh model, which uses the teachings of the present to unite the past and future. Tribal Journeys is a significant cultural event that upholds the Snuw'uy'ulh principles while facilitating the communication of ancestral teachings and traditions.

Keywords: Indigenous, canoe, youth, culture, tradition, Coast Salish, narrative, perform



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Chapter One: Preparing to Paddle

Lhnimulh kwu'elh
Stz'uminus mustimuhw
Lhnimulh kwu'elh
Stz'uminus mustimuhw
Ah si'em
Nu siiye'yu

The Kw'umut Lelum canoe family's song of introduction, *Stz'uminus Mustimuhw*, was sung upon arrival into each host community of Tribal Journeys 2010 and at nightly protocols. The closest English translation from Hul'qumi'num, the Vancouver Island dialect of the Coast Salish Halkomelem language, is: "It is us, the Stz'uminus people, my respected friends." In recognizing the importance of announcing who we are, where we come from, and our reasons for making the journey, I introduce my research with a similar approach.

Oral Tradition and Cultural Continuation

The continuation of Indigenous cultures relies on oral tradition, as knowledge, history, and teachings are passed down through spoken word and lived experiences. The Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) confirms this transmission as both an intergenerational and interpersonal process based on the relationship formed by verbal interaction; the past, present, and future is connected through human voice rather than written word (Volume 4, Chapter 3), thus forming an oral tradition. As explained by Deloria Jr. (1997), every human society has a set of stories that frame its identity; and, in Indigenous populations, oral tradition is "the non-Western, tribal equivalent of science" (p. 36, para. 1). Ocean-going canoe journeys are among the many identity-framing events common to oral traditions within Pacific Northwest Indigenous cultures; Tribal Journeys is an annual modern-day Indigenous canoe journey wherein nations and tribes are culturally renewed.

Culture is not something that occurs independently from everyday life or simply within it; culture *is* life. It is who we are, regardless of whom we are. Culture is an ever-changing process derived from the things we do, events we take part in, people we interact with, choices we make, and decisions that impact us. Persistent attempts by dominant cultures to assimilate Indigenous peoples have caused historic trauma and have had a devastating intergenerational effect on the continuation of Indigenous cultures.

Without cultural remembering, there is no cultural knowledge, nothing to pass on to next generations, nothing to teach young people and nothing to use as social resources in times of crisis. Without shared cultural knowledge, there are no societies, just groups of culturally orphaned individuals unable to create their shared future. (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004, p. 41, para. 2)

Kw'umut Lelum Child and Family Services

Kw'umut Lelum Child and Family Services is a society that facilitates family continuity for each of its Indigenous youths by providing support for children, parents, families, and social workers involved in the child's guardianship. The agency is committed to the overall well-being of approximately 70 children, *Kw'umut* being the Hul'qumi'num word for "raising and taking care of a living being" while *lelum* means "house." Kw'umut Lelum is located on Snuneymuxw First Nation land in Nanaimo, and although there are several Coast Salish nations and tribes on the Northwest Coast, the society is specifically dedicated to nine member nations on Vancouver Island: Halalt, Lake Cowichan, Lyackson, Malahat, Penelakut, Qualicum, Snaw-naw-as, Snuneymuxw, and Stz'uminus. "Respecting children's right to live with dignity" is Kw'umut Lelum's motto, as guided by the *Snuw'uy'ulh*, a Coast Salish system of teachings and beliefs that focus on family, community, and sacredness of culture (<http://www.kwumut.org/>).

As explained by Executive Director William Yoachim (Sqwulutsutun), under the government's delegation process, Kw'umut Lelum is at the C4 stage which means the agency carries files that are Continuing Custody Orders (CCOs), so the children are permanent wards until the age of 19. All live in extended family (foster) homes or group homes, and Yoachim describes the young people as those who "have been permanently removed from their parents and are somewhat disconnected from their community and culture" (personal communication, March 30, 2010). He says displacement from family can cause separation from culture and that as an agency for youth and *hwuhwilmuhw* (First Nations people), Kw'umut Lelum needed to lead its children down a path towards culture and community. With a goal of connecting and reconnecting young people to culture through a shared experience, the agency selected 18 youths to participate in the 2010 Tribal Journeys, a 12-day Indigenous canoe journey from Ladysmith, British Columbia to Neah Bay, Washington. Many of the youths had participated the previous summer when Kw'umut Lelum's first canoe "family" was formed for the 20th annual celebration.

Snuw'uy'ulh

Snuw'uy'ulh is the traditional teaching model of the Coast Salish peoples, wherein truths and rules are passed down by Elders, known as *Sul'eluhw* in the Hul'qumi'num language, to guide an individual through the various stages of life from before birth until after death (Paige, 2009, p. 1). It is based on the concept of respect, cultivating not only a sense of self and identity, but identity within a collective cultural community (Paige, 2009, p. 81). Snuw'uy'ulh states that children are held in the highest regard, their identities are strengthened with ancestral knowledge shared by adults and Elders and through environmental connections with the land, water, and air (Snuneymuxw First Nation, n.d., p. 5). In direct dialogue with Coast Salish *Sul'eluhw*, Paige

(2009) discovered that some Elders believe younger generations aren't paying proper attention to Snuw'uy'ulh and that this breakdown in communication can, and should, be repaired (p. 82).

Tribal Journeys is a modern-day means of elevating interaction between Elders and youth, which in essence, facilitates a time and space to establish and restore some of the Snuw'uy'ulh values.

Research Question

While participating in Tribal Journeys 2009, I noticed the journey had a profound impact on the Kw'umut Lelum youths; some did not want to be there when it began, yet did not want to leave when it was over. It was the first traditional Indigenous canoe journey for most, and when reuniting to reflect on it more than seven months later, I was astonished at the level of excitement of the youths. It was as if the journey had just ended, still in the forefront of their minds and on the tips of their tongues. It was apparent these young people shared an unbreakable bond that time could not touch, and, in that moment, I knew that Tribal Journeys was exceptional. But why? What made this experience so compelling and different from others? On that memorable spring evening, I was inspired to learn more about the phenomenon that is Tribal Journeys.

Although the need to safeguard and pass on teachings and traditions are well-documented in existing literature, I was unable to uncover any comprehensive academic studies on the link to youth, adults, and Elders by way of Indigenous canoe journeys. That is how I arrived at my research question: In what ways can Indigenous canoe journeys, particularly Tribal Journeys, enable communication of ancestral teachings and traditions, particularly to the Kw'umut Lelum youth? In exploring these possibilities with cultural continuity in mind, it became my goal to produce an evocative, indeterminate research paper that creates a new foundation of knowledge and opens the door to further questions in this area of study.

The Indigenous Research Paradigm

Mainstream western academia only recently accepted Indigenous research as its own paradigm, separate from colonial discourses. In *Research is Ceremony*, Wilson (2008) outlines a specific Indigenous research paradigm and its interrelated concepts. With regard to the evolution of Indigenous research, I am especially cognizant of the era in which some non-Indigenous individuals emerged with the tendency to claim expertise in researching Indigenous peoples (p. 49). As a non-Indigenous person conducting research in Indigenous communities, I can never see “through the eyes of the colonized” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 2, para. 2), but I can ensure the virtues of my process reflect those of the Indigenous research paradigm.

The Indigenous research paradigm consists of an ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology, which Wilson (2008) visualizes as equal interrelated parts of a circle symbolizing the flow of ideas (p. 70). As ontology is the nature of reality, he claims an Indigenous ontology may contain multiple realities because objects are not as important as relationships to them (Wilson, 2008, p. 73). Next is Indigenous epistemology; in addition to being a fluid ‘way of knowing’ that comes from generational teachings through stories (Hart, 2010, p. 8), it is made up of systems of knowledge based on several relationships including those that are spiritual, interpersonal, environmental, and intrapersonal (Wilson, 2008, p. 74). With Indigenous axiology, the researcher is ethically bound to those relationships and, rather than separating the self from the subject, is part of the research (Wilson, 2008, p. 77). Lastly, Wilson (2008) claims that an Indigenous methodology is a process based on the axiology of relational accountability; it requires the researcher to respect all relationships and expects that the knowledge received will be practically applied (Hart, 2010, p. 9).

Terminology

Although the majority of canoe families who participate in Tribal Journeys are from the Pacific Northwest, canoes from Greenland, Hawaii, Japan, and New Zealand have participated. For this reason, I refer to *Indigenous peoples* when making inclusive references, recognizing that the imperial experiences of populations differ and are not collective (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 6). Canada defines the country's Aboriginal peoples as individuals who are Indian (Status and Non-status), Inuit, and Métis (Constitution Act, 1982, s 35); however, as most of my research took place within the territories of various First Nations (Canada) or Native American nations (United States), I prefer to specify each by name or as a nation or tribe. Furthermore, I use the word *community* when referring to Indigenous lands instead of *reserve* or *reservation*; and I refer to interviewees as *participants* and interviews as *conversations*.

Connecting Self and Study

A month before my 37th birthday, I met my cousin for the first time after she had recently moved from Trinidad to Vancouver, British Columbia. My father's side of the family is from Trinidad in the West Indies while my mother's side is English and French-Canadian from Quebec. Over dinner, my cousin and I began talking about family, including aunties, uncles, and numerous cousins in Trinidad, most of whom I had never met. Not knowing much about my grandparents, I began asking questions and she enlightened me about an eccentric grandmother from Venezuela. I had always known about my "Spanish roots" but having never questioned them, had not realized they were so defined.

"Oh no," said my cousin, "She's *my* grandma, but not *really* yours." An uncharacteristic calmness washed over me as I excused myself from the table for a moment in anticipation of the

story that would come next. My cousin knew it was too late to avoid the long-buried truth that my biological grandmother was a well-kept family secret. Why? Because *my* grandmother was not Spanish in any way; she was an Indian lady—East Indian—with whom my Scottish grandfather had an affair during a hunting trip. She was young and she was poor, but even more opprobrious in early 1900's Trinidad: her skin was brown and she was pregnant with an 'illegitimate' child. "By the way," my cousin noted, "She is still alive."

Uncertain about what to do with my newfound ethnicity, I flew to Trinidad a few months later to meet my grandmother and other relatives. It was a necessary experience but inevitably, a cultural disconnection remained when I returned, partly because little had ever been established. The following year, my grandmother died, and my long-time interest in cultures shifted towards connections and continuity. Can one reclaim a culture that was never known? How important is where we come from in relation to who we are; and, regardless of biological associations or upbringing, is it ever too late to recover and impart tradition? These are questions I started asking as my own realities prompted similar curiosities that propel this study.

My participation. In 2009, I was invited to participate in Tribal Journeys in the capacity of an adult volunteer for Kw'umut Lelum Child and Family Services. I was privy to taking part in this event due to my role as an RCMP Civilian Member police dispatcher and volunteer Auxiliary Constable, invited by a Nanaimo RCMP constable who was in First Nations Community Policing at the time. During both the 2009 and 2010 Tribal Journeys, the police officer and I assisted Kw'umut Lelum staff in chaperoning the activities of the youth and being available to them in the absence of their guardians. By becoming part of the Kw'umut Lelum canoe family, I received the gift of participation that made this research possible.

Chapter Two: The Support Crew

Since pre-contact times, Pacific Northwest waterways have been Indigenous highways and canoes were the vehicles of transportation; however, unlike the present-day Tribal Journeys, there were no support boats for the paddlers, no one setting up camp, and no elaborate feasts awaiting the arriving families. For this reason, we are thankful for our land crews, support boats, host communities, volunteers, and other advocates of Tribal Journeys. In research, we also need to acknowledge our support crew, the ones whose contributions enhance our academic journeys, the people who have come before us and some who are currently studying alongside of us.

Literature Review

This literature review is shaped by a theoretical framework centred on relationality within the Indigenous research paradigm and the integration of interactionist concepts relating to self, identity, and social identity. Four constructs that impact communication of ancestral knowledge are explored with regard to Tribal Journeys: a modern-day rite of passage, relational interactions, traditions and teachings, and the *great canoe*. The context of this thesis considers the works of three Indigenous scholars: Shawn Wilson (2008), Margaret Kovach (2009), and Michael Hart (2010), who outline a suggested approach to Indigenous research. The symbolic interactionist perspective of sociologists Blumer (1969), Goffman (1959), and Mead (1934) are taken into account, as meaning-making processes are viewed through relational and symbolic lenses to discover which interactions facilitate cultural communication. In presenting findings, concepts of interpretive interactionism (Denzin, 2001) and performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003) are applied, and evolving criteria of modern ethnography are acknowledged (Richardson, 2000).

In addition to the peer-reviewed, empirical data referenced throughout this study, it is important to give ample regard to the teachings within oral traditions shared through alternative mediums. This research paper draws on the written work of specialists whose compositions are specific to the Northwest coastal communities in which Tribal Journeys takes place: Amoss (1981) looks at the evolving position of Elders; Thom (2005) analyzes place and naming; Suttles (1987) takes an ecological approach; and Kirk (1986) examines change and tradition. Artist David Neel's (1995) *The Great Canoes* is the only non-fiction literature I found that specifically highlights modern-day Indigenous canoe journeys, particularly Tribal Journeys. Aside from a handful of short films and independent video productions, other major works exclusive to Tribal Journeys are in three documentaries: (1) *Canoe Way: The Sacred Journey*, (2) *Qatuwas: People Gathering Together*, and (3) *Song on the Water: The Return of the Great Canoes*.

Modern-day rite of passage. Tribal Journeys is a modern-day Indigenous canoe journey in the Pacific Northwest. The origins of Indigenous canoe travel dates back to time immemorial which is why some people refer to the modern-day Tribal Journeys as a *movement* or *revival* and a *spiritual* or *sacred* event. With this in mind, Van Gennep's (1960) study of rites of passage must be considered when examining what Tribal Journeys is—and isn't. Drawing on this work is Campbell (2008), who applies the rites of passage concepts into a journey of three stages that one could argue are mirrored by Tribal Journeys.

Relational interactions. Canada's Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) report of 1996 distinguishes Elders as cherished, respected, and spiritual individuals who have acquired sacred knowledge from the Creator and wisdom through experience; it outlines how imperative Elders are in passing on traditional teachings (Volume 4, Chapter 3). *Echoing of the*

Elders, a documentary produced by Cook, White, Blanchet-Cohen, & Hildebrand (2000), offers a Coast Salish perspective on Elder and youth relations in reclaiming, preserving, and carrying on traditions and teachings. *Place* is another significant relationship, as highlighted by Kirk (1986), examined by Thom (2005) and Suttles (1987), and illustrated by Cresswell (2004).

Traditions and teachings. Naming ceremonies are traditions within several Pacific Northwest Indigenous cultures that are connected to personal and social identity, as highlighted in Everson's (2000) Master's thesis, Thom's (2005) dissertation, and by Brown and Brown (2009). Protocol is also an important ritual within Tribal Journeys that impacts identity through social interaction, as nations and tribes celebrate indigeneity through traditions, rituals, and symbolic ceremonies (Blumer, 1969; Mead 1959; Goffman, 1934). Meantime, language has been identified as an area that needs to be preserved, protected, and practiced in order to maintain and continue traditions, as shown in a recent report released by the First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Council (FPHLCC, 2010).

The great canoe. It is imperative to acknowledge the essential role of cedar in the Pacific Northwest (Stewart, 1995) in order to properly examine a tree's transformation into a "live" vessel of transportation. The canoe plays a significant role in this journey and must be explored both symbolically and performatively (Vannini, 2009b, p. 15) in order to understand its ritualistic nature. Milligan (1998) explores relationships between people and *built environments* (p. 4) while Vannini and Vannini (2008) explore the meaning within the medium. Canoes are historical icons, indigenous as the First Peoples of the Northwest Coast and the primary means for travel in a pre-contact era; they are liaisons between the land and water and embodied "technics" (Vannini, 2009a), capable of passing down knowledge and traditions.

Chapter Three: Choosing the Right Route

Since Tribal Journeys began, a different nation or tribe has taken on the tremendous role of being the main host. Although there are several stopover communities that provide food and shelter, the main host community is the ultimate destination. We know ahead of time where to go, but how do we get there? Based on the community each hails from, canoe families depart from different locations and choose from various routes; some take longer than others and it is simply a matter of what suits each canoe family. Eventually, all participating nations and tribes gather at the end for days of celebrations. Like a canoe journey, there are several ways to reach the destination in a research project. Once we figure out where we want to go, we must follow certain protocols and determine which methods best accommodate our goals and objectives.

Method

This ethnographic study is a descriptive and performative evaluation of the cultural, communicative impact of Tribal Journeys particularly on 18 Indigenous youths as chosen by Kw'umut Lelum and with whom I journeyed from July 11 to July 23, 2010. Participant-observation is dependent on human interaction to depict phenomenological experiences, and performance ethnography “values intimacy and involvement as forms of understanding” (Denzin, 2003, p. 16, para. 2). Through conversations with adults and youth observations, my research explores the ways that Tribal Journeys can enable communication of ancestral teachings and traditions. My data collection and analysis methods are guided by principles of the Indigenous research paradigm (Hart, 2010; Wilson, 2008), and the combination of stories and knowledge allows method and meaning to be relationally recounted (Kovach, 2009, p. 94).

Adult participant conversations. This thesis includes data from primary interviews that I conducted with 18 adult participants, 13 conversations transpiring during Tribal Journeys 2010 including one that involved two participants. All were conducted in the form of non-structured information exchanges that I recorded with a digital audio device and personally transcribed thereafter. “An open-structured conversational method shows respect for the participant’s story” (Kovach, 2009, p. 124, para. 1); thus, most dialogues began about a specific aspect of canoe journeys and evolved naturally, rather than from a specific set of predetermined questions. I entered the journey with an open mind and relied on my interactions to guide my invitations for participant conversations instead of pre-selecting people to interview. All adults of the Kw’umut Lelum canoe family were made aware of my study either before or at the onset of the journey.

The remaining five participant conversations took place after Tribal Journeys 2010, also in line with my previous process of selection led by shared moments and interactions. Three were non-structured information exchanges that took place on Vancouver Island, and again, I recorded each with a digital audio device then personally transcribed them. For the other two, no audio recording devices were utilized. One was a semi-structured Email exchange in place of a scheduled face-to-face conversation pre-empted by snowfall; the other was an unstructured in-person conversation after meeting by chance at an Indigenous conference in Hawaii.

Of my 18 adult participants, 17 have participated in Tribal Journeys in some capacity. With the exception of one participant, all are Indigenous persons including four Respected Elders fluent in the Hul’qumi’num language. Recorded conversations totalled 400 minutes, the shortest at seven minutes and the longest at just over an hour. I received varied participant responses and fulfilled all recommendations for amendment prior to my data evaluation. All Indigenous

participants spoke from their own knowledge, and none were asked to speak on behalf of the nations they hailed from. The sole participant not involved in Tribal Journeys is instrumental in coordinating other Indigenous canoe journeys upon which I was able to make comparisons.

Consents, anonymity, and ethics. Each adult participant was given the option of anonymity in the presentation of this study; however, all agreed verbally and by way of informed and signed consent to be named and allow their comments to be attributed accordingly in written form. I believe this enhances the validity of my research; and, as one participant pointed out, it also fosters self-accountability for participants. The author of *Research is Ceremony* says: “In a dominant system way of doing those ethics reviews, you are not allowed to name participants and stuff. But I think that in an Indigenous research paradigm, it is almost unethical not to name them,” (Wilson, 2008, p. 115, para. 4). Furthermore, in my approved Royal Roads University Request for Ethical Review, approval is granted to Executive Director William Yoachim to speak on behalf Kw’umut Lelum as the governing agency for the youth participants.

Observations of youth. In addition to the stories of adult participants, I kept a record of my observations of the 18 youth participants during Tribal Journeys 2010: their conversations, actions, experiences, and interactions among themselves, with the Elders and adult leaders, with the canoe and the environment, and with people they met along the way. I had obtained appropriate permissions from all the youths’ guardians prior to the journey which included the condition that under no circumstance would the youths’ names and personal information be disclosed in this paper. I documented most of my observations in handwritten field notes, self-dictating the remainder into a recorder—142 minutes—then transcribing these narrations.

Other fieldwork. Along with my respective binders of adult participant conversations and observations of the youth is a folder of information that I collected prior to, during, and after Tribal Journeys 2010. This includes handwritten notes I made while attending a skippers' meeting, handouts from Kw'umut Lelum, booklets and pamphlets from Makah Nation, media releases, and public internet communications. I also retained field notes that I jotted on paper while on or in the canoe and on the support boat; I stored them with my audio recorder in a waterproof case which I kept on my person at all times during the 2010 Tribal Journey.

Evaluation of data. When it came time to evaluate my participant conversations and observations, I felt guided by interactionist theories of traditional western academics while trying to remain true to the Indigenous paradigm. Wilson's (2008) reminder was reassuring in that Indigenous ways of knowing are relational and, therefore, cannot be viewed solely through one lens (p. 58). When it comes to analysis, Wilson (2008) informs: "Accuracy does not play as big a part in describing the phenomenon but is more important in describing the set of relationships that make up the phenomenon" (p. 122, para. 2). This meant I needed to identify relationships within and because of Tribal Journeys and ascertain how each was meaningful.

I studied my data to identify both relational and symbolic constructs as well as patterns of behaviours that linked the adults and youth to each other, to Tribal Journeys, and to specific teachings and traditions within it. I recorded all emergent themes and subthemes; and, when discerning what to present, I focused on three major criteria: (1) frequency, (2) relevancy, and (3) information source. In determining the most significant data in relation to my research question, consideration was given to themes that surfaced most often and by multiple participants. Input from Elders carried more weight than my own observative interpretations, as did transformative

manifestations of the youth. The end result was a qualitative synthesis of four interrelated theoretical constructs that culturally impact the individual and collective identities of Tribal Journey participants.

Performance ethnography. Ethnography is the storytelling of a specific culture's material existence and meaning systems (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 16); performance ethnography "simultaneously writes and studies performances showing how people enact cultural meanings in their daily lives" (Denzin, 2001, p. 15, para. 3), or in this case, a specific event. It generates "moral texts that move from the personal to the political, from the local to the historical and the cultural" (Denzin, 2003, p. x, para. 3). Through storytelling, poetry, graphics, and dialogue, this study follows Richardson's (2000) idea of trading in the neutrality and disengagement of traditional ethnography for an empirical form of art expressed through writing (p. 253). Richardson (2000) recognizes that modern-day ethnographers who break the norms of mainstream academia may face challenges as they continually recreate criteria for evaluating this type of work (p. 254). To share the Tribal Journeys phenomenon on paper, the story must be told in a similarly experiential and performative manner as the journey itself; story and knowing cannot be separated and is therefore considered both meaning and method (Kovach, 2009, p. 94).

Presentation. With a similar open-mindedness as my data collection, I allowed stories of others to unfold within my own Tribal Journeys experience, creating a "poetic, nuanced" (Denzin, 2003, p. 38, para. 2) narrative. I chose a performative approach that begins with metaphorical chapter headings and preambles to reflect the major components of both a research project and canoe journey. In an exploration of discoveries that incorporates both *findings* and *discussion* thesis requirements, I use a first-person "evocative voice" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.

283) in the present tense to weave relevant words from Indigenous languages into an otherwise English narrative. Humphreys (2005) endorses the first-person for “its ‘I-witness’ nature” (p. 852, para. 2), claiming present-tense narratives enhance insightful reflexivity by ethnographers (p. 852). Drawing on Indigenous research principles and theoretical constructs, my discoveries are delivered in a story that jumps back and forth in time as common to performance texts (Denzin, 2001, p. 19). In what Denzin (2001) dubs a “narrative collage” (p. 19, para. 2), I employ a present-tense chronological description of Tribal Journeys 2010 while injecting past-tense deviations to highlight concepts from both Indigenous specialists and mainstream theorists.

Uy’shqwaluwun. Much like the inseparable relationship between story and knowing was a teaching I learned from a Stz’uminus Elder during Tribal Journeys 2010. Willie Seymour is one of the participants of this study, and throughout my research, I made every effort to uphold this discipline as explained to me:

Uy'shqwaluwun means having a good mind and a good heart. Speak from your mind, speak from your heart: uy'shqwaluwun. It's hard to separate the two, the mind and the heart; they are one. (Willie Seymour)

Although I am not Indigenous, I endeavoured to reflect my commitment to the concept of uy’shqwaluwun in conducting research within Indigenous communities and in presenting the cultural relevance of Tribal Journeys in this study.

Chapter Four: An Exploration of Discoveries

After my first Tribal Journey in 2009, I submitted a short article for the Snuneymuxw First Nation newsletter. Although it was an accurate overview of the journey, it barely scratched the surface of Tribal Journeys and did not depict any of its teachings, lessons, relationships, and experiences. To understand the significance of Tribal Journeys, we must learn more about

particular aspects of the journey and we must pay attention to the culturally compelling stories that impact its participants, especially the youth. Now that we have chosen our route and have received permission to leave the shore, we can embark on this exploration of discoveries.

The Journey

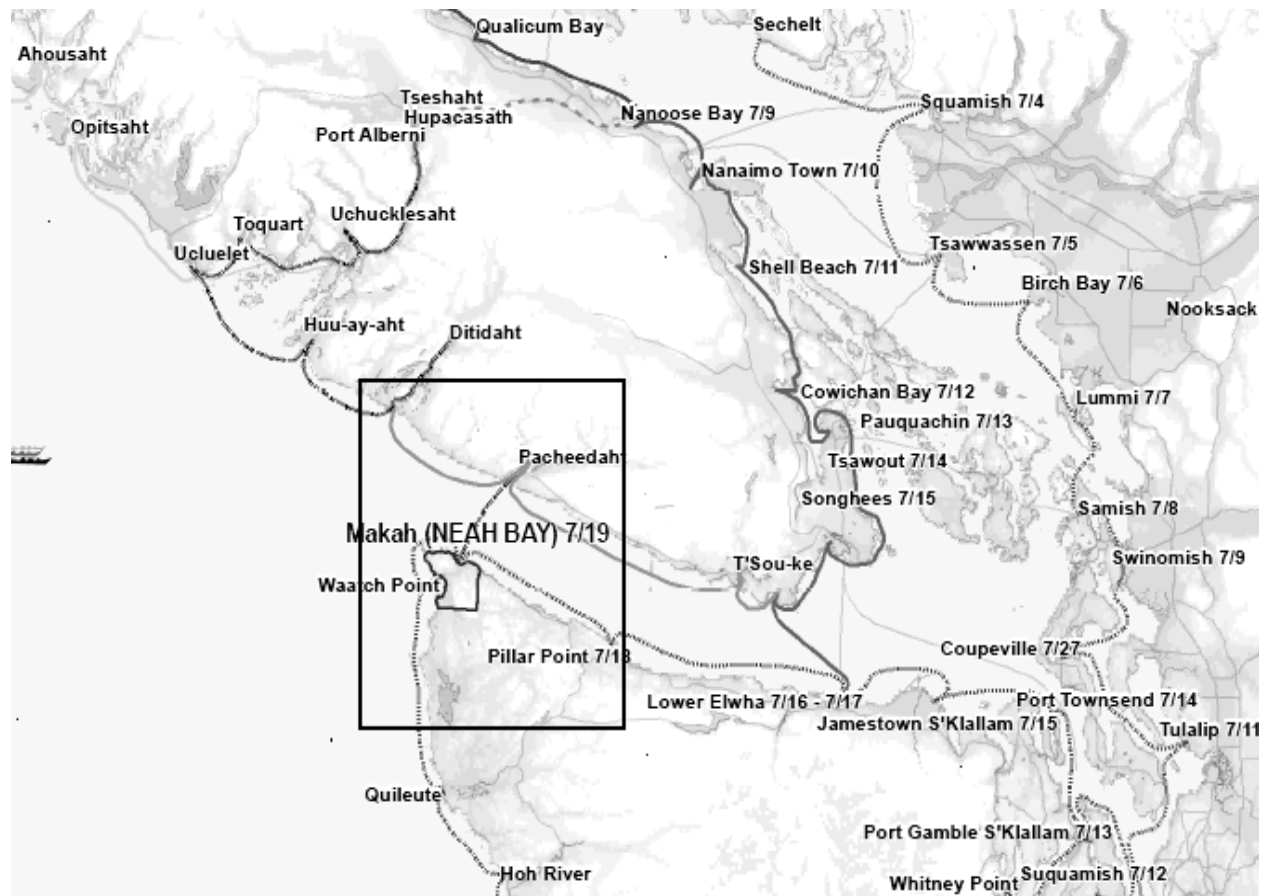


Figure 1. Route Map for Tribal Journeys 2010 “Paddle to Makah.” Adapted from <http://paddletomakah.org/>. Copyright by Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, reprinted with permission.

July 11, 2010. Half a dozen canoes converged this afternoon at Shell Beach (Thuq’min) in Ladysmith, home of Stz’uminus First Nation, the sun radiating proudly in their honour. Some of the Kw’umut Lelum youths paddled out to greet the arriving guests and to bring them to the shore, a gesture often extended by the stopover host community. Today is the beginning of our

canoe family's journey as we host others who have chosen the East Vancouver Island route for Tribal Journeys 2010, *Paddle to Makah: Journey to the Beginning of the World*. This year, there are five different Tribal Journeys routes to Neah Bay, Washington, home of the Makah Nation.

Makah Peoples = q^widičča?a·t̄x = "People of the Cape"

The two routes in Canada flank the east and west coasts of Vancouver Island, while the other three originate in Washington State. Our canoe family will paddle 15 to 50 kilometres each day until we reach Neah Bay, over 200 kilometres away. The Kw'umut Lelum canoe family is made up of 43 members taking part in the journey, although there are many behind the scenes who dedicated time, money, and hard work to bring this journey to fruition. As for the youths, 13 are returning after participating in Kw'umut Lelum's first Tribal Journey in 2009, plus five who are brand new to the experience. All but a few arrived before today's dinner and protocol, the two customary events held on the nights when canoes land in one of the host communities.

* * *

Tribal Journeys is an annual ocean-going canoe journey that involves thousands of people paddling to a pre-determined destination in Canada or the United States, canoe families sharing Indigenous traditions of the Pacific Northwest along the way. At the end, participants gather in the community of the hosting nation or tribe for up to a week of ceremonial protocols, feasting, and traditional celebrations. Several people are instrumental in the origin story of Tribal Journeys which has taken place every year since 1993, although the 1989 *Paddle to Seattle* is widely recognized as the inaugural journey. Thirteen canoes participated in this expedition as part of the Washington State Centennial celebrations in what is often referred to as the first time since the 1800's that Indigenous canoes have journeyed in such a way (Satiacum & Celletti,

2009). In actuality, however, the renewal began in 1986 when Frank Brown (Athalis) of Bella Bella, British Columbia resurrected the Indigenous canoe journey for the Heiltsuk Nation. He explains that while a student in the Outdoor Education Management Program at Capilano College in North Vancouver, he also worked at the Vancouver Friendship Centre. One day, the Friendship Centre received a letter from Mike Harcourt, the mayor at the time, about the City of Vancouver hosting Expo 1986, and the theme was transportation and communications.

I thought it would be very appropriate to show the first form of transportation in communications and that was the Glwa, or ocean-going canoe. So, while I was in college, I wrote numerous papers in preparation to go back home and organize the carving of a canoe and paddle it down for Expo 86. (Frank Brown)

The Heiltsuk Nation paddled from Bella Bella to Vancouver, British Columbia for the 1986 World Exposition, sparking a modern resurgence of ancestral mobility for the tribes and nations of the Northwest Coast. In addition, Expo 86 was showcasing a 50-foot canoe built by artist Bill Reid and other Haida carvers. After Expo was over, the Haida paddled the *Loo Taas*, or Wave-eater, back to Haida Gwaii; then, in 1989, the Haida paddled the *Loo Taas* to Alaska and completed a journey up the Seine River to Paris, France (Neel, 1995, p. 2). It was the same year as the Paddle to Seattle, in which Emmett Oliver of the Quinault Nation was an organizer in Washington, with the help of Joseph Waterhouse who had witnessed the arrival of Frank Brown and the Heiltsuk Nation while at Expo 86. Oliver requested the state allow Canadian canoe families to participate in Washington's 100th anniversary, and despite being denied, invited them to attend anyway (Satiacum & Celletti, 2009). Frank Brown tells me: "Not only did our carvers carve canoes, but we were all brought back together with our ceremonial protocols that have always been associated with the canoe travel and had basically gone dormant." He adds that part of the beauty is that none of the nations or tribes owns the rights to Indigenous canoe journeys.

Frank Brown and his crew from Bella Bella travelled up to 1000 kilometres for the 1989 Paddle to Seattle in Suquamish, Washington. During the celebrations, he committed to keeping contemporary canoe journeys alive by inviting nations and tribes to build canoes and paddle to Waglisla (Bella Bella) in 1993, in what ended up being a pivotal gesture.

The task was for participants to enter into a renegotiation with the past in order to bring back or 'refind' their traditions. In this way, carvers relearned and recreated the dying art form of canoe building, while pullers discovered the amount of physical and mental preparedness necessary to undertake such an arduous journey. Elders were consulted throughout this process in order to try to discern protocol associated with canoes in the past. Rules were established... 'canoe culture' was born. (Everson, 2000, p. 31, para. 2)

Members of the Quileute Tribe of La Push, Washington were the first to accept the challenge and presented Brown with a paddle, promising to return to it at the next gathering in four years (Neel, 1995, p. 3). In Ahousaht, Canada's now Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn Atleo wanted a Nuu-chah-nulth canoe to participate and said, "I didn't know if we even had one. All I could think of was the Elders building dugout canoes on the beach." Atleo inquired with a family who had an old canoe stored under their house with prickly bushes grown all over it.

I asked permission to use the canoe and held a gathering with the Elders to support going to Bella Bella. The canoe had to be prepared for the journey as well as ourselves, establishing protocols and that the event is healthy, free of drugs and alcohol. It caught on with the young people and each Bighouse in the family structure chose which of their family would go. (Shawn Atleo)

Sure enough, in the summer of 1993, the Ahousaht canoe became one of 23 canoes from 30 nations and tribes to paddle to the shores of Bella Bella.

Elders wept as we brought the canoes in to ancient and accustomed beaches along the way. They saw the raised sails and remembered the family journeys of their youth... "You are a gift to us," they said. "We never thought we'd see the great canoes again." (Heidlebaugh in Neel, 1995, p. 127, para. 2)

The Heiltsuk people hosted approximately 3000 participants for the Bella Bella celebration which was named *Qatuwas*, meaning “people gathering together.” The Qatuwas festival of 1993 marked the revival of ocean-going canoe travel in the Pacific Northwest which has remained an annual event. One year later, Musgamagw Tsawataineuk member Frank Nelson (Yekawid) of Gilford Island, British Columbia led the way to what is now known as Tribal Journeys, with a paddle to Victoria, B.C., as part of the Commonwealth Games (Neel, 1995, p. 4).

Meanwhile in Washington, Dakota/Coast Salish cultural leader Philip Harold Red Eagle and his mentor, the late Tom Heidlebaugh, were busy compiling the teachings of Quileute traditionalist David Forlines, also now deceased, in an initiative called the *Full Circle Youth Paddle* in Washington (Satiacum & Celletti, 2009). It incorporated “The Ten Rules of the Canoe,” originally developed for the Northwest Experiential Education Conference of 1990, which encompasses a commitment to self, to others, and to the journey (Neel, 1995, p. 133). Red Eagle devised a copper ring ceremony wherein people promise to follow the ten rules in exchange for a necklace bearing a ring that symbolizes a circle of canoe people; a coloured story bead is also given out to indicate the theme or story of each Tribal Journey that an individual participates in (Satiacum & Celletti, 2009). The copper ring and bead ceremony has become a contemporary tradition within Tribal Journeys since 1995, with Red Eagle personally trying to reach as many participants as he can, particularly the youth. While an increasing amount of people are becoming aware of the ten rules, all participants know that Tribal Journeys is a “no drugs, no alcohol” event, and that under no circumstance is the canoe ever called a *boat*.

For participating canoe families from numerous Indigenous communities, the evolution of Tribal Journeys has created a collective identity referred to as the “canoe nation.” Modern-

day Indigenous canoe journeys replicate the transportation and communication systems of the First Peoples of the Pacific Northwest that were eventually superseded by contemporary mobility; in doing so, an intrinsic cultural connection is established.

Where canoes were once obsolete vehicles rendered useless by modern transportation methods, they have been transformed into symbols of an ancient tradition that serve to legitimize the existence and continuation of Aboriginal peoples. Although it is recognized that canoes have endured a discontinuous past, they are accepted as *real* connectors to an ancestor's way of life. (Everson, 2000 p. 32, para. 3)

Much preparation was required before canoes navigated the ancient highways, as there were no support boats or land crews to transport food, clothing, shelter, and people; everything went in the canoe and everyone had to work as a team in order to travel safely. Knowledge of currents, wind direction, ocean swells, and local landmarks was relied upon, and came from personal experience with the land and water, and understanding their intricacies; in addition to the size of the canoe and crew, these factors dictated how long a canoe trip would take (Kirk, 1986, pp. 117-118). Respected Elder Luschiim Arvid Charlie, a member of Cowichan Tribes, is no stranger to the sea; he remembers over fifty years ago when there were no powerboats to create waves or to share the sound of their motors. Closing his eyes to recall the experience, he tells me how one could listen to the sounds of nature: "Birds and ducks. You hear all kinds of things whether it's early morning or late evening. It was so much different. Seals, sea lions, the wind, the water."

* * *

With sticky watermelon wedges in hand, canoe families clap and cheer from the bleachers as Willie Seymour (Qwulthutstun) speaks of the world's unsuccessful attempts to eliminate Indigenous people. It is our first post-dinner protocol on the journey and being a stopover community in the middle of the eastern Vancouver Island route, there are only a half

dozen canoes at this early stage. Willie is a Stz'uminus First Nation Respected Elder; he has been blessed with the gift of speaking and we are fortunate to have him as part of the Kw'umut Lelum canoe family for Tribal Journeys 2010. When Willie finishes welcoming visitors to Shell Beach, his powerful voice is replaced by the beat of a single drum as Respected Elder Beverly David (Suliquye') leads the circle of Kw'umut Lelum youths and adults in song, the circle signifying unity. Beverly, also known as Buffi, is a Stz'uminus First Nation member as well, and has been teaching the youth Hul'qumi'num songs in preparation for the journey, including our introduction song, *Stz'uminus Mustimuhw*. "Buffi is so knowledgeable on the Snuw'uy'ulh, the Indian way, the First Nations way of life," says Kw'umut Lelum Executive Director William (Bill) Yoachim. "She is so culturally intuitive you can never quit learning with her." Bill says the Kw'umut Lelum canoe family is privileged to start the journey with these two Elders, and a third who will join later on. Their wisdom and knowledge is invaluable to the youths.

* * *

In *Echoing of the Elders*, a documentary produced by Cook, White, Blanchet-Cohen, & Hildebrand (2000), William White describes Elders as cultural teachers traditionally trained by their parents and grandparents, and who encourage children to be strong and to know they are loved. Men and women, Elders know the rituals and ceremonies, when and how to behave, and have an understanding of values (RCAP, 1996, Volume 4, Chapter 3). In the video, several youths are asked to define what they think an Elder is. Here are some of their responses:

Youth 1: "Someone that talks to younger ones; teaches a lot to youth."

Youth 2: "Someone loving, caring, and understanding; someone that can help me."

Youth 3: "Somebody that's older than you and has more experience with everything."

Youth 4: "Somebody really old and that's related to grandma or some far distance."

Youth 5: "Someone who knows a lot of heritage about what happened in the past."

Youth 6: "Someone who everyone respects and looks up to all the time."

(Cook, White, Blanchet-Cohen, & Hildebrand, 2000)

Indeed, Elders are all of these things; and, although not always *old*, it is common to refer to Elders as such, as they are blessed with the insight that often comes with age. Chief Dan George once said: “The young and the old are closest to life, they love every minute dearly; if the very old will remember, the very young will listen” (George & Hirnschall, 2005, p. 46).

In an interview for *First Nations Cultural Heritage and Law* (Bell & Napoleon, 2008), Luschiim Arvid Charlie compares Elders to libraries of knowledge, as they are the carriers of oral history (p. viii). They are a vital link between youth and Indigenous teachings and traditions. But western modernization has impacted the position of Elders since pre-contact times; as economic foundations changed and native ideology was challenged, the value of Elders’ knowledge seemingly decreased and had less influence over the young people (Amoss, 1981, p. 235). This change over time should not be taken lightly as the Elders’ ancestral knowledge is the cornerstone of Indigenous identity. “If the culture is allowed to die, the identity of the people is buried with it” (RCAP, 1996, Volume 4, Chapter 3, section 3, para. 11). The familial bond that was broken by assimilation attempts, especially when Indigenous children were taken from their families and placed in residential schools, must continually be reinforced.

The *Elders’ Perspectives* section of the RCAP report (1996) urges community members to seek out the spiritual gifts of their Elders (Volume 4, Chapter 3), and Kw’umut Lelum has done so by inviting three Coast Salish Elders to lead their 2010 Tribal Journeys canoe family, and on whom the youth can rely for traditional wisdom. Like the Coast Salish Snuw’uy’ulh model, traditional wisdom is defined in the RCAP report (1996) as the process that demonstrates how and what should be done: “It embodies the values of the people in the lessons that are

taught. What is right and appropriate can be found in the teachings” (Volume 4, Chapter 3, section 3, para. 1). Respected Elder Florence James (Thiyaas) was the first Elder to become part of the Kw’umut Lelum canoe family. She had planned on participating in Tribal Journeys 2009 only until the stopover in her home community of Penelakut; but, despite having just one change of clothes and no sleeping bag, she completed the entire journey. She tells me it was a teaching that prompted her to continue, realizing that the youth not only required her guidance, but that as an Elder she learned not to leave work unfinished, not to quit once committing to something.

* * *

After protocol, the Kw’umut Lelum canoe family heads to Arnie and Freda Robinson’s property to finish setting up camp. Arnie (Hulth’b’tub) is the owner and captain of our 60 foot support boat, the *Scott Hill*, and Freda (Qwi’uminaat) is our canoe family’s primary skipper, her last name Sampson at the time. It is early evening now and the crimson sun hovers lazily over Shell Beach while the youths acquaint and reacquaint themselves with each other. A few go to school together but most are from various communities and live off-reserve, and Tribal Journeys is the occasion that unites them. Almost everyone is excited about embarking on this journey although a few are still uncertain, including one reluctant youth who eventually concedes, but only after carefully weighing the pros and cons. Bill Yoachim hands out red windbreaker jackets that were made for this journey, as well as grey sweat pants with bold, black “KL” letters on the backsides. The adults gather in a circle to discuss rules and expectations and we are reminded that this trip is all about the youth: “We will not neglect them, we will not let them go hungry, and we must protect them” (Bill Yoachim). We are all empowered by the journey that lies

ahead, and despite the 930 p.m. bedtime for the young people, we can still hear their whispering voices well past midnight.

July 12, 2011. It's a 5 a.m. start and our day begins with a presentation by some of the Kw'umut Lelum directors. Every youth is given a brand new paddle carved by Noel Brown of Snuneymuxw First Nation with help from some of the youths in the sanding and finishing stages. Eric Danielson is one of the Kw'umut Lelum foster parents and also a skipper on the journey; he tells me his friend donated some of the old growth cedar to Brown and the rest was gathered.

They didn't have quite enough wood to finish the paddles for each of the youths so Noel took them up in the mountain. You've got to go very high to get the yellow cedar and they found a spot. They collected up enough to finish off a paddle for each one of the youth for the Tribal Journeys. (Eric Danielson)

Having a hand in creating these paddles is an interaction that bears meaning beyond merely instilling a sense of pride within the Kw'umut Lelum youths. The paddle is a symbolic object that each individual has a relationship with; thus, they must be treated properly. "The meaning of objects for a person arises fundamentally out of the way they are defined to him by others" (Blumer, 1969, p. 11, para. 1), and in the case of paddles, they are to be treated like friends.

That paddle becomes part of you; it becomes your best friend and it may save your life. To throw your paddle around is like slapping your best friend around, your buddy that's going to save your life. You slap him around? No. You treat your paddle respectfully. (Luschiim Arvid Charlie)

Elder Luschiim Arvid Charlie has carved approximately 30 canoes and has paddled his whole life, including several years as a canoe racing skipper. He has been a part of the Cowichan canoe family for many Tribal Journeys and one of his cultural teachings that prepares youth for the journey is also common to most canoe families, including the Kw'umut Lelum youth. "They

learn at an early age not to put their paddle down with the blade to the ground,” Luschiim explains. “If you must touch the ground when you’re holding it, you put the handle down.”

After the youths receive their paddles, we prepare to leave Shell Beach. As Willie Seymour is from Stz’uminus First Nation, he blesses the canoe families as they depart from the shore, a common practice usually conducted by a Chief or member of the hosting tribe or nation. The rest of our Kw’umut Lelum crew is readying for our first paddle of this journey, watching from the shore in our red and black lifejackets as other canoes make their way towards the horizon. The two canoes from Bella Bella have cedar wreaths wrapped around their bows and it reminds me of our inaugural Tribal Journeys ceremony on this same beach a year ago. I recall how Willie spoke of the journey connecting the past and future while others emphasized a commitment to the youth. Elders sang and drummed and each participant was brushed with cedar boughs before we were sent off; onlookers observed and cheered after Kw’umut Lelum’s brand new canoe, the *Xpey’*, was also brushed with wet cedar boughs to bless its initial launch.

* * *

A few years before the decision was made to attend Tribal Journeys, Kw’umut Lelum director Kevin Frenchy provided the log for the *Xpey’* and Noel Brown was chosen as the carver. Although the canoe is called the “Long Life Maker,” the direct Hul’qumi’num-to-English translation of *Xpey’* is “Western Red Cedar;” together, these terms are representative of the vitality of cedar in Pacific Northwest nations and tribes. A species of *arbor vitae*, which is Latin for “tree of life” (Stewart, 1995, p. 24), the cedar tree has provided for Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast from birth until death: in ceremony, medicine, transport, shelter, and various material creations (Stewart, 1995, p. 18). This includes ocean-going dugout canoes like the ones

used in Tribal Journeys, which Stewart (1995) claims were “developed to such a degree of sophistication” (p. 48, para. 2), including “elaborate ornamentation” (Stewart, 1995, p. 57, para. 2) that may include a “painted totemic figure” (Stewart, 1995, p. 57, para. 2) added onto the bow.

Selecting a tree to carve into a canoe is a reverent process, although times have changed and standing trees aren’t plentiful like they used to be. “Aggressive logging in Coast Salish territories at the end of the nineteenth century brought down the most accessible forests of cedar” (Jennings, 2002, p. 87, para. 2). Elder Luschiim Arvid Charlie says that nowadays in the Cowichan Valley, old growth is so limited they often have to settle for whatever comes off the logging truck. But Luschiim remembers what it is like to select a standing tree, when a male or female tree could be chosen depending on the purpose and the preference of the family. “Yesteryear we were able to choose one that would have canoe grain somewhat intertwined and wouldn’t crack as easily as a real straight grain; it would have some knots on the bottom side” (Luschiim Arvid Charlie). Whether one or more people select the tree, it is always treated with the utmost respect, like a human being. Elder Willie Seymour explains that medicine people bless the tree and tell it what it is going to be, while a cushion of cedar boughs is prepared for its landing. The tree is then propped up to *season*, or dry, before it is carved and painted.

As the cedar is transformed into *the great canoe*, its creator(s), family, and paddlers enter into relationships with the living vessel. Freda Sampson says she learned to splash water on the head to wake it up before canoe races, letting the canoe know it is time to go. She says once in awhile she can even feel the canoe vibrating under her feet:

You know...
like *mmmmmmmm, mmmmmmmmm*
like something, the whole thing
is **alive**.

Freda tells me she's experienced this only twice in her many years of Tribal Journeys, exclaiming: "The canoe was vibrating because it was happy! It was happy."

Is the canoe alive? Yes, and there are ceremonies you do. For our family, it's done privately at the beginning of working on the canoe, of making the canoe. There's a cleansing ceremony after the building of the canoe and there's almost like an initiation ceremony or launching ceremony. (Luschiim Arvid Charlie)

For the Kw'umut Lelum canoe family, ceremonies began in 2009 after many of the youths helped prepare their vessel for Tribal Journeys, swinging an axe enthusiastically at the wood before Noel Brown began building the *Xpey'*; several youths had a hand in the carving process. This interaction with the cedar is a fundamental relationship, as the young people are part of the cedar's life as a tree and its transformation into a great *snuhwulh*, or "canoe" in Hul'qumi'num.

In her article on attachment to places, Milligan (1998) analyzes relationships between people and "built environments" (p. 4). In the case of Tribal Journeys, the canoe is not only a *built environment* but also an environment that some of the youths helped to build. The young people who participated in the inaugural Tribal Journeys, most of whom returned in 2010, helped create and shape the canoe's identity; in turn, the canoe helps shape the identity of the youths in a meaningful symbiotic relationship and through the journey it facilitates. Milligan (1998) says "places are meaningful spaces" (p. 6, para. 3), differentiating that a *space* is simply an existing physical environment while a *place* has been assigned meaning through interaction (p. 6) and an emotional bond, or "attachment" (p. 7, para. 1), within the space. The canoe is a meaningful place in Tribal Journeys because of the individual and collective relationships formed with it and within it. Skipper Freda tells me some people even leave a spot or two open for the ancestors.

In order to understand the significance of the canoe, a "performative approach to mobility" (Vannini, 2009b, p. 15) can also be considered, as ritual and routine impact the identity

of the paddlers. Meaning is found within the medium and “each medium is distinguished by its own temporal and spatial logic required for presenting events in a particular manner,” (Vannini & Vannini, 2008, p. 1287). The dugout canoe is an historical medium in Pacific Northwest oral traditions and the act of 10 to 20 people *pulling together* from one community to the next in this ancient form of technology along with other Indigenous canoes is a sign of a collective identity. The juxtaposition of the canoe traversing the open ocean parallel to the ferry is more than a mere representation of two vessels; their destinations are different, and although they are not together, they are moving forward in the same space at the same time.

Small and large

Then and now

Primitive and modern

Pre-contact and colonial

Despite being dwarfed by the powerful ferry, the Indigenous dugout canoe perseveres through the Salish Sea, both vessels profound symbols of pre-contact and colonial eras represented by a simultaneous *performance* of mobility. The ferry challenges the canoe with its swells but the canoe continues. It carries on, as both vessels move forward at the same time.

The great canoes of Tribal Journeys signify the “cultural regeneration of many nations as they struggle to retain and rebuild following a period of systematic oppression and of rapid social and technological change” (Neel, 1995, p. 1, para. 2). One could view the canoe as a “technic” as discussed in Vannini’s (2009a) study of technoculture, wherein the vessel is a teacher who embodies wisdom, knowledge, and spirituality, and has the ability to communicate traditions and teachings. It is important to remember the canoe is a living creature; it is not dead until its wood is rotten (Arnie Robinson). Elder Willie Seymour tells a story about a young boy who expressed anger in front of the canoe, even though Willie reminded him that the canoe is alive and could

hear him talking. While they were paddling, the canoe flipped over for no apparent reason and the boys arms were scraped up by barnacles. Although the boy was disciplined by the canoe, the canoe also taught the boy discipline, as he was able to overcome his hurt by continuing to paddle. As this story illustrates, the Indigenous dugout canoe is not only a liaison between the land and water, but also a liaison between the youth and culture; it facilitates a reciprocal relationship between the young paddlers and Indigenous traditions wherein each enriches the other. As Lummi elder Joe Washington states in Tom Heidlebaugh's (1995) afterword in *The Great Canoes* (Neel, 1995, p. 123): "It is the cedar canoe that connects us to the old ways."

* * *

Being the host community, we are the last to leave Shell Beach, destination Cowichan, also known Quw'utsun and Khowutsun. Buffi, our Elder, is perched at the front of the canoe with her drum in hand, facing the young people as she sings and they *ushul*, which means "to paddle" in Hul'qumi'num. With the *Xpey'* in tow, we prepare ourselves to tackle the sometimes-rough Samson Narrows by paddling the *Thuq'min*, our bigger canoe. Once in awhile, we count out ten to twenty "power strokes" as we propel the canoe forward. The *Thuq'min*, also the name of the village at Shell Beach, was built by our skipper Freda's uncle, Elmer Sampson, and means "to spear" in Hul'qumi'num. Elder Willie relays the story of *Thuq'min* as he understands it from Freda's grandfather, describing several canoes surrounding an unknown ocean creature that captured two girls out swimming one day. A man in one of the canoes offers up his dog as bait to lure the animal; the people then kill the creature by spearing it. They are able to retrieve the girls so they can receive a proper burial while the dead creature is left behind on Shell Beach.

Those in the *Thuq'min* canoe take shifts paddling while the others remain on the *Scott Hill* with captain Arnie at the helm and Willie by his side. There is plenty of room in our support boat but many of the kids opt to climb the ladder and sit up top where privacy trumps the chilly breeze. Lifejackets must be worn at all times and an adult must be present. Some of the youths wrap themselves in blankets and sit in small folding chairs; others lie on their backs and look up at the grey sky. They are excited to be on the water despite staying up late. When I return to the canoe, the sun makes a brief appearance and hushes our crew. We paddle quietly, soaking up the warmth on our faces as I close my eyes and listen to the paddles swooshing through the water, able to keep time without looking at the ones in front of me. Buffi's drum and voice lead the way in a perfect song that continues until the sun hides behind the clouds.

The Tribal Journeys canoes arrive in Cowichan Bay earlier than expected by our hosts, and several of our young people become impatient as we wait in both of our canoes. After an hour and a half, two Cowichan Bay canoes paddle out to greet and escort all the canoes to shore in order of those who live furthest away to the closest. Bella Bella is the first and we are last. Up to 200 people are watching from the beach as we raft up together to face the crowd like we do for every landing protocol. The presentation of the canoe families as one group determines how this ritual is perceived by the onlookers, much like a team relying on participant cooperation to define a situation (Goffman, 1959, p. 91). Side by side, our wet fingers cling tightly to each other's canoes, paddles on the gunnels and pointed towards the sky with painted designs facing forward as a sign of respect and an identification of each canoe family. People cheer in approval as these Pacific Northwest Indigenous communities represent a unified canoe nation. There are

less than a dozen today, but by the end of the journey, more than 80 colourful Indigenous dugout canoes will face the shore in this arrival protocol—quite a sight!

Today’s hosts, Cowichan Tribes, are organized and energized as they provide instructions for this landing protocol. “When I say *hup*, you say *hoo*,” directs the enthusiastic skipper.

Hup > Hoo!

Hup > Hoo! A chant of *hup-hoo* ensues.

One of our girls comments on the energy generated by the chanting voices as the canoes paddle in a circle around the buoys. When our canoe becomes parallel with the shoreline, we put our paddles in the air again as a sign of respect, circling back around before making our way in and asking for permission to come to shore. Announcing your canoe family’s arrival is a gesture that dates back to the old days when people travelled to neighbouring communities. I am told it is customary to introduce your family; however, one participant of this study says requesting permission to enter and leave a community is not technically a traditional requirement, although common to modern-day Indigenous canoe journeys. Meantime, another participant says the act of asking permission recognizes a nation or tribe’s ownership of the land. Nonetheless, I am informed of at least one instance when a community withheld permission because they wanted to learn more about a particular canoe family’s cultural teachings and traditions.

While it is not *traditional* to have a microphone for landing protocol, it does not make it improper or disrespectful; in fact, Cowichan’s use of this handy device allows everyone to hear where each other is from. On behalf of our two canoes, Buffi introduces the Kw’umut Lelum family in Hul’qumi’num, telling them who we are and where we came from, and thanking the host community. One of the youths from our canoe family takes the microphone and follows up

in English: “We are the children of Kw’umut Lelum and we ask for permission to come ashore and visit your territory; we’ve paddled all day, we’re tired and hungry and need a place to rest.”

I always find it a brave feat when a youth steps up to speak at shore protocol, especially after Buffi tells me she still gets nervous speaking sometimes.

Once ashore, members of our canoe family pick us up in a rented van while others take a shuttle bus to the Si’em Lelum Gymnasium in Duncan. They have driven down with the rest of our land crew, who have been busy setting up camp in the field in front of the gym where all the Tribal Journeys canoe families will spend the night. The Kw’umut Lelum tents are all in place before we arrive and are pre-assigned. Most of the youths have adults designated, but a few of the older ones are given an opportunity to be chaperone-free, a privilege that can be taken away if not properly respected. The Kw’umut Lelum youth are anxious to meet other young participants of the journey at dinner and protocol, and to catch up with their Cowichan counterparts as some of our youths currently live, or have lived, here.

* * *

One of the most considerable customs within Tribal Journeys is the protocol held on the night that canoe families arrive into a community. Although the word “protocol” is used to describe other rules within Tribal Journeys, the nightly protocol is the one most anticipated and takes a substantial amount of time as the journey progresses and the number of canoe families increases. In this sense, protocol is a gathering of all participating nations and tribes to celebrate Indigenous identity, tradition, and history through ceremonial singing, dancing, and drumming.

Whether you’re on Tribal Journeys, at a potlatch, or even just a small family gathering, to share our songs and dances is how we project our culture and our spirituality. Even to sit and listen is a powerfully moving experience because you feel the energy of the people and why they are here. (Brandee Robinson)

Brandee says protocol is done out of love for the songs, dances, people performing, people watching, and for yourself. Protocol usually includes words of thanks to the host community, often with gifts of appreciation, followed by brief explanations of the songs and dances being presented. This includes from whom and where the songs and dances originate and who owns the rights to them, as permission must be granted to use a song owned by someone else.

Depending on the location of the host community, protocol is typically held in the Bighouse, Longhouse, or Smokehouse, or a designated tent if traditional structures aren't large enough to accommodate all the participants. Protocol is commonly held on the first night in a stopover community and often continues on subsequent nights in the same location. At the final destination, protocol is complete after all the canoe families have had a turn, which can translate to a week-long event when 80 to 100 canoes from various nations and tribes are involved.

Protocol shows the impact of maintaining spiritual relationships with each other, with the environment, between nations, and with the water; it's about safety, spirituality, respect, and responsibility. The big effort is to repair the deep wounds among First Nations: nation to nation, First Nations to Canada, and human to human. (Shawn Atleo)

Through protocol, Indigenous peoples proudly celebrate their history and identity: who they are, where they come from, the songs they own, the ones they pass on, and those they newly create.

A lot of our stuff was lost, so we're reviving it. We're creating whole new cultures and protocols and songs. The younger generations are going to come up and take over and add their own elements to it. That's what's so awesome about human beings—not just First Nations—we evolve. (Vyna Brown)

* * *

First up for tonight's protocol is Cowichan Tribes and they open with a welcome song. Sometimes the host family goes first, other times last, and much like the landing protocol, an

order of those from farthest away to closest is followed. With paddles in hand, the Cowichan dancers take to the floor of the Si'em Lelum Gymnasium wearing headbands with feathers, as dozens of small wooden paddles adorn their dark shirts, including the sleeves. With deer hooves draped from the ankles of their knitted calf coverings and hovering over bare feet, the dancers wait for the sound of the nearby drum. After a brief welcome and introduction, Cowichan's speaker mentions the importance of including children in ceremonies. He also explains that when a nation or tribe is singing, the people are either praying or telling a story. As the Cowichan hosts move on to a prayer song, the Kw'umut Lelum youth observe. Some appear intrigued while others remain non-expressive. Three adult males gradually rise from a kneeling position on the floor; their hooves and shirt paddles rattle as they stomp their feet, arms spread open as they dance in circles around the floor.

Next up is a much anticipated participatory dance that most of our youths are familiar with, some because of their ties to Cowichan and others because of Tribal Journeys 2009. It begins with the dancers choosing a partner from the audience. Together, they side-step around the floor in a circle, arms crossed and hands held. Once in awhile, there is a turn. If the music stops, those on the floor pluck another partner from the crowd and the dance continues in this same fashion. I am told it is disrespectful to refuse if you are asked to join the dance. In the end, the dance culminates with a floor full of people who, in pairs, form an arch that each couple goes through before linking to the archway. Even some of our shyest kids indulge in this dance. "The Cowichan Friendship Dance is our favourite," states one of the Kw'umut Lelum youths on behalf of the collective.

* * *

With Goffman's (1959) "presentational self" in mind, social interaction through Tribal Journeys nightly protocols can also be seen as *performances* that are symbolic of the self, when specifically examining how identity is (re)presented through ceremonial songs and dances.

We dance for many reasons. You dance at a potlatch to show who you are, show respect to the host, and things like that. We dance at something like Tribal Journeys for the same reasons: to share and to uplift and to empower.
(Brandee Robinson)

Although Tribal Journeys protocol isn't an actual potlatch, many people compare it to one because of the *performances* and regalia, the latter of which often comes with specific rules for storing and transporting. In potlatches: "We use theatre and impressive masks to tell our ancestor's (sic) adventures so the people witnessing the dance will remember it" (U'mista Cultural Centre, 2011). Tribal Journeys protocol is very similar, and a number of participants call it a "cultural way of life," or as Dave Bodaly describes: "It's a hunger within the people to share their identity." Brandee says, regardless, "You're giving something to the person sitting in the crowd watching," no matter what kind of song is being *performed*.

Although protocol *performances* are authentic expressions, they are not exempt from possessing characteristics of other types of (re)presentations in front of spectators, nor is it unusual for *performers* to be cognizant of, and concerned about, the impression on the audience (Goffman, 1959, p. 17). Elder Florence James tells me she knows of times when performances have crossed the line into "boasting." She says, "Although we're not allowed to do that, a lot did. They won't say that out loud though." Protocol is not completely unlike other types of performances that place value on entertainment factors. Several hours of practice often go into preparing for protocol, and the *performer* and audience both place expectations on the outcome. Some participants are disappointed by a less-than-adequate *performance* as indicated by Brandee

Robinson on one night early in the journey: “To me, ours was lacking because I know what we’re capable of. As the Ahousaht First Nations, I know what I’ve seen in the past and I know what’s expected of us because we prepare.” From the audience, it is common to hear both criticism and praise of a nation or tribe’s *performance*. Luschiim Arvid Charlie says of protocol: “I’ll put it this way; they’re all good, but some are excellent.” Whether one agrees that protocol is a performance, it remains a presentation of a nation or tribe’s traditional songs and dances and is representative of the collective identity and history of each.

* * *

Being the guests from farthest away, Bella Bella is next in the protocol order. In traditional button blankets of different colours, designs, and societal crests, the Heiltsuks come out singing and drumming, as dancers circle slowly with paddling motions. The speaker reminds the crowd that youth are the treasures of this journey and that adults must uphold them in order to keep the family strong. The Bella Bella canoe family shares a number of songs and dances, each with its own creation story, and all of which Frank Brown explains are learned early in life:

With our ceremonial protocols, it’s fairly structured and it’s what we grew up with from a very young age, primarily sharing our social and play songs and dances, the ones that you don’t have to pay money because of the whole potlatch process. We did bring out a couple of treasures within the *Dluwalaxa* peace dance series and our young people have been indoctrinated into those protocols. It’s quite different from, for example, Kw’umut Lelum’s youth, who, for various reasons, are disenfranchised from their communities and from their families. I think that’s an interesting distinction between First Nations youth that are in community and those that aren’t. (Frank Brown)

Frank is correct in that most of the Kw’umut Lelum youths haven’t grown up with this type of cultural foundation; for many, Tribal Journeys is the only chance to participate in traditional singing and dancing. Although this may not always be specific to each individual’s heritage, a

sense of cultural belonging can still be attained as a participant. “Just being involved, that spirit will come alive in them; the more they get involved, the more they will want to be involved... they want to be part of it because it awakens them” (Dave Bodaly).

As the Bella Bella canoe family finishes its protocol, a group of men start to drum and it takes me a moment to figure out what’s happening. It turns out someone has lost a wallet and Tribal Journeys tradition demands that the owner must dance in order to get it back. The speaker places the wallet at one end of the gym and a teenage boy carefully steps forward, somewhat bashful in contrast to his brazen blonde hair.

///// The drums beat quietly and the boy begins to dance...
S l o w l y.
 The crowd cheers in approval!
 Suddenly the music stops.

Just as the boy is about to reunite with his lost item, a girl slides the wallet across the floor.

///// The drums begin to pound again...
 LOUDER than the first time.
 And the boy matches their intensity.
 He kicks it up a **notch**.
The crowd rallies in support!

Once again the drums abruptly stop and the girl cheekily relocates the wallet to the other side of the room. With increased determination, the young man dances freely across the gymnasium, moving in circles with arms outstretched and unaffected by the attentive audience. It is on this third extension of the dance that the boy earns back his lost item.

Last up for protocol is our canoe family, following Qualicum and Sliammon First Nations. Much like last night, our Elders begin, with Willie Seymour our speaker and Buffi David leading the way with her drum and voice as we sing three songs: *Stz’uminus Mustimuhw*, our introduction song; *Tiwi’ulh cun ce*, a prayer song; and *Lemut tu kwasun*, a song about self-

realization. “I can’t get it out of my head,” states one of the Kw’umut Lelum youths about Stz’uminus Mustimuhw, our *identity* song. Neither can I. After protocol, our canoe family heads back to camp to gather for a “circle” led by Willie. Circle is a time to communicate and reflect, and as Kw’umut Lelum Social Worker Pat Thomas points out, to “give the kids a voice.”

In tonight’s circle, I am impressed when a handful of young people profess a fondness for protocol. Some of the adults attribute this attraction as a craving for cultural expression that is often not as prevalent in everyday life. Willie states that protocol is a time of introspection and one of the greatest opportunities for healing. He says everyone experiences it in his or her own unique way and that no one can predict when a personal message will come to them.

I emphasize to our youth to be there for protocol. The disciplines I received were to be there early and don’t be in a hurry to leave. What you’re searching for may happen at the very beginning, and sometimes it’s in the last order of business you will find these truths. It could happen any time. (Willie Seymour)

He says protocol offers “spiritual nourishment” and that the families “have their own message” or reason for participating in Tribal Journeys. Speaking of the Kw’umut Lelum canoe family, Willie says, “For us, it’s healing and educational reconnecting with our ancestors.”

July 13, 2010. This morning is a rare one in that we don’t have to be out on the water early. Today we have time for a coffee under the cloudless Cowichan sky before a short paddle to Pauquachin, one of the Saanich (WSÁNEC) nations, also Coast Salish territory. I watched as a canoe family basked in a smudging ceremony before we left but I couldn’t tell if it was sage or sweetgrass they were burning. I asked Willie about it and he said there could be many reasons behind the cleansing as different medicines can be used to clear the mind and spirit. Everything goes smoothly in our canoe this afternoon aside from a minor incident involving two youths

arguing about who broke the handle of a paddle. Once the dispute is settled, we fall into a comfortable paddling rhythm and my thoughts are able to wander to the beauty that surrounds us.

* * *

The concept of *place* is significant when understanding the connection between humans and the environment. For the Coast Salish, individual and collective identity is closely tied to place, as Thom (2005) describes: “the centres for the experience of relationships with others and with the land,” (p. 1, para. 2) including “mythic stories, spirit power, ancestors, and other beings” (p. 1, para. 2). In *Song on the Water*, Ray Fryberg of Tulalip explains how the role of place within Tribal Journeys allows tribes and nations to retrace the steps of the ancestors.

My grandmother told me that she used to come here as a young girl to fish. To know we’re landing upon the same shores that my grandmother did in her canoes with her family and everything has a very special meaning to me. For us to be gathering the way that we’re gathering in the teachings and ways of our ancestors is very, very important. (Lundahl, 2004)

Suttles (1987) reminds that the environment influences social networks of the Northwest Coast where most of Tribal Journeys takes place; and, as many participants have described, relationships with the land, water, plants, and animals are as essential as those with other people.

We are all one and our lives are interconnected. Our relationship with our territory is fundamental and we regard it as an extension of ourselves. That is why our ancestors gave names to important sites and geographical features, just as names were and continue to be bestowed upon family members. (Brown & Brown, 2009, p. 23, para. 1)

“The Indian people’s sense of place and personal identity began in this distant past before the world became as it is now” (Kirk, 1986, p. 21, para. 4).

In his essays on the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest, Suttles (1987) describes an acute awareness of the Coast Salish when it comes to the moon, the tides, the relationship

between the two, and the human relationship to both (pp. 71-72). Interpretations of these dictated the gifts the environment produced for the people if the people ensured enough were in the right place and at the right time (Suttles, 1987, p.68). On canoe journeys, sometimes the tides work with the paddlers and other times against, and throughout Tribal Journeys comes the constant reminder to “respect the water.” I am assured that if the people look after the water, the water will look after the people. “As coastal First Nations, we’ve always lived and died by the sea; it’s a real deep connection to the water,” states Frank Brown, adding:

It’s a sacred place
Between the land and the sky
Not good or bad
Just nature
Totally objective.

Lifelong fisherman Arnie Robinson concurs, adding that his late mother Elsie always reinforced the power of the ocean: that as much as the water can heal you, it can also take your life.

In Tribal Journeys, the relationship with the land and water reflects more than a tenuous attachment; it is centred on the connection to environments (Wilson, 2008, p. 88) encountered within the journey. For many of the young paddlers, travelling to different places is a rare occurrence, and Tribal Journeys allows them to discover traditions specific to the lands of the tribes and nations they visit. As Elder Florence James points out, “The youth are influenced by it, as being in care does not allow them to experience it being left at home.” Through interaction, song, dance, and story-sharing, the youths are able to identify others by traditions that are unique to them, to their nation, to their *place*. The young participants also carry their own sense of place to the communities they visit, and they are able to identify commonalities and differences; they

affiliate their encounters with the places they learn about, experiencing place not as an object, but epistemologically, as a way of viewing and understanding the world (Cresswell, 2004, p. 15).

As nations and tribes have always identified with the places they hail from and waters they travel, they also identify with the food they harvest. “We lived off these lands before anybody else did and we sustained these lands. There was always fish, always deer, and enough of everything because our people knew enough to move on and not extinguish something” (Brandee Robinson). The link between traditional foods and place does not go unacknowledged by the youth, as illustrated by a conversation that permeated the Kw’umut Lelum canoe one afternoon in anticipation of meals at the final destination in Neah Bay. The youth were aware of the Makah Nation’s whale hunting rights after hearing about a feast in 1999 when the Makah harpooned their first whale since the 1920’s. “I wonder if they’ll serve whale for dinner,” the youths speculated out loud, tallying who would be willing to try it.

* * *

As we paddle in to Pauquachin, one of the girls becomes emotional about the recent passing of a grandparent. I tell her it’s okay to cry and remind her of our Elder’s teaching:

You’re with your teammates but still in your own world and any overwhelming emotion you’re carrying gets washed away as you’re paddling along. It may be hurt and sometimes subconscious... but it’s a journey: a physical journey, emotional journey, spiritual journey, and a mental journey. (Willie Seymour)

Skipper Freda says by letting our emotion go, we allow the water to take care of it.

After the landing protocol, the canoe families pull their vessels to shore. “All hands on the canoe,” someone yells, and we haul ours up the beach. Our lifejackets come off quickly in the hot sun and we carry them and our paddles to where our land crew will pick us up. By now, Tribal Journeys support vehicles are easily distinguishable with colourful writing on most:

paddle to Makah and *shut up and paddle* are common phrases written with chalk and erasable markers. Our van pulls up with the distinctive *Kw'umut Lelum 2010 baby!* and *whoo rah!* on the sides, and we pile in. Outdoor dinner and protocol are casual and unstructured tonight with canoe families being invited to simply take the “floor” as they wish. Tonight and tomorrow, we are staying in a building next to the tribal school in Tsartlip and while it is a treat to have washrooms instead of outhouses, there is less privacy and sleep doesn't come easy for some.

July 14, 2010. Six o'clock means cereal and sunshine as we prepare to paddle from Pauquachin to Tsawout, another Coast Salish Community on the Saanich Peninsula. The wind is working with us today and our canoe is moving through the water faster than usual, passing several curious seals along the way. On the *Scott Hill* support boat, Elder Buffi is going over the words and meaning of the Hul'qumi'num songs we've been learning for protocol. Four of the boys are eager to sing, but one of the girls requests further clarification. Buffi responds by writing the words on the glass of the *Scott Hill's* double doors in pink and blue erasable markers for all to see. Some of these young people have already been learning Hul'qumi'num through *Kw'umut Lelum*, but for others these songs are an introduction to an Indigenous dialect, one of many that they will encounter through the protocols and ceremonies within Tribal Journeys.

* * *

Within his studies of Mead, the nature of symbolic interactionism is broken down by Blumer (1969) into three premises, all relating to how individuals interpret their *selves* and situations: response based on meaning, interaction through language, and reflection through thought. As Mead (1934) asserts, thoughts are not existent without language, and language is a result of social interaction; thus, language must be viewed as a contributor to shaping identity.

“Through language, people are connected with their history, their ancestors and their land, and as a language declines, so too does the sense of identity of a people,” as written in the First Peoples’ Heritage, Language and Culture Council (FPHLCC) report released in April 2010 (p. 7, Identity section). Indigenous languages are more than mere communication tools; they are symbols of identity and cultural distinction and must be protected (Bell & Napoleon, 2008, p. 417).

Buffi and I are sitting next to each other at a picnic table when she shares her dedication to language; she is a Hul’qumi’num teacher for all ages.

I think because I grew up with the language that was the very first step of carrying it on. Both my parents spoke the language so I heard it through my whole life. At first, I only understood and never really spoke: just words like *huy ch q’u* and *namut kwu*, real basic. But now I can write it; I went to school and did a three-year program. (Buffi David)

huy ch q’u = thank you
namut kwu = you’re welcome

Extremely passionate about Indigenous youth learning traditional language, Buffi becomes overwhelmed by emotion and pauses for a moment before speaking again:

It’s our identity. And it’s very strong for me. You know, all my life that’s what I wanted is for our children to know who they are and to be proud, and not live like people they’re not. The residential school had a very big impact on our people, and whether we went or not, it still affected us in the long run. Even today, a lot of our children learn the language but they go home speaking and the parents don’t understand. We’re still working on that. (Buffi David)

Loss of language illustrates one of the many disruptions in transmission of Indigenous traditions and has become an increasing concern. The FPHLCC warns that British Columbia’s First Nations languages “are in a state of critical endangerment” (2010, p. 9), which translates to a considerable cultural loss if not preserved. When I speak with RCMP Constable Chester Williams, who is involved in various Indigenous canoe journeys, not only does he acknowledge the need to retain language, but he shares an explicit hope for Indigenous youth:

My dream is to one day walk into any mall in Canada and see a First Nations child run up to the parents and only speak their language. You don't see that. You see other cultures—the little ones, even babies—talk their first language. We don't; this English we speak is not our first language. (Chester Williams)

Buffi echoes his words, noting that her parents emphasized that English is a borrowed language from the *white man*. Kwak'wala speaker Daisy Sewid-Smith adds that language is a way of life: “Without it we have no tradition, no culture—it means everything to us” (FPHLCC, 2010, p. 8). As outlined in the RCAP report (1996), it is impossible to protect and preserve culture and ceremonies without having Indigenous languages to properly describe, express, and pass on traditional wisdom (Volume 4, Chapter 3, section 5).

* * *

It is early afternoon and the subtle wind causes us to be slightly early so we paddle to nearby James Island where some of the other canoe families are already enjoying a rest. A large spring salmon jumps out of the water and dances in the air before a dinner-sized crab greets us at the beach. The sun is hot and while some of the adults lay in the sand, most of the youths are busy picking up eagle feathers, weaving necklaces and bracelets out of thick grass, and playing in the water. “The seaweed here is so beautiful; it has hair on it,” states one girl as we prepare to head to Tsawout, and when we paddle in for landing protocol, the sight catches our breath.

The harbour transforms
 into
 a bottomless goblet
 of bubble tea.
 Countless translucent jellyfish...
 floating
 in a sea
 of green.
 These creatures...
 tapioca-like
 and protective.

Magnificent is this haven we are entering.

When we near the shore, the anxious audience cheers loudly as we raft up together then paddle in a circle. As we pass the people, Skipper Freda calls out: "Paddles up," and we salute the crowd with our paddles pointed towards the heavens.

It's another casual evening and not all canoe families participate in protocol; those who do, are not in regalia tonight. Having practiced earlier, our canoe family partakes. "We were thirty times better than yesterday!" exclaims one of the boys. Even the youth are cognizant of performance. Afterwards, the kids take advantage of the school grounds by playing football and soccer while others relax in "our" covered building. There is a healthy dose of "teen drama" this evening as some of the youths start getting on each other's nerves: using each other's belongings, making up rumours, and calling each other unwanted nicknames. Before bedtime, we receive new red shirts to wear for tomorrow's celebration at the home of the Songhees Nation.

July 15, 2010. This morning we get up later than intended, but still manage to leave Tsawout by 7 a.m. to head to the land of the Songhees Nation, the Coast Salish neighbour to Esquimalt. Advance permission to leave the shores had been granted during last night's protocol as is sometimes done when canoes depart very early, at different times, or by special request. During the first half of today's paddle, we are graced by the presence of porpoises between our canoe and the shore. They are easier to spot than land at times, as a continuous curtain of ocean mist masks the shoreline, although unable to hide the snow-tipped Olympic Mountains that glisten in distant Washington State. The second half of today's paddle was not quite so peaceful, and as with any relationship we hit a rough patch. The water swelled and rocked our canoe, the ocean seemingly reflecting some of our moods and causing me to wonder if the water could

sense our restlessness. Perhaps there is a lesson, as Wes Nahanee (Chiaxsten), a cultural leader from Squamish and skipper for the Greenland/Alaska Tribal Journeys canoe family tells me:

Sometimes life gives us that glass, that nice beautiful calm water, but then the waters will pick up and we have to work harder to get to where we're going. It can't always be glass otherwise we don't learn anything. (Wes Nahanee)

Being in the front of the canoe, it was important not to show fear to the youths behind us as we negotiated our way through the large waves. We would later learn that our captain and Elder were quite concerned for our safety as we drifted further from shore, and also that three Tribal Journeys canoes capsized. Luckily, everyone is alright. Arnie Robinson suspects the spirit of the Elders and the ancestors is what kept our canoe family safe.

Paddling, also known as *pulling*, is hard work, and the reality is that some of the youths truly enjoy it while some prefer others aspects of Tribal Journeys. When the proverbial: "It's just around the corner," is uttered, some are disappointed to find out that *it* usually isn't. But today, one girl paddles this entire leg of the journey which takes approximately six hours. In addition to one of the boys who is a keen puller, her genuine love for paddling is obvious. She never seems to tire and always seems to help: bailing water, throwing the bumpers out as we approach the support boat, helping others get in and out, and roping the canoes to the dock. I call her a *natural* and she smiles and tells me her grandfather used to paddle and that she loves it. I hope she'll continue to paddle when the journey is over; after all, paddling is also a sport and canoe racing is a more frequent option than Tribal Journeys. These are things I think of as we near the Songhees harbour, and it is apparent by the onshore activity that celebrations are well underway on this extraordinary day where thousands gather to mark the naming of the Salish

Sea. This day was specifically chosen to coincide with Tribal Journeys and is the second time in as many years that Tribal Journeys participants are invited to observe a naming celebration.

* * *

Looking back on Tribal Journeys 2009, all canoe families were invited to a traditional Coast Salish naming ceremony during a stopover in the Lummi Nation host community. In Coast Salish nations and tribes, naming can provide a personal connection to ancestral knowledge, properties, places, and powers and can connect individuals of the same name (Thom, 2005, pp. 213-214). Amidst hundreds of friends, relatives, and strangers, an elderly Lummi woman received the name of an ancestor. Although individuals can be given names for different reasons and at different stages, it is not unusual to receive an honoured hereditary name like this, later in life (Barnett, 1955, p. 133). The Lummi naming ceremony included masked dancers, speakers, and drummers, who, in the midst of their *work*, received quarters from members of the host family and some witnesses. This gesture is a symbol of acknowledgement and thanks and the coins are not to be regarded as payment. Gifts were given to all of us who witnessed the naming and, as with most gatherings, a plentiful feast followed, in which all Tribal Journeys participants enjoyed. As it was for me, this occasion was the majority of the Kw'umut Lelum youth participants' introduction to Indigenous naming.

Naming is a significant symbolic interaction in the traditions of many Northwest Coast nations and tribes. Dave Bodaly's summation of naming illustrates how meaning is closely connected to Indigenous identity; he talks about how traditional names indicate who people are, where they come from, and their lineage. This can include associations to rank and privilege, as names belong to families, or "houses," depending on which nation or tribe an individual is from.

Dave was one of six participants of this study who talked about naming to varying degrees, all of whom spoke of an ancestral connection to identity, whether in reference to a person or to a place.

* * *

Vyna and I are chatting in my tent, remnants of dead insects and specks of wet dirt near our covered feet, me sipping lukewarm coffee from my red metal camp cup. She is from Bella Bella but part of the Kw'umut Lelum canoe family, having been hired as a youth supervisor.

My Heiltsuk name is Glwaxx. Glwa is an ocean-going canoe so my child name is the female version of that. It was given to me because I was born when my dad was paddling from Bella Bella to Expo in 1986. (Vyna Brown)

The 23-year-old explains to me that the name she was given comes from her great-grandmother, Maggie Hall, one of the Heiltsuk *wumaqs* (high-ranking women) who held names. Families maintain the rights to certain names, and because Vyna now holds *Glwaxx*, it is hers to pass on if she has children, or to a niece or nephew if she doesn't. In Heiltsuk tradition, "The name of a person carries a transfer of privilege from one generation to the next, providing for intergenerational succession" (Brown & Brown, 2009, p. 23, para. 2). People can also hold more than one name, Vyna tells me, and some can be shared at the same time. For instance, Vyna and her youngest brother will soon receive female and male versions of the same adult name because their dad wants them to remember the special connection between a brother and sister.

My dad goes to my grandfather and says "I need names for my kids, what should we do?" So my grandfather looks back into his history book, which is in his mind, and finds the names that our family has rights to. (Vyna Brown)

As names are connected to the identities of the named, as well as the relationship with nature, Vyna's father considers the silvertip grizzly bear for her and her brother. The grizzly is part of the *mitla*, a Heiltsuk dance in which Vyna and her father lay eagle-down upon the ground to

cleanse the house and protect those within it. The grizzly bears are protectors, and as the oldest child in her family, Vyna has always been a protector. In receiving the name of the silvertip grizzly bear, given during a potlatch, she and her brother will each represent one of two posts at the front of the *House of Athalis*, to protect it. Vyna states, “We believe Bighouses are ancestors and humans. The front is the face, the poles are the skeleton, and the fire is the heart.”

The House of Athalis is an ancient Bighouse that Vyna relates her father, Frank Brown, was named after, *Athalis* being chosen, once again, by Vyna’s great-grandmother. It means “far up in the woods,” and is symbolic of a transformational eight-month traditional punishment of time alone on an island for Frank when he was just 14 years old (Brown & Brown, 2009, p. 23); this, instead of typical western sentencing for serious crimes committed by youths. “You can also get a name when a major event happens in your life—a life-changing event,” Vyna explains. “When you survive something and it changes you to the core.”

Unlike typical communication transmissions wherein messages have a polysemic nature, the meaning is often specific in the naming of Indigenous peoples. Canada’s Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Shawn Atleo felt a tremendous responsibility when he received the name *A-in-chut*, which means “everyone depends on you,” passed on to him by his father when he became a hereditary chief within the Ahousaht First Nation in 1999 (S. Atleo, personal communication, September 7, 2010). Couple this with the name carried by his late grandfather that was bestowed upon him: *A-aap-wa-iik*, which means “always does the right thing.”

“Names weren’t meant to be easy,” explained Atleo, at the Healing Our Spirit Worldwide conference I attended in Hawaii. They challenge individuals “to carry the standards of your House, to make sure you’re listening to your Elders and the teachings of where you come from.”

The Chief approves of the way the conference emcee introduced him, with an emphasis not on who he is, but *whose* he is. During his speech, Atleo recounts how, during his summer vacation, they had a naming feast back home in Ahousaht wherein names were handed out in order to anchor people within their families and territories. He recalled, “We draped people with names and you could feel them pulling these names on like you would a warm blanket.” Chief Atleo believes members of all nations and tribes should have traditional names if naming is a part of their teachings (personal communication, September 7, 2010).

* * *

“We should make an effort to get our own First Nations names,” Arnie exclaims while navigating the *Scott Hill*, thinking out loud about possibilities for the Kw’umut Lelum Tribal Journeys canoe family. Captain Arnie’s suggestion is logical, at least in relation to the youth, who all reside within the nine Coast Salish nations that are members of Kw’umut Lelum. Although it would be difficult to determine who and where the names would come from, if individual Indigenous names were given to the youth on Tribal Journeys, it could potentially connect them, collectively, to a part of Coast Salish culture. For Arnie, recently receiving *Hulth’b’tub*, a traditional name from his grandfather’s side of the family in Nitinaht, filled an emptiness that his European name was unable to satiate.

* * *

In addition to persons, Indigenous place names also carry significant meaning within oral traditions. “Naming, in particular, can draw attention to places and locate them in wider cultural narratives” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 98, para. 2). Today, Tribal Journeys participants are taking part in the official celebration hosted by Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations to mark the naming of

the Salish Sea, a collective name that refers to the body of water encompassing the Strait of Georgia, Juan de Fuca Strait, and Puget Sound. Together with the Tribal Journeys canoe families, there are up to 2000 celebrants including chiefs from Canada and the United States, dignitaries from different levels of government, the Canadian Forces, members of First Nations and Native American tribes, the general public, and the media.

“Coast Salish peoples have traversed these waters for thousands of years and this name pays homage to our collective history,” states BC Lieutenant-Governor Steven Point, a member of the Stó:lō Nation.

Xwě lī qwěł tēl is his name.

Into a microphone, Point tells the crowd, “Today’s celebration reflects the growing understanding and appreciation of our cultures. It is another step in the bridge of reconciliation” (Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, 2010). But while the BC government associates the naming to reconciliation, Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, president of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, regards the naming celebration as little more than a symbolic gesture by a government who, he feels, could be dealing with more important First Nations issues instead.

Onlookers cheer as the Tribal Journeys canoes begin arriving in the harbour, asking for permission to come ashore and noting how the *sea of the ancestors* has never changed, just that now it bears an appropriate name. Outfitted in white cotton Kw’umut Lelum Tribal Journeys t-shirt, Bill Yoachim and Snuneymuxw First Nation Elected Chief Douglas White III anxiously await our arrival. Our skippers rope up our two canoes to a dock as we step into the Salish Sea and green seaweed wraps itself around our flip-flopped feet. The Kw’umut Lelum youths

disperse into the campsites and adjacent fields while Chief Doug White (Kwul'a'sul'tun) kindly takes a few moments to talk to me about the day, which began in the Songhees Longhouse.

One of the most sacred Coast Salish ceremonies took place this morning: the Sxwayxwey masked dance, to honour and bless the occasion. That ceremony is used in the Coast Salish world and certain families have the rights to it, so it is used at events like this when something is being honoured. (Doug White)

After the traditional Sxwayxwey, celebrations continued outside the Longhouse with speeches, singing, drumming, canoe races, and the blessing of a canoe which was also named *Salish Sea* and was presented to the Canadian Navy. The Snuneymuxw Chief explains that George Harris of Stz'uminus First Nation put forward a resolution at the 2008 First Nations Summit to (re)name the Salish Sea, after Dr. Bert Webber, a retired professor from Washington, came up with the idea over twenty years ago.

Once all the Tribal Journeys canoe families are ashore, a feast is held in the Songhees Longhouse and I realize what an honour it is to be part of this (re)naming. Even just to be in the Longhouse is a privilege, this sacred place of knowledge and healing. In his Master's thesis about First Nations tradition and identity, Northwest Coast artist Andrew Everson (Nagedzi) of Comox makes the distinction between symbols of tradition within the public and private spheres. He notes how things like canoe races and pow wows may be accessible to the public; however, ceremonies like namings and the Sxwayxwey are usually private, with participation often restricted (Everson, 2000, p. 6). Sitting quietly, I contemplate how today's occasion is as much about renaming the Salish Sea as it is about *reclaiming* it. To reclaim this body of water is to reclaim a part of the Coast Salish culture, communicating a sense of identity to Tribal Journeys participants, especially the Coast Salish, before they cross the newly-named Salish Sea from Vancouver Island to Washington for the first time. The celebration within Tribal Journeys

connects participants, including the Kw'umut Lelum youth, to the land, ocean, and ancestors, and also to each other. Tulalip Tribes chairman Melvin Sheldon Jr. called it an "historic day," concluding: "I see our young people here, and they are going to carry this on."

* * *

Dinner is now done and protocol gets underway, and the energy is high from today's celebration. Paddle necklaces are handed out and most of the youths are pleased to receive a gift. I stare down at my dirty toenails and remember that Arnie Robinson told me the benefit of being barefoot in the Bighouse, as shoes and socks are barriers between humans and the earth. I have a hunch this is the only Longhouse we will be in this Tribal Journey and there is something comforting about the way its cedar, sand, dust, and smell protectively hold on to those within it. In colourful regalia, Bella Bella performs a number of songs and dances including a ceremonial song reserved for special occasions like today's naming of the Salish Sea. I am watching intently when all of a sudden, protocol comes to an unexpected halt. A man has fallen into an older woman in a wheelchair and although she is not seriously injured, she is visibly shaken. Tradition dictates that when anything *bad* happens on the floor, it must be dealt with right away, so some of the Elders, including Willie Seymour from our canoe family, immediately place blankets upon the frightened woman to realign and embrace her spirit. When the Elders finish speaking, witnesses place quarters in their hands, and protocol resumes. Eventually it is our canoe family's turn to take to the floor and we sing loudly and proudly in our red shirts, aware of the audience and mindful of the fact that our Elder, Buffi, has to leave the journey tonight.

July 16, 2010. Most of our canoe family left protocol shortly after we sang last night, anticipating this early 4 a.m. start for many, complete with a full breakfast compliments of our

Songhees hosts. One of the boys stayed behind in the Longhouse with Willie until the end of last night's protocol, leaving his side only to go to the washroom, a certain contentedness seemingly sought in the presence of an Elder. For today, only nine of us adults will take the canoe and support boat, as the water is simply too rough to risk having the youth paddle. In the name of safety, it is decided they will take the Black Ball Ferry from Victoria, British Columbia to Port Angeles, Washington. None seem to mind, as they are craving some free time. As it turns out, the water is too rough for even the adults to paddle, and we spend most of today's passage on the *Scott Hill* as the Navy and Coast Guard escort travellers from Canada to the United States. The customs agents don't bother us; however, we are prepared with proper identification and documentation just in case they do.

At Hollywood Beach in downtown Port Angeles, today's landing protocol is informal—no rafting up—as canoes are coming in at different times and in different ways: by paddle, tow, and trailer. There are approximately 50 canoes now, a considerable increase with Canadian and American canoe families converging in one place. We wait for the rest of our canoe family who arrive a short time later on the ferry, smiles on faces and pizza in hand and our land crews bring us to our campsite about 20 minutes away. In the long emerald grass, we place our tents in a circle, the sun shining through a constant breeze. We share this residential site with a couple of other canoe families and are so close to the ocean we can hear the waves crashing into the shore.

After dinner, tonight's protocol is held in the Elwha Tribal Center Gymnasium and the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe hosts go first, taking almost two hours while the restless crowd chatters more than normal. By the time we do our protocol, our Elder Willie has to speak extra loud because the gym is so noisy. With many canoe families now, the Kw'umut Lelum youth

are enthusiastic to meet other kids; and, although it is more difficult to keep track of everyone, we manage to round up our crew and head back to camp for 11 p.m. A handful of youths are disappointed to leave protocol but the message tonight is that if one person is not safe, our canoe family is not safe. During tonight's circle gathering, we talk about ways to look out for each other and it is very much a family conversation with everyone having a chance to speak and listen. There is no pressure to talk, as dialogue is as much about listening as it is about speaking. The theme is to mention something we are grateful for, and one of the youths says, "I'm grateful for the experience of Tribal Journeys; not everyone gets to do this."

July 17, 2010. I wake to the sound of a chorus of zippers that hatch the way to a new day as everyone opens their tents in unison. The Kw'umut Lelum youths begin by helping in the kitchen and serving the Elders at breakfast in the gym. Some of the adults call it the "Indian Way," the young people serving the Elders so the Elders can eat first. The increase in people is apparent here in Elwha, and the line-ups for showers cause residents of the community to welcome people into their homes to wash up. Some request a donation or small fee. It is two hours before I get a cold shower that is well worth the wait. As I stand in line, the police officer of our canoe family washes the hair of one of our youths in the kitchen sink of the random house we are in. The girl had expressed her dislike of police on day one of the journey, and this moment indicates the potential of Tribal Journeys to humanize relationships by removing barriers that exist outside it.

Today is a day off for everyone, a chance to relax, interact, and rest up before the final portion. As many of the Kw'umut Lelum youths are fans of the *Twilight* vampire series, they decide on a road-trip to Forks, a nearby town where the movies are based. Only one girl stays at

camp with five of us adults, and we straighten up our tented kitchen area then do some shopping. Tonight's dinner is fresh crab and halibut followed by protocol that continues where it ended last night. I arrive to the gym when Ahousaht is on the floor, noticeably a crowd favourite with their powerful male voices capturing the audience's attention. I am visibly moved by one of their songs and Willie, our Elder, puts his arm around me while one of the youths comes over and hugs me. I later find out from Arnie Robinson, originally from Ahousaht, that this blessing song often overwhelms people unexpectedly.

Our rest day is coming to a close as we anticipate a 4 a.m. start tomorrow, on the ocean right after breakfast. During the skippers' meeting, they discuss the likelihood of rough waters, cautioning that for every half hour canoes leave late, they can expect to add two hours to the trek. We exit protocol fairly early to come together for a circle. Tonight's gathering feels cohesive and exuberant, with most youths still excited about their day in Forks while cocooned in sleeping bags, protected from the cold. Only a few are disappointed, and one of the boys says: "It was just a bunch of shopping," while another simply states, "It sucked." But in keeping the conversation positive, we reveal our favourite parts of the day while the wind ushers the clouds along, and mine is observing these contented young people in this circle. These conversations are moments of unity and reflection, as I illustrate below with anonymous youth expressions from our circles; they encompass the Kw'umut Lelum emblem called *rebirth*, designed by artist Edward Joe of Ladysmith.

It represents the circle of life from inception to eternity. The child in the whale reflects a long history of co-existence where we have shared the power to heal and to have pride in our people and our nation. The orca represents a strong tradition to respect the unity of the family and the community. (Pat Thomas)

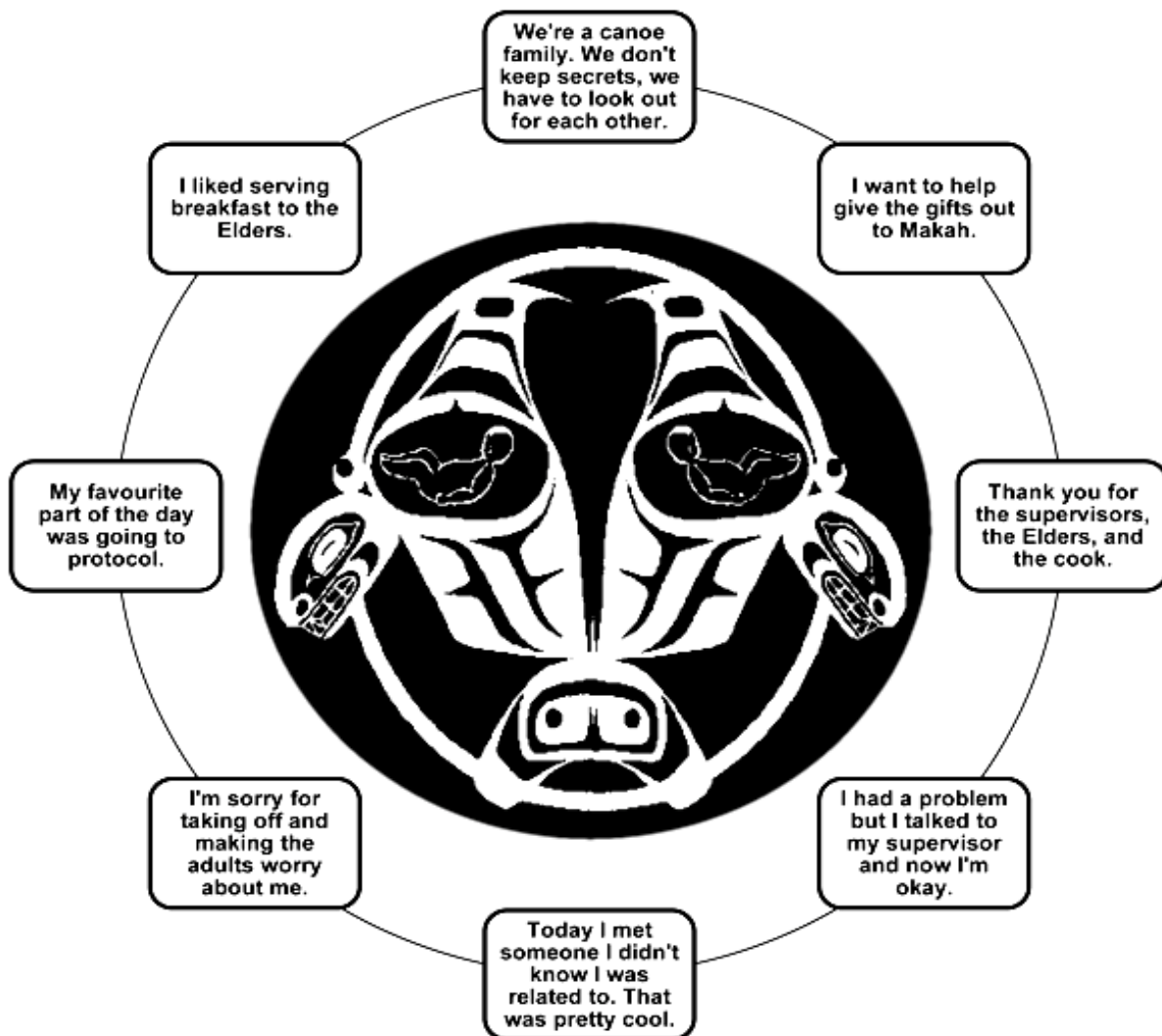


Figure 2. Youth Quotes From Kw'umut Lelum Canoe Family Circles. Kw'umut Lelum Emblem adapted from <http://www.kwumut.org/>. Copyright by Kw'umut Lelum Child and Family Services, reprinted with permission.

July 18, 2010. Today's leg of the journey is to Pillar Point, but before daylight even makes a full appearance, we know that paddling is not an option. The threat of the water is too dangerous and the canoes must be towed. Back to camp go all the Kw'umut Lelum youths except one, who stays behind to travel the support boat with some of the adults, including me. Our cook whips up a pot of *mush*—oatmeal—for breakfast on the *Scott Hill*. Having participated

last year as the Kw'umut Lelum canoe family cook, she knows all too well that things don't always go as planned and she is ready for those inevitabilities. On the other hand, the ocean is predictably angry, and at one point, the *Xpey'* canoe breaks free from its rope and begins a journey of its own before captain Arnie retrieves and reconnects it to the *Scott Hill*. Even canoes stray from time to time. We end up bypassing Pillar Point and going all the way to Neah Bay where the remainder of our canoe family is already setting up camp. This means we will be in the same site for five nights and won't have to pack up camp until the journey's end.

Our land crew supervisors are already at the Makah Marina in shuttle vans when the *Scott Hill* arrives. I almost fail to notice the exquisiteness of the harbour as I get lost in thoughts of regret at the alternate finish to this journey. Paddling in to the final destination of Neah Bay was supposed to be the climax: the culmination of perseverance and hard work, a collective canoe family triumph, a physical feat, a shared experience with dozens of Pacific Northwest nations and tribes. This isn't how it was meant to be; our canoe family isn't even together. Wallowing in my dejectedness, I realize my concerns are temporary misguided by my selfish expectations.

Me: I guess it's not just about the paddling, right?

Pat: It's more than paddling; that's part of it, but not all of it. I find this year it's more about building relationships. I really see that in the kids: teaching about healthy relationships and family and community, trying to instill that.

Me: You can see that they're learning a lot, or at least they're talking about what they're learning more than they did last year.

Pat: Yeah, I think it's the teaching; we're fortunate to have the Elders with us to teach us along the way. One Elder said to me, "It's about having fun at the end of the day, they'll learn along the way."

As Pat Thomas and I dialogue about this year's Tribal Journeys, I realize that (a) it's not just about canoeing and (b) it's not at all about my perfect ending.

When we arrive to our camp, the youths are engaged in Frisbee and soccer, seemingly unaffected by the amended arrival to Neah Bay. The adults are cleaning up and relaxing, both of which are easier now with the addition of mobile showers and the removal of paddling safety concerns. I sense that our shuttle vans, as well as the local bus, will be busy taxiing people to and from this campsite and downtown where all the festivities are. After exploring in respective small groups, the Kw'umut Lelum canoe family reconvenes for a circle, as we are accustomed to doing, and tonight we are to reveal a fear that we have about this journey. Most of the youths are initially quiet, but as they witness the adults' vulnerability, they become more comfortable in sharing. I admit my fear, which is writing this paper and relaying this story effectively.

July 19, 2010. Today is the day we've all been waiting for, as the Makah Nation welcomes thousands of Tribal Journeys participants who have planned, fundraised, and paddled to arrive at this final stop. Although many are already here in Neah Bay, all canoe families will come together in an official landing ceremony to celebrate reaching this final destination. First, the canoes will gather for an informal "soft landing" at 2 p.m. to the east of the marina; then, at 3 p.m., the ceremonial landing will take place to the west of it. Thousands will witness canoe families come to shore in the culmination of the historic *Paddle to Makah*. Not only is it the last leg of the *Journey to the Beginning of the World*, it is also the beginning of a massive week-long cultural celebration that members of the Makah Nation have been working hard to prepare.

* * *

"Why does everyone call them *honeybuckets*?" I ask Arnie Robinson about the hundreds of green plastic port-a-potties that line the campsites, shore, and vendor areas. He has been to Neah Bay before and tells me that Honey Bucket is the name of the well-known company that

provides these portable outhouses. We get to talking and Arnie tells me that arriving to Neah Bay during this journey has been a powerful experience and that it has invoked an “indescribable feeling” in him. He explains a difficulty in distinguishing why he felt more emotional than he did in the other Indigenous communities along the way. In remembering that people have a profound connection to places, Arnie’s relationship with Makah lands is substantiated by Basso’s (1996) summation: “Places, as we realize, are as much a part of us as we are of them” (p. xiv, para. 1). Eventually Arnie figures out that his connection to the land is so intense because of his Nuu-chah-nulth origins from Ahousaht, the Canadian counterpart to the Nuu-chah-nulth of Makah. “Thats it!” he exclaims. “We’re on Nuh-chah-nulth territory. It’s like coming home.”

* * *

The weather and tides have been fickle in the latter part of Tribal Journeys 2010, but for today's final landing protocol, the clouds part like curtains for the stage. Escorted by two eagles who have been watching intently from separate pole perches, canoe families already in Neah Bay paddle out to the soft landing area and patiently wait for the others to arrive. The Makah Nation thoughtfully hand out red bags to everyone, including a sandwich, fruit, and bag of chips; a bottle of water; hand sanitizer; a red commemoration bracelet; and a Tribal Journeys 2010 information booklet. While canoe families paddle in from Pillar Point to join up with those of us already in Neah Bay, members of the families at this soft landing mingle, those in plainclothes rolling up sleeves while others in regalia seem unbothered by today’s heat.

Thousands of onlookers are marvelling at the sight of dozens of dugout canoes, known as *chapatz* to the Nuu-chah-nulth, the vessels’ colourful Indigenous designs proudly adorning the Makah waters. Some may have seen this before while others wonder what this journey is all

about. As we circle the harbour in typical protocol formation, people cheer at this incredible celebration unfolding in front of them. We raft up in the ceremonial landing area and the Salish nations and tribes are the first to come ashore while a group of canoes remains rafted up together behind a roped area. There are 86 canoes in total, so there must be an order to this final landing. We are the first to experience this grand welcome which begins with three bursts of fireworks. Up to a hundred Makah females of all ages face the ocean and line the shore as they dance in the sand. Breathtaking. Masked dancers continue the celebration atop a makeshift longhouse designed especially for Tribal Journeys 2010, and two of my participants tell me these are called *hinkeets* dances, and are only brought out to honour and respect a special event. The same dances will be presented to the next group of canoes to come ashore.

The smell of fresh salmon is wafting our direction from town as a placid plume of smoke rises from the apparent cooking area in the distance. With microphone in hand, Makah Nation's Maria Parker Pascua welcomes the canoe families in Makah language, and Honourable Chairman Michael Lawrence translates her words, which include:

With Tribal Journeys 2010, another page in history is written. We are thrilled to be a part of history with you and overwhelmed by the amount of growing participation Tribal Journeys is witness to each year. We, the Makah, honour your attendance. We welcome your songs and dances, we invite you to share a meal with us, and we encourage you to keep your traditions alive and cultures strong. Thank you. *Klecko klecko*. (personal communication, July 19, 2010)

Canoe families simultaneously tap the handles of their paddles inside the canoe, not on the gunnels, causing thunderous cedar applause. In the background, a similar echo serves as a reminder of the canoes-in-waiting, and those of us in the first group briefly introduce our canoe families and ask permission to come to shore. Our Elder Willie introduces our Kw'umut Lelum canoe family and thanks the Makah for allowing us to part of their legend and for sharing in this

milestone. Frank Brown is the speaker for Bella Bella and Frank Nelson shares words on behalf of the group of canoe families from Vancouver Island, including how Tribal Journeys will continue because of the participation of the youth (personal communication, July 19, 2010). The strong presence of these two men reminds me that their dedication to reviving Indigenous canoe journeys is a fundamental part of what has become this annual Tribal Journeys tradition.

This afternoon's ceremonial landing protocol takes up to four hours so there will be no night-time protocol this evening. That will get underway tomorrow and is scheduled to last until July 25th, allowing enough time for all canoe families to present their respective nations through singing, dancing, and the sharing of stories and gifts. The final protocol will include more regalia and longer "performances" and as the word gets out, passing tourists and curious neighbours not otherwise participating in Tribal Journeys will come and go throughout the week. In an outdoor serving area, several volunteers scoop food onto the plates of at least 7000 people who gather in the school gym to enjoy this fresh salmon dinner. The Makah hosts say a prayer before we eat, and other nations and tribes sing and drum throughout the evening. The Bella Bella canoe family is up late practicing for protocol and one of our youths stays behind to watch his Kw'umut Lelum supervisor dance, falling into a peaceful sleep long before they finish.

July 20, 2010. Protocol gets underway this morning shortly before 11 a.m. in a large tent set up on the football field of Neah Bay High School, complete with bleachers and chairs beneath a white awning that encompasses the *stage* of grass. Most of the Kw'umut Lelum canoe family waits until after lunch before coming downtown but I wanted to be here for the start. Besides, I couldn't resist lining up at a roadside vendor for an *Indian taco*: fry bread topped with saucy ground meat, lettuce, cheese, tomatoes, onions, and sour cream—a messy delight that I've

only ever experienced during canoe journeys. The tentative protocol order is posted so we know when each canoe family will perform although changes are inevitable. The Greenland/Alaska canoe family gets started while the Māori people of New Zealand wait their turn in the adjacent practice tent not far from the nearby complimentary healing tent to treat various afflictions.

The majority of our canoe family spends the day between the protocol tent and the many booths and kiosks that line the shore where approximately 80 vendors are selling food, art, clothing, jewellery, books, music, and an array of other souvenirs. Approximately 30 rented golf carts are readily available to shuttle people around town while the canoes rest quietly on the beach, their part of the journey complete. The late afternoon brings an enthusiastic bunch of youths back to camp, and after a meal-like snack of hamburger soup and bannock prepared by our wonderful cook, we practice our protocol songs. One of the boys burns some sage in a seashell and our canoe family takes turns smudging ourselves in an impromptu circle gathering.

* * *

Throughout the journey, many of the Kw'umut Lelum youths expressed an increasing desire to participate in protocol, either by singing together as a canoe family or by observing others in song and dance. But while Tribal Journeys is an introduction to protocol for some of the Kw'umut Lelum young people, for others, it is a reconnection to teachings and traditions already once learned, as this group home caregiver explains about one of the youths.

Being out here and being with some of the other tribes, listening to their songs and things, it has rekindled what I call her "Inner Indian." So the songs and stuff that she remembers from where she comes from, she's singing them and she's teaching me. (Nicole Norris)

No matter how distracted this young girl was by a teenage boy who had captured her attention, nothing could prevent her from dancing with her original home community's canoe family.

Leaving her unsupervised in the practice tent was only a concern until I realized how committed she was to participating in their protocol, although I admit a slight sense of relief when I saw her enter the protocol tent. Proudly wearing her button blanket, she danced and danced and danced while as a canoe family, we watched and watched and watched this wonderful transformation.

She has been through a lot in her life and she's a little bit reckless, though it's certainly not her fault. But when she was dancing there, she was just totally into it and dedicated to her culture and her heritage while she was performing... it just really hit me hard in my heart and it felt really good in my spirit to watch a young girl like that give so much of herself to her culture and her dancing. And the smile on her face is what really touched me the most. (Eric Danielson)

The moment left many of the Kw'umut Lelum adults in awe, and, as Nicole pointed out, protocol is not only transformational, but also allows the youth to teach the adults through their unabashed participation. For instance, I may never have danced if one of our boys hadn't brought me to the floor of a Bighouse for Cowichan's Friendship Dance, or if another girl hadn't invited me up from the grass of the protocol tent to take part in Alert Bay and Alaska's interactive dances. As we dance, I notice the smiles on our youths' faces and sense this is something they want more of.

As Vyna Brown points out, protocol and traditional celebrations within Tribal Journeys provide an environment where it is cool for the youth to be part of Indigenous culture.

You come to something like this and it's not cool to drink, it's not cool to smoke, it's not cool to smoke weed. It's not cool... and when you come here you're put into an environment where what we do, we don't even question. This is how we celebrate. If you know your songs and dances, you're rich, you're wealthy, you're full; it blows some youths' minds. (Vyna Brown)

Vyna talks to me about how many of the young people are disconnected from Indigenous culture because of the distractions in everyday life, and she understands first-hand how those challenges can lead youth in negative directions. But, she adds, "I've seen this Tribal Journeys change the lives of grown people," so she says it's never too late to establish a cultural foundation especially

for the youth. Wes Nahanee says he has witnessed the effects of those new beginnings, as youths who once walked around town “all gangster and that” have gotten involved in the journey and started looking more at culture and less at trying to be someone they are not.

* * *

A silence falls over the crowd in the protocol tent when a nine-year-old girl from Sliammon near Powell River, British Columbia sings Amazing Grace.

Pure

Innocent

Flawless.

As she finishes, the young girl receives an ovation that leaves many people standing in tears. She then sings *Shallow Waters*, a song she co-wrote to bring attention to the dangers of oil spills that continue to threaten the Northwest Coast. The energy and spirit at protocol is contagious tonight and several of the Kw’umut Lelum youths are enjoying the participatory dances. I am watching one boy in particular who is typically shy and quiet to the point of rarely speaking. But tonight he is very different and it is not difficult to see why. A teenage girl from another canoe family is constantly by his side, her smile lights up his face as they laugh, talk, and dance. Some would refer to this friendship as a “Tribal Journeys relationship,” and because the boy appears outwardly different than he was before meeting the girl, the change does not go unnoticed by anyone in our canoe family. In fact, some of the other youths are jealous of his bliss—they did not expect this—while others simply tease him about his *girlfriend*. None of these interactions adversely affect the boy and his confidence only seems to grow. As someone he has already been talking to about this girl, he tells me “I am happy,” and in this moment, I am overcome with a joy that can’t even be put into words. For this boy, and because of this boy, I am happy too.

It is after midnight and tonight's circle is once again a profound experience as most of the youth have no problem expressing themselves. Some are disappointed that our turn at protocol is delayed until tomorrow while others are apologetic for wandering off without letting an adult know where they were going. Two of the youths are not speaking to each other—again. Vyna hears about the transformation of our Kw'umut Lelum girl who danced with her original nation tonight at protocol and is impressed with the girl but not surprised at her reconnection to culture. In fact, Vyna tells me when she and the girl had shared some songs on the support boat, the girl was shocked at her own ability to recall words and songs in her traditional language. Vyna told her: "That's because you're on the journey right now and your spirit is alive. You're allowed to remember things that when you're in the other outside world you're too distracted to remember." Vyna informs the girl that sometimes in life, it can be "hard to maintain who we are as First Nations people," whereas on the journey, it happens naturally.

July 21, 2010. This morning we are second in line at the protocol tent, and as Qualicum finishes up, an obvious sadness appears on many of their participants' faces, as this performance marks the end of their journey. Most are headed home today but we delay their departure for a few more minutes by inviting them to join us for one more dance. Led by our elders we sing and dance, and some of our own canoe family members become emotional as they realize it is our last protocol performance as well. Our youths give tokens of thanks to the Makah Nation: shirts and hats along with a paddle carved by one of Arnie and Freda's relatives. Our Elder Willie is thoughtful in remembering to include the host family's main cook in our gift-giving. The Makah respond with gifts for our oldest and youngest youths who graciously accept the offerings.

After a short time in the protocol tent, most of our canoe family ventures back to the beach and vendor area, shopping and meeting old friends, making new friends, and often discovering relatives not previously known. I know that at the end of the day, we will all end up in the protocol tent together and everyone will be watching, thinking, and feeling *something* about this journey. As expected with teenage girls, some are talking about dating, breaking up, and reuniting with boys they met during this and last year's Tribal Journeys. Meantime, the guys are less overt when it comes to their flirtations. One of the boys takes the time to tell me about how a little bit of freedom here has gone a long way for him. He says it allowed him to be alone with his thoughts while sitting on a bench at the water's edge, admiring the sun setting into the mountains as the mists set in. I am impressed by his maturity.

Following dinner in the gym, back to the main tent we go for more protocol. In addition to tokens of thanks for hosting nations and tribes, some canoe families give away creations to the audience on behalf of their respective communities. Our canoe family youth had given out Kw'umut Lelum t-shirts during our protocol, mostly to those seated in the Elders' area. Other families give items such as the paddle necklaces we received in the Songhees Longhouse, or things like cedar bracelets, blankets, or bigger items like drums and pieces of art. When Tulalip rolls out a 24-inch drum tonight, one of the boys in the Kw'umut Lelum canoe family is ready.

He was watching the guy and nobody else was really paying attention much, and the gentleman was about a good 40 or 50 feet away. All of a sudden he just grabbed the drum and he rolled it out across the floor. (Eric Danielson)

Our boy runs out there so fast and scoops up the drum, proudly grinning from ear to ear. He and Willie end up singing a song in front everyone so they choose *Stz'uminus Mustimuhw*, bringing tears to the eyes of some of our canoe family members, as well as some onlookers. As an

encore, our youth seeks out the leader of the tribe who gave the drum away so he can personally thank him for it.

July 22, 2010. The journey isn't quite over yet, but a few of the youths are leaving with their caregivers after questionable behaviour by a couple of them. As they pack up their belongings, our cook concocts an egg-rice-wiener-garlic-and-onion dish that is a hit. It is foggy and damp today, and some of the adults take a group of youths to the Makah Museum. As the evening winds down with the sunset, our shuttle vans come to pick up our canoe family from the protocol tent earlier than expected. Van rides are typically filled with music, chatter, singing, and raucous laughter, but for one girl, this shuttle back to camp is not fun at all. This girl just saw her boyfriend for what will likely be the last time until next summer's Tribal Journeys, as the Kw'umut Lelum canoe family is heading home tomorrow and she lives nowhere near him. After learning that they didn't have a chance for a proper goodbye, I agree to take her back to the protocol tent to do so and the young couple takes time for a proper final farewell.

July 23, 2010. Shortly after waking, our camp looks like it has been hit by a windstorm, foamy mattresses scattered on the wet grass, tents in various stages of dismantle, and belongings in disarray. The Kw'umut Lelum canoe family is packing up to go home on this final day of the journey, everyone except for captain Arnie, skipper Freda, and me who plan to stay until protocol is complete. The host's final protocol is a much-anticipated presentation but if other canoe family protocols get extended into Sunday, Freda and I may have to go home before it is over. A few of us grab a quick java before the Kw'umut Lelum canoe family departs, and not unlike the young couple last night, it is difficult to say goodbye. I take my time with each person as we share some final words and brief embraces. After they go, I think about the journey as I

walk towards Arnie's boat. When I arrive at the *Scott Hill*, I see the Kw'umut Lelum canoe family lifejackets strung across the boat and the words to our protocol songs now half-smudged off the glass doors behind them. The canoes are still sleeping on the sand while the mist rests on the mountains like the boy described to me a couple days ago. Already, I miss our canoe family.

Having relocated my belongings to the *Scott Hill*, I settle in to one of the staterooms, alone on this boat for the next two days as Arnie and Freda are staying at a relative's house. Thousands of tiny fish are scurrying in the water as if in a hurry to get somewhere, while conversely, there is barely any traffic on the main road along the shore. I take advantage of a golf cart shuttle to visit the Makah Museum and by the time I am finished, tourists are already flocking to the protocol tent. They are welcome to attend and their interest is respected, although from one conversation I overheard, some participants find the unfamiliar presence of the passing spectators changes the dynamic of protocol and causes it to feel more public and less intimate. Some of the newcomers stay for the pasta and garlic bread dinner. Immediately following is an announcement of another death relating to the Makah Nation, and I recall something Vyna said.

I was always taught when death's around, you sit still; you are silent. The reason why is because when death is close, it always happens back to back to back. I was trying to tell the youths: "You guys have got to sit still, like you've got to, because this is when there's spirits around." (Vyna Brown)

It is the fifth death announced this week but because it did not occur on Makah lands, protocol will continue and we do not have to stop all activities as tradition would otherwise require.

Ahousaht takes the floor around 8 p.m. and the crowd is energized by this Nuh-chah-nulth nation performing in fellow Nuh-chah-nulth territory. One of the speakers says the culture will never die because their children have participated in these dances since they were toddlers, a belief that Brandee Robinson shares. "Our culture is strengthening. A lot of people say our

cultures are dying out and I don't believe that because I live every day amongst it. I've taught my daughters what my grandmother taught me" (Brandee Robinson). I find myself wishing the Kw'umut Lelum youths all had a similar foundation. I reflect on Tribal Journeys as Ahousaht performs, but I don't make it through all six hours of their protocol that lasts until almost 2 a.m.

July 24, 2010. I am startled by the sound of footsteps and I realize that someone else is on this boat. It is 7 a.m. and barely awake, I cautiously climb the small winding staircase to discover Elder Luschiim Arvid Charlie on board, cane in one hand and bag of belongings in the other. He is relocating from where he'd been staying in a nearby motel after most of the Cowichan canoe family went home. Luschiim and I eat cold, leftover curly fries and after I help him get settled, I go back to bed. When I wake again, I spend 50 cents on a shower in the marina washroom before going to watch Ditidaht First Nation's protocol. As I find out from Ahousaht's Brandee Robinson, Ditidaht claimed ownership to one of the songs Ahousaht performed last night at protocol. Brandee explains Ahousaht's relations to Ditidaht and says the contested song is a *hinkeets* song that belongs to her uncle. Nonetheless, as tradition requires, conflict must be dealt with immediately and Ahousaht pooled together its money and gave it to Neah Bay in acknowledgement of the disruption. Months later, while talking with Canada's AFN National Chief, he brings up the necessity of this symbolic gesture. "I heard that during our protocol in Makah a song was contested. It's a reflection of boundaries, and dealing with it as it happened is like the process of reconciliation. Sometimes it is difficult, but it is necessary." (Shawn Atleo).

Dinner is halibut cooked in lemon butter and, as it melts in my mouth, I can't help but express my thanks for the many meals we have been blessed with, this one being one of almost 6000 served tonight. The work of the final destination host community is a colossal undertaking,

and I am ever so grateful for the Makah Nation and all the volunteers. By now, every business in town is more or less closed as most residents are readying to participate in the final protocol. It is rumoured to be quite a production and at 6:20 p.m., male voices begin to chant and a lengthy procession of hundreds of Makah members enter the protocol tent with paddles in hand. Males and females of all ages are in various regalia of white, black, and red, and some are wearing cedar hats and headbands. The crowd doesn't all fit inside the protocol tent and some are outside on the field cheering loudly at this magnificent Makah entrance which includes a 28-foot makeshift grey whale that represents this whaling community. As it approaches the front, four masked wolves jump out of the whale and the audience erupts with applause, anxious to see what comes next. I only wish I would be here to find out; and, more importantly, I wish the Kw'umut Lelum youths were here. Next year, however, our canoe family is planning to stay until the very end of protocol and celebrations: Tribal Journeys 2011, the Paddle to Swinomish, Washington.

It is just after 7 p.m. and Freda and I must leave now, regrettably, as the beginning of the final protocol becomes the end of the journey for us. Arnie and Luschiim will stay until the final song has been sung and dance has been danced, enjoying the many hours of this last protocol of Tribal Journeys 2010 which will wrap up with the Makah Nation doling out numerous handcrafted gifts, including several paddles. Freda and I talk about the journey as she drives us to the ferry in Port Angeles where we meet up with other Tribal Journeys participants still basking in the experience. As we board the boat I think of the *Thuq'min* and *Xpey'* which will be back on the water tomorrow. No one will be in the canoes as the *Scott Hill* tows them back to Shell Beach where they began, but I know they remain alive, as does this unforgettable journey.

* * *

Since 1986, Indigenous canoe journeys have been occurring more frequently and in greater numbers along the Northwest Coast. Canoe travel dates back to time immemorial, and although modern-day Indigenous canoe journeys are different, they are more than mere replicas of ancient travel. At a most basic level, Tribal Journeys is a trip from here to there; but rather than simply a journey from point A to point B, I would argue that “here to there” is a collective passage from one social world to another (Van Gennep, 2004, p. 10). This aligns with a concept suggested by one of the participants of my research: “It might even be characterized as a modern day rite of passage” (Frank Brown). I agree with Frank that this is a significant consideration, as Tribal Journeys is an annual ritual consisting of a series of ceremonial protocols and traditions which can cause participants to transform in various ways. Van Gennep (2004) describes rites of passage as phases of separation, transition, and (re)incorporation:

Preliminal rites: rites of separation from a previous world

Liminal rites: rites executed during the transitional (threshold) stage

Post-liminal rites: rites and ceremonies of incorporation into the new world

(p. 21, para. 2)

Tribal Journeys can be said to mirror these phases of preparation, transition, and union (Van Gennep, pp. 20-21), as participants leave their everyday communities to embark on the journey then re-enter a changed person. Liminality is the moment in which transformation occurs. Frank Brown expands on this theory as he talks specifically about the youth:

They are physically separated and each goes through a transition or a journey then you incorporate the experience and have a ceremony at the end. So this piece, Tribal Journeys, is really excellent in a post-colonizing environment, a really awesome tool for doing that. It’s like a communal or collective rite of passage and a lot of kids will do it for a period of time. (Frank Brown)

This is why it is not uncommon for Tribal Journeys to be referred to as a *movement* or *revival* with sacred and spiritual plausibility rather than simply a celebration of Indigenous cultures.

This is also part of the reason behind a propensity to remain in the liminal phase, as it can be difficult to re-enter everyday life as a changed person. “Being on the water is not just a healing experience for everybody; it’s a teaching experience. It’s a view of life from a different place,” says Brandee Robinson. Shawn Atleo follows up: “Without specifically calling it a healing journey, the journey can put healing into action.”

In *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell (2008) draws on Van Gennep’s work to outline three similar stages of a journey: departure, initiation, and return. It is not surprising to discover the Kw’umut Lelum symbol represented in the departure phase: “The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is the transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale” (Campbell, 2008, p. 74, para. 1). In exploring Tribal Journeys with Campbell’s theory in mind, the journey becomes a “monomyth” (Campbell, 2008), duly rendering the participating youths as modern-day *heroes*: The young participants accept the call to the journey, experience the rituals and teachings that are couched within it, and return with a newfound traditional knowledge. Dave Bodaly calls it a life-changing “journey within the journey,” while Frank Brown says Tribal Journeys is a “collective process of rediscovery,” noting that the youth of today end up becoming the leaders of tomorrow. In this respect, I believe the Tribal Journeys youths are indeed heroes in their own rights—or *rites*—not only able to carry on the journey, but the Indigenous knowledge and traditions that it represents. “Yes, these journeys—Tribal Journeys—are sacred,” Canada’s AFN National Chief states with conviction. “Indigenous people are seeking to reconnect after being removed from their culture. Are canoe journeys sacred? Damn straight they are; this is sacred work” (Shawn Atleo).

Tribal Journeys is not the only Indigenous canoe journey, however it is the largest in the Pacific Northwest. Many canoe families rely on community funding, and as Elder Luschiim Arvid Charlie tells me, one funding stipulation in Cowichan is that cultural teachings and Hul'qumi'num language must be taught within the journey.

I tell stories about the local area and local history, so it's all part of it. Without that part, we wouldn't get funding. It must be included; that's what we were told at the beginning and they reiterate it every year. (Luschiim Arvid Charlie)

Shawn Atleo was one of the core organizers when Ahousaht hosted Tribal Journeys in 1999 and says at one point it looked like they would not have enough money to host it. He ended up fundraising by running over 411 kilometres in ten days, gathering more than \$45,000. Since then, canoe journeys have grown in size and the cost is much higher, especially for final destination hosts. While some politicians have publicly committed to providing partial funding towards Tribal Journeys, Luschiim says that the bill is still massive, and millions of dollars are often not enough. He tells me some participants started asking, "Is it worth hosting? What's the benefit to the community?" As a result, an idea was put forward to host every three or four years, perhaps with mini-journeys in between, but to this day, Tribal Journeys remains an annual event. Perhaps its value outweighs its cost.

Chester Williams has been involved in Indigenous canoe journeys for five years as the RCMP's Aboriginal Policing Program Coordinator, and he has learned that not all Indigenous canoe journeys are the same. One canoe journey he is involved in is called *Pulling Together*, a seven- to ten-day paddle hosted annually by provincial agencies in different areas of Southern British Columbia. It started out in 1997 as *Vision Quest* to raise money for assisting Indigenous peoples in overcoming addiction and has evolved into a valuable relationship-building event that

connects Indigenous nations and community organizations. Chester is also involved in *Gathering Strength*, held annually in Northern British Columbia. Interaction amongst the youth, Elders, and paddlers is the essence of this canoe journey, offering learning opportunities through traditional songs, drumming, and story-sharing. Incidentally, the rumour is that *Gathering Strength* will join up with Tribal Journeys in 2014 for the next Qatuwas in Bella Bella.

Although there are several Indigenous canoe journeys of various size, cost, and intent, Chester reminds that the focus must remain on connecting and reconnecting First Nations youths to their past, traditions, and teachings. All journey participants play a part in this endeavour.

Growing up, I always heard: “It takes a community to look after a child.” They teach that within canoe journeys, and when we’re on our way, I always tell my youth, “It’s not just me looking after you, it’s everybody.” (Wes Nahanee)

Chester is currently helping plan a new canoe journey in Haida Gwaii specifically for youth. If his increasing involvement is any indication of how canoe journeys are becoming a greater priority for cultural teaching, perhaps this is a good sign for Indigenous youth of today.

Elsie Robinson. When six of 18 participants single out one person without any direct questioning from the researcher, the unexpected discovery cannot be ignored. Elder Elsie Robinson was an incredibly wise, caring, and spiritual woman who impacted the lives of many. She was born in 1920 and passed away in October of 2009, survived by several children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, and nephews. Members of Ahousaht First Nations paddled in Elsie’s honour during Tribal Journeys 2010, her granddaughter Brandee Robinson calling Elsie the “glue” of the family who propelled their participation.

My grandmother was my only parent. I have parents, but since two years old, she’s been my mom, dad, granny, my best friend, my everything. So, losing her was like the world got pulled out from underneath me. (Brandee Robinson)

Brandee says her canoe family held up Elsie's photo when they paddled in to Neah Bay, but publicly honoured her just briefly, as tradition requires a year-long grieving period after one's passing. Meantime, Vyna Brown of the Kw'umut Lelum canoe family is also one of Elsie's granddaughters; thus, she completed the final stretch in Ahousaht's *Kakawinchiitl* canoe.

I paddled in with my granny's canoe... it hadn't been paddled on Tribal Journeys in a few years and they went to Ahousaht to get it and brought it to Ladysmith. They wanted to do it in memorial of my granny; our family's been taking it really hard. The feeling on the water: we could all feel her. There were times when we were at the ceremonies and I could really feel her. Even when I was on the water with Kw'umut Lelum, I could feel her. (Vyna Brown)

No stranger to the ocean, Elsie Robinson respected it but did not fear it. Her son Arnie says when his children went to bed seasick from the rough waters, she would stay up with him and eat moose stew, unafraid. When the kids were awake, they were drawn to her. "My late mom used to sit on the back of our fish boat—it was a big one—and my daughters said eventually one by one, they'd all go sit with her for an hour" (Arnie Robinson).

The late Elsie Robinson is also the grandmother of Canada's AFN National Chief Shawn Atleo. He fondly recalls her running alongside him in Port Alberni when he was fundraising for Tribal Journeys 1999. Chief Atleo speaks frequently about his "Granny Elsie" and the powerful vision she had of a "big dark thing" too heavy to push. Elsie compared this weight to the page of a dark chapter in Indigenous history that not one person can turn alone, stating it takes all people to change the future. Brandee Robinson tells me this was not the only vision their grandmother had. Shortly before the revival of Indigenous canoe journeys, Elsie envisioned killer whales—*kakawin* to the Nuu-chah-nulth—that were so close together they prevented approaching canoes from passing as the vessels approached from all directions. Elsie believed the whales represented the reasons that maintained grudges amongst nations that historically warred with

each other. Her vision progressed as Indigenous communities worked together in preparation for the 1993 Qatuwas. The killer whales gradually began to part as nations and tribes came together, demonstrating the power of the canoe nation in uniting Indigenous peoples, an essential cultural movement that continues to this day.

We've all gone one way or another to deal with the hurts and pains we feel. I think especially for our youth, for them to find that connection early in life gives them the base that's needed. I had that base with my grandmother and it's what leads me back every time, the teachings she gave me. Whether you do it from a cultural point of view, spiritual point of view or purely educational point of view, you get out on that water for Tribal Journeys and you will walk away every single time with something new inside of you. (Brandee Robinson)

Chapter Five: Reaching the Destination

Some of the same conclusions hold true for Tribal Journeys as they do for research; well in advance, we find ourselves planning where we want to go but we get there in different ways. Each passage is personal and unique and by the time we reach the destination, the journey has somehow changed us. At times we find ourselves wondering: where do we go from here? We look back with fond memories but sometimes there are moments of regret, when we know we could have pulled harder or done things differently. I share the words Wesley Nahanee offered when, at the end of my first Indigenous canoe journey, I finally began to understand its complexities. "The journey is never over," he assured, "This is just the beginning."

Summary of Discoveries

Tribal Journeys brings about many discoveries which highlight the ways that Indigenous canoe journeys, particularly Tribal Journeys, can enable communication of ancestral teachings and traditions, particularly to the Kw'umut Lelum youth. While several concepts were explored throughout my narrative presentation of the journey, four theoretical constructs emerged:

- (1) Tribal Journeys can be considered a modern-day rite of passage
- (2) Relational interactions with people and places are integral to Tribal Journeys
- (3) Traditions and teachings are communicated through journey interactions and actions
- (4) The *Great Canoe* is a “live” vessel that can connect people and Indigenous traditions

These constructs are woven into my performative story of the journey by way of an exploration of discoveries (Chapter Four) which satisfies the *findings* and *discussion* thesis requirements of western academia while remaining true to the methodology of the Indigenous research paradigm.

Affirmations and Aspirations

Many research projects follow the format of analyzing a particular problem then concluding with specific recommendations for improvements. This thesis acknowledges an existing issue and evaluates the validity of one possible response. The starting point was in recognizing that several factors have disrupted the transmission of Indigenous cultures; the focus is on Tribal Journeys as an avenue that can lead to cultural reclamation and continuation. Rather than impose my own interpretations, I have opted to share from each participant a quote that is indicative of the promise and potential that Indigenous canoe journeys behold. In their words:

Culture. The canoe brings these youth together and allows them to spend healthy time doing cultural activities. There are several cultural leaders in all of our communities and they connect these kids to their culture. (Shawn Atleo)

Immersion. They become so much a unit in that canoe that their whole life is there. There’s no “gotta get back to school” or something; this is their life and this is where they’re focussed. (Dave Bodaly)

Continuation. There’s no question this canoe journey is a continuation. There was a broken line because of the affects of colonization, so I think this is a legitimate and culturally appropriate way of reconnecting and empowering youth. (Frank Brown)

Indigeneity. It's in them because they come from generations of Indigenous people. Our people were nearly completely wiped out but these kids carry those genetics, those strong genes. These kids are still here and they're still native and they know that in their hearts. (Vyna Brown)

Inclusion. It's good to invite somebody else over, whoever wants to come and sing. Whether they're part of the journey or not, come and support it by taking part in the singing and dancing. (Luschiim Arvid Charlie)

Healing. The biggest thing I think they get out of it is being able to release pain and hurt that they've had in their hearts, because every one of these kids has been through so much. Healing is part of this journey. (Eric Danielson)

Transmission. In passing on culture, there's so much discipline that it's not an easy thing, so it depends on who passes it down. Are they using the discipline, are they disciplined, are they going by our old ways? (Beverly David)

Mobility. The tribal journey used to be the vehicle that transported our First Nations people, the highway for us. It was not easy and people had to prepare for the trip. The foods had to be dried to maintain the health and the hard work paddling; there was also spirituality practiced beforehand. (Florence James)

Relations. In Tribal Journeys, I get the youth out on the floor, introduce them, find out what village they're from, and what bloodline they come from. People from their territories will come up and say, "I'm your relative," or, "I knew your mother, I knew your father." (Wesley Nahanee)

Carving. To get them back in touch with their own is fantastic especially through carving. They all took part in digging out this canoe and the end result was just amazing, and the sense of pride on those kids' faces. (Nicole Norris)

Addictions. Ray Fryberg of Tulalip said somebody crunched the numbers and the success rate was six times greater than their drug and alcohol prevention programs; Tribal Journeys was that effective they said. (Arnold Robinson)

Transformation. I've watched youth come out of Tribal Journeys completely changed for the better. You come on something like Tribal Journeys and see the greatness of life. It's not just about living and travelling the way our people did; it's a connection that nothing else can give you. (Brandee Robinson)

Protocol. It's good to see the kids singing and wanting to dance, getting up and dancing with other canoe families. Next year, maybe the girls will have shawls, the guys will have drums, and they'll be singing. (Freda Sampson)

Reconciliation. It's a personal thing, the reconciliation; I got emotional several times hearing other people's stories. It's something I am searching for and I hear it; when you go to a ceremony or celebration, there will be a treasure box and what you're searching for comes in many forms. (Willie Seymour)

Identity. The songs, legends, and stories are a constant reminder of being mindful of yourself: who you are and where you come from. (Patricia Thomas)

Community. Kw'umut Lelum is doing this work to help our youth experience our community life and our cultural way of life; being in a canoe like this and getting a chance to experience something in a personal way but also as part of a community of people. (Douglas White III)

Tradition. We're passing down our knowledge, our protocol, to the canoe journey pullers and youth, showing them this is how it's done. This is how it's been done since the beginning of time. (Chester Williams)

Language. We're privileged all three Elders speak the full dialect; that's role modelling. Part of reviving the language is knowing it's out there; and these kids take classes and get more intuitive to Hul'qumi'num. (William Yoachim)

Tribal Journeys offers a modern-day opportunity for Indigenous youths to interact with other Indigenous individuals by traditional communication means. It facilitates a time and space for the young people to connect with the Elders: to witness their knowledge, to learn from their teachings, and to hear their stories. Not only are the youth able to unite with people and traditions from their own territories, but they are presented the chance to observe and encounter cultural practices in and of other Indigenous communities. Kw'umut Lelum Executive Director William Yoachim says Tribal Journeys creates a canoe family the youths can lean on long after the journey is over, and he shares the Snuneymuxw First Nation Chief's vision for the future:

When all these kids that are in care grow up, I want to be able to sit down and have a conversation with them and be clear that we did everything we possibly could to help them know who they are... what family community they're connected to, where they come from, and where's home for them. We have to do whatever we can to be able to look them straight in the eye and say we did that. I think this kind of an experience goes a long way towards being able to have that strong conversation with them in the future. (Douglas White III)

Some guardians may feel apprehensive about sending their children away with a large group for two weeks; it is my hope that this study accurately reflects the cultural and transformative impact of Tribal Journeys so that it may be considered as a potentially life-changing event. Through the immersive experience of Tribal Journeys, young people can cultivate their relationships with people, places, the environment, and the canoe. These vital interactions impact their ways of knowing which influences their ways of being, strengthening the promise of carrying on Indigenous teachings and traditions. Dave Bodaly reiterates: “We have to know where we come from in order to know where we’re going.”

Considerations and Limitations

As mentioned in my introduction, I became involved with Tribal Journeys as a volunteer youth leader with Kw’umut Lelum Child and Family Services. Being affiliated with the RCMP as both a full-time dispatcher and part-time volunteer caused some of the youths to perceive me in the same way as the police officer who also participated in the journey; I am not a police officer, but many of the young people viewed us both as “the police.” This perception had the potential to impact how some of the young people interacted with me and the participating constable during Tribal Journeys. Also, as a non-Indigenous person conducting research within Indigenous communities, this could have had an influence on my interactions; it also means I do not possess an inherent Indigenous perspective.

As my research focuses on the interactions of the youths in relation to Tribal Journeys and not on the reasons why they live in foster care or group homes, information about personal cases was neither sought out nor disclosed in this study. Also, a potential disconnection between Indigenous young people and their respective cultures was a consideration in my approach to this

research; therefore, historical factors that have caused disruptions in cultural transmission were acknowledged, but not specifically argued, in this paper.

I attempted to solicit feedback from all participants by providing a copy of transcribed conversations, but was unable to initiate further contact with three people. I conducted my data collection earlier than expected in my research process, and should have planned for future participant contact more diligently, continually nurturing these relationships throughout the research process. This would have contributed to an extension of our respective dialogues which may have brought forth further insights beyond initial conversations.

The duration of Tribal Journeys 2010 was 12 days for the Kw'umut Lelum canoe family, a relatively short period of observation for an ethnographic study; however, immersion in such an experience made it possible to translate observations that reflect how ancestral teachings and tradition can be communicated. Tribal Journeys is an annual event that occurred independently and regardless of this study; there were no anticipated risks to participants as a result of this research and there were no inducements involved in this study. The only monetary consideration was that Kw'umut Lelum covered the costs of its canoe family members including mine as a participant-volunteer, thus rendering Kw'umut Lelum my sponsor for this study.

Tribal Journeys is a considerable response to the call for regenerating Indigenous protocols and traditions; however, as a number of participants of this study indicated, other venues must also be pursued in the ongoing quest for Indigenous cultural continuity. Kw'umut Lelum's William Yoachim sums up his thoughts on the journey with this reminder: "Tribal Journeys isn't all of saying it's what being First Nations is all about, but it connects our children to culture and offers healthy lifestyle choices."

Future Research

As indicated, I was unable to unearth any academic studies that focus on the cultural, communicative impact of Tribal Journeys on the participating young people. With this in mind, there are several possibilities for future research including further studies by Indigenous participants of Tribal Journeys, which would be valuable additions to existing literature and would offer Indigenous perspectives that a non-Indigenous researcher could never provide.

Youth care workers might consider comparative studies of the young participants they work with regularly, in relation to individual and collective behaviour before, during, and after Tribal Journeys, including cultural impact and retention of knowledge received. A case study involving youth participation in Tribal Journeys over a period of several formative years could also potentially uncover significant data in developing and strengthening one's connection to Indigenous culture. Primary interviews with the young participants hold great potential in validating and furthering results, whether the conversations are one-on-one or as a focus group.

Subsequent ethnographic studies over a longer segment of time would add to the body of research on Indigenous canoe journeys and cultural impression upon participants. This could include an extensive study by a participant-researcher who gathers data from a variety of Indigenous canoe journeys over the span of several years. Another option would be to analyze the evolution of Tribal Journeys and compare activities and ceremonies since its inception.

Personal Reflections

Selecting my thesis topic was not an easy decision because I understood that in choosing to study Tribal Journeys, the learning curve would be tremendous. Part of me yearned for the “safety” of researching a subject in which I am already well-versed, yet I knew all too well that

my comfort would eventually be replaced by a desire for new knowledge. In analyzing the cultural, communicative impact of Tribal Journeys, I recognized I would face difficulties as a non-Indigenous researcher conducting research in Indigenous communities; however, I also knew my genuine interest in Indigenous canoe journeys, particularly Tribal Journeys, could overcome the challenges and sustain the thesis process. Thankfully, my participants and advisors were patient, understanding, and forgiving.

The relationships formed as a result of Tribal Journeys last long after the journey is over. I am still in contact with some of the youths; meantime, several of the youths remain in touch with each other. As our canoe family gathers for summer barbecues and celebrations of different occasions, we ponder past Tribal Journeys as we plan for the next. By participating in current events and future canoe journeys, it is my personal goal to become a better volunteer and to share my *self* more openly. I am cognizant of my social shortcomings, particularly the inability to allow myself to be vulnerable enough to fully commit to the moment—and to people—with *both feet in*, except in my writing.

Wilson (2008) says, “If research doesn’t change you as a person, then you haven’t done it right” (p. 135, para. 5), and I am grateful for discovering volumes about myself because of this study and because of Tribal Journeys; on both, I will continue to reflect. More importantly, I am blessed to have had the opportunity to learn about Indigenous canoe journeys and the people involved in various capacities, of all ages, and from different communities.



The silent voices of the past continue to echo throughout this region, voices that only now are finally beginning to reclaim that which is their own so that the Aboriginal youth of today are better prepared to walk in the world of tomorrow.

(Cook, White, Blanchet-Cohen, & Hildebrand, 2000)

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