



Elders, Oldtimers and Salmon

Spring & Summer 2010



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Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition

INTRODUCTION - Gretel Miles

Elders, Oldtimers & Salmon

Skeena Elder stories began in the spring of 2010, inspired by the experiences of living in a place so rich with history and culture in times of rapid change. The amazing stories and reflections of the people have always interested me. As community correspondent for the local paper from 1994 through 2001 I found the stories of local people the most inspiring and valuable things I had during these challenging and difficult times. The massive commercial logging and fishing industries are fading into history at the same time tremendous changes have taken place culturally and politically for the Gitksan people. The many changes, on many levels, influence and create additional changes in traditional practices of harvesting the abundance of the territories for all who live here.

I introduced the idea of the project to the people I interviewed by saying:



"I'm doing a project with the Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition to talk to people about their lives on the Skeena, the stories about the river and the fish. We want to get some history, before everything changes too much."

I asked people to speak of their first memories of the river and fish, and what they would like to say to the great grandchildren of the future.

Of the sixteen people contacted, some declined, some were not available in the timeframe, and one decided against publication following the interview. Each person brought a particular personal perspective to the issues around the river and fish, based on their backgrounds and careers. The participants ranged in age from the forties through the eighties and all have had intense and complex relationships with the river and fish.

There was some agreement, some very different opinions, yet a general consensus that things

have changed. And the change has not been for the better for the fish, the river, or the people. It was agreed that greed has been the common factor in the decline and destruction of the resource and habitat.

A shared theme was that a return to traditional ways of respecting and sharing the resource may offer some hope for the peoples who make their homes in the Skeena Watershed, and all the children, grand children and great grand children of the future.

Participants

Yvonne Lattie	New Hazelton	Page 4
Aubrey Jackson	Gitanmaax	Page 11
Lily Jackson	Gitanmaax	Page 20
Wilfred Lee	Kispiox Valley	Page 28
Sadie Mowatt	Gitanmaax	Page 38
Victor Mowatt	Gitanmaax	Page 53
Arthur Sampson	Sik A Dakh (Glen Vowell)	Page 66
Bob Clay	Kispiox Valley	Page 72
Hattie Westle	Kispiox	Page 81
Jackie Williams	Kispiox	Page 93

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Northwest Community College
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Storytellers Foundation
Jacob Beaton, Copper Moon
Audrey-lynn Westle
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Elders, Oldtimers & Salmon

Yvonne Lattie Two Mile, Hazelton April 16, 2010

GG This is Gretel, and Yvonne, on Friday, April 16. Yvonne, what would you like to say about your memories of fish and the river and what's important?

YL Well, the earliest memory I have was with my grandfather. He had *huxws*, dried fish strips, and it was a beautiful, beautiful moonlit night I it was Christmas Eve, and we were sitting at their house, my Grandma and Grandpa's house in Old Town (Hazelton) and the window opened up towards Roche de Boule Mountain, and the moon was over the mountain. We were, and he pulled out his Japanese sauce and puts a little dish of it on the table, and he sings "Silent Night" to me as he's cuddling me on his lap and after he finishes singing "Silent Night" to me, we start eating dried fish and Japanese sauce. And that was the first real memory I have of fish in my life.



Later on, when we were living in camp, those big little logging camps all over the place, they're just small, few people chose, and my mom and dad were living out there and money was scarce, and they used to set a net in the Salmon River and he would pack the fish home on horses to. I believe then we were living at Collins Lake. They would, Mom would can it. They would fill the smokehouse with fish, 'cause fish was a huge huge part of our diet, because we didn't have much, and they had to do a lot of hunting, a lot of fishing, a lot of berry gathering.

And so it was a huge part of our life. Before he'd head off to work in the bush he'd be heading off to the river to check the net, bring it back up to camp and Mom would get it

soaked in water and off Mom and Dad would go to work. And after work they'd get back from cutting trees and hauling them. Well, they were skidding them with horses then, and Mom would cook and Dad would start cleaning fish and then both Mom and Dad would start hanging them in the smokehouse.

And fish was unbelievable. There was so many fish and then later on, after I'd married Don, we'd did some fishing out on Skeena at Elizabeth Wesley's fishing camp out at Slowdown cabin. And she told us to set a net on the creek that runs into the Skeena there and Dad was helping Don, and we had the net out by a pole and there were so many fish that you could literally reach out and touch them as they were going past the rocks.

GG I've heard people say you could practically walk on their backs.

YL Well, there were unbelievable numbers. In half an hour we'd have to pull our net. We'd get about a hundred and ninety, two hundred fish. I don't know the name of that creek but it's out by Slowdown cabin, heading out towards Gisaga'as. And it was amazing. You'd just have to set your net a couple of times, and you'd have enough fish for many families. You know, it wasn't a matter of setting net and fishing and fishing and fishing. You just did it a couple of times and you'd have enough fish for the whole winter. And uh we also did a fair amount of fishing, when Don's dad, Dick, used to have his net at Gitanmaax, on the Skeena there, and he used to catch tons and tons of dog salmon. And Emma used to do it up, tasted like smoked black cod the way she used to do it. And nothing was ever wasted. Everything you caught was used.

GG The heads and the tails and the bones?

YL Yes, everything was used, and we never had any problems in terms of fish. There was always so much of it around and people shared. Everybody got to have a bit of the bounty, and there was no problem there. And it's probably been, I'd say, a good thirty years that I've noticed the downfall of the fish. Just seems to be getting less and less and less. It's hard to get fish, even for ourselves. We have to pay someone to get us fish. Or buy gas for them to go and get us fish, because our fishing territories is up on the Slamgeesh, and we do have fishing holes up a tGisaga'as, but I usually get my fish from my brother Arthur. And when Tony's dad used to have his net out on the Skeena, just above Kispiox, we used to check the net and get fish from him. We used to get fish from Timmits. You'd just go up and help and he'd give you some of the fish. We'd split it. And it was good.

GG So was he your relative, Timmits?

YL No, Timmits is just a nice old guy in the village, and you know whoever's willing to help him, he shares with them and, because he's getting on in age and it's hard for him to, harder and harder for him, he's got heart troubles. It's harder and harder for him to do it, so he usually likes some young guy, more able-bodied guys to go out and give him a hand; you just go give him a hand and he gives you the fish, or half of the fish, or how many you want.

But now to even get fish for older people, it's hard. They have to pay for it. In fact one of the young men in Old Town charges the elders five bucks a fish! Whereas, our custom is, you know, you're a young man, you go out and fish and you give it to the elders. You don't charge them for it.

GG What happened to the fish, what do you think?

YL (*sighs*) I think a lot of has to do with overfishing on the ocean, because you see when the numbers leave the lakes there's huge huge numbers of smolts that leave and they head out to the ocean, and once they're in the ocean they head up to Alaska to the feeding grounds and stuff, and I think a lot of it is over fishing and a lot of it is the fish farms, as well, on the mouth of the river, of the Skeena, as well as the travelling routes for the

smolts. So you've got smolts fighting against natural predators. You've got them fighting against sea lice. So you've got a huge fight for a wee tiny little fish that's just heading out to the ocean and then coming back, it's human fights.

Fighting with, trying to get through and up the river to spawn, because of all the seiners and the trollers and the different gill netters, and so I think they take a huge number of the fish. And as you're coming up the river you've got the First Nation people fishing, you've got the sports fishermen, you've got the bears, so you've got a huge, huge line of predators going after these fish and their only route is the river. If the water is too warm they stay out in the ocean and they don't come up for quite a while. You know, there are so many factors involved in it....how much snow is on the mountain, how much water there is in the rivers, how cold is the water, you know.

GG Do you think there has been destruction of the salmon habitat? All the logging over the years?

YL All over the years, you can, you know, you can see the Bulkley River used to have lots of fish in it, but you know the Morice area being totally raped, I guess, there is very, very few trees out there. I remember when old Dick Lattie used to have his trapline out there and you know there was trees everywhere, there was tons of fish. It was beautiful. And then Forestry (provincial Ministry of Forests) went in there, and the people that had traplines, they gave them ten cents a trap for their traps! I think Dick had something like two hundred, three hundred traps, and he got a cheque for three bucks.

And the traplines gone. You know the trees are gone, so there's no more trapping. You know if you remove the trees, you get rainfall or melting of the snow, you've got the soil going down into the river and your trees, the roots are getting all loosened and you've got erosion of the riverbanks, and you've got all this sand and dirt in the rivers. And you've got fish that are fighting to survive in the rivers, and you're bugging up their breathing systems because their gills are all filled up with the sand and you've got so many many factors into why there is such a huge depletion of our fish...

The thing about it is, when that fish is gone, life or everything is pretty well ceased, especially the birds and the bears that depend on it. You know, the wolves. I've seen wolves dragging fish out of the river. So it's not only people who are going to suffer It's the wildlife that are going to suffer. The end of a whole ecosystem. And how do we reverse it? Well, I don't know. Because with climate change, you've got a whole different factors of snow packs and how much moisture you've got in the ground, and how much you've got into the rivers. Is the weather too hot? Will it heat up the rivers? And the fish coming back up, will they survive?

Driving to Terrace the other day, all the creeks are so low you just begin to worry. And Tony and I went for a walk in behind New Town (New Hazelton) there and we've seen coho up there in the fall, and when we went for a walk up a few days ago the creek was just filled with little fry, but the creek is so low that all you're seeing in the creek are gravel beds. And you wonder how the heck are those little things going to survive, because they

need the water to get back into the river! And if they don't have water running properly, then they're going to have a hard time getting back to the river. So this year, I really believe it's going to be a really hard year for the fish. Because the creeks are drying up. There's very little (snow) pack left on the mountains and you know we're only into April. We should be having floods! And you know...

GG It should be raining.

YL Yeah, and there's nothing, and so you start to worry. You also worry about the fact that it's going to be really hot this year, like what are we going to do in terms of water? Are we going to have tons of forest fires? Are we going to have any berries for the bears to survive? Are there going to be any fish in the river for them to eat?

GG Do you remember any other years, any cycles...are any people telling you about any long dry periods?

YL In my whole life I've never seen water as low as it is this year.

GG And that's 61 years.

YL Yes, and my grandmother never ever talked about water being this low. She always talked about how much fish there was in the river. Used to be just black, she'd say, that you could just literally walk across the backs of the fish, and now, you know, you take a look in the rivers and you don't even see the fish moving any more, unless you get into pools like Gisaga'as, and then you see them finning, but you don't see them going up the river like they used to. They used to just slide up over the rocks; it was so impressive to watch them. And now you don't see that anymore.

BREAK

GG So we were saying that it's hot, and it's dry, and you never remember anything like this. You don't remember your grandma ever telling you it was like this.

YL No, I don't remember it being this way, or my Grandma ever telling me it was this way. She always told me it was plentiful, fish was plentiful, but she always told me that you only take what you need, and you always respect the fish, respect the animals. Because if you don't they may never be there, as plentiful again. It was always lessons. But the biggest thing I worry about, with the unemployment rate as high as it is in this area we're looking at anywhere from eighty five to ninety five per cent unemployment and the majority of our people live on Social Assistance. And Social Assistance for a single person is a hundred and eighty- nine dollars, or... on reserve. I think it's about two hundred, a little over two hundred off reserve. And when you think about the fact that you've gotta buy food for the whole month out of that money then it's pretty hard to exist on that amount.

And so you'll see that most people that are unemployed hunt, they fish, and they, that is their means of survival. So if we have no fish, how are they going to survive? There's already a huge, huge increase in our food bank here, but how is the food bank going to

survive if they don't have fish and they don't have moose meat and you know that's my biggest fear. What is going to happen to the people that are on Social Assistance, the families? It's going to be a huge, huge impact on them. So I don't really know what's going to happen. I keep thinking, what is going to happen in the future, because we're going to end up with no fish.

The only fish we're going to get are the little trout in the lakes, if we even get lucky enough to keep those alive. Because not only have we faced the Forestry but now we're going to be facing huge economic development in terms of mining. And mining can happen in the top of the mountains and affect how many rivers and how many streams? So it's like government has messed us around in terms of the logging, and now they're going to hit another resource. And mining you know, it's going to be destruction of First Nations people if the fish go, because the fish are a huge huge part of our everyday survival. We may not eat it every day, but it's a very very important part of our life because I know, with my children, we put up about twenty cases of salmon a year for my kids and my step children. What are they going to do when there is no more salmon?

It's going to be a huge, huge impact on them as well, you know. Our systems, as First Nations people, our systems are have grown to be accustomed to wildlife, to fish, and the less fish we have and the less wildlife we have in our diets, the bigger the increase of diabetes.

GG And lifestyle changes have been incredible here.

YL And it's you know, not only diabetes. It's lupus, it's arthritis of every sort, it's cancer, and the less we live off the land the more the disease takes our people. And I just wish I could turn the clock back by about thirty or forty years. People still have the knowledge they have now. I don't know what you'd call it, the new system or the new way of life is a destructive way of life. It's not a way of life that is going to ensure the survival of the people.

GG Well, you always garden. People used to garden. What is hopeful? What do you see as hopeful? I do see a lot of garden projects going on.

YL Well, with the garden projects, you've got the vegetables, but what are you going to do for your salmon, for your meat? And you know you need that, you need the omega three oils in your system. First Nation people are very susceptible to many kinds of things, because their lifestyle has changed and there was a study done, not long ago, to revert First Nation people to their normal diet and these were people with diabetes, and the diabetes disappeared! They became normal. They no longer had diabetes, so they did studies and they've come to the conclusion that our way of life was a good way of life and our diet was really good.

GG And active. And devil's club, which moderates your blood sugar, is a natural medicine which is all over the place

YL People are just, I don't know, I think...

GG Time to wake up and smell the devil's club?

YL I think a lot of it has to do with when everybody was working, everybody was active, they were out doing things and there was a goal in life, there was a vision in life, and when the mill went, people just lost that vision in life. It's almost like they lost a bit of themselves when they lost their employment and can't take care of their families any more and you've got a lot of abuse because of it.

And yet, you know, when the big companies came in they didn't come in to do a good job, they came in to just rape the lands and leave with the wealth, and leave us poorer than we were.

GG And here we are.

YL And here we are, with less salmon, less moose, because those roads out into the bush have enabled people to go out and road hunt, easy, slaughter moose and so now there is even a depletion in the moose stocks. So what do you do? So I guess we just have to re-educate our people, and we need to be more conservative in terms of fish and wildlife, and we need to share and we need to not hoard and sell, you know. Because the old people say that when you start selling your food you're destroying your way of life. You sell fish to elderly people, you're. That's against our law. It's against our custom or lifestyle.

GG Well, many of the stories, from what I've heard and read, have that as a theme. If you disrespect the food then the mountain comes down or the monster comes out of the lake. I mean, when the balance is off there is a strong reaction from nature.

YL Oh, that's a part of our story telling. At night my grandmother used to tell me stories, and stories were always to teach us respect, and to also teach us to fear harming something, because if we harm it, it's going to come back and harm us. And I really believe that, because not only First Nations people, but people of all walks of life that have not respected the fish, and that do the ocean bottom trolling that destroys everything and now it's coming back to bite us.

There is really a lot of damage done to the ocean bottoms, a lot of damage done to the spawning beds and to the ozone layer, which is a huge, huge factor. We need to take care of those things. We can never reverse the ozone layer, but we can take care of what's there. But you know, it's not about life and it's not about survival. It's about governments. They push big money, they push corporations, they push development and it's the people the grass roots people in the end who are suffering for their pockets. And we need to start pushing for the government to put laws in place that don't allow raping of the land and destruction of the ecosystems, because...

GG How can we do that?

YL I think it's up to the people to make a good selection when they vote because they don't make a good selection...

GG And vote! Voting is a good idea.

YL If they don't make a good selection then they're part of the problem. If we don't get good people in there to make good decisions and, you know, Campbell said, "BC is open for business" and so what does that tell you? They don't give a hoot in hell about what's up there. All they care about is filling corporations' pockets with money and never mind about the people that need to survive. The government is bought out by corporations. I just wish that we at the grass roots would get it together and start making the right decisions, making the right selection when it comes to making that process.

GG Well, it's about being selective about where we spend our money too, which companies own what.

YL Most of my money goes into bare necessities, because Tony and I do a lot of fishing, a lot of hunting. We always supply our kids, and several of our elders. We don't need a whole lot to survive since there's only two of us. We don't have a lot of huge desires because we're happy with just being and when you can be happy with just being, you no longer need to be a huge consumer.

END



Elders, Oldtimers & Salmon

Aubrey Jackson Kispiox River, April 12, 2010

GG Okay, this is, hmm, what day is it? Monday, April 12...say something.

AJ Hello, how are you?

GG So this is Aubrey Jackson, and Gretel, down by the Skeena River or is this the Kispiox?

AJ This is the Kispiox.

GG This is the Kispiox, on Monday, April 12, Aubrey is going to share his thoughts about fish and the river...

AJ I was born and raised in Prince Rupert and born during the time when fishing was booming and Prince Rupert was very rich, and there was a lot of money and activity and kids around. And, as children living in a fishing community, we would often get together and our playground was down by the canneries or the boats, and crawl around under the canneries and come out all nice and juicy, but we spent a lot of time fishing off the docks and what not...and it was a very interesting time.

My mother, Lily Jackson, was a net mender, and she started her career, obviously long before I was born, but Nelson Brothers was the company that she initially was working for and we were in Port Ed (Edward) during that time. And I can remember like the amount of the number of gill netters, and they were all wood gill netters as I recall.

GG Wooden boats?

AJ And we lived on the waterfront in these pier type buildings, cannery, they were cannery or Nelson Brothers company housing is what it was.

They were built on these piers, and you'd walk out of the house and walk down the boardwalk and

across the main boardwalk that connected all the houses together and on the outside of that board walk were outhouses. Then of course right on the water was the fishing boats moored right out in front of the place, and the net loft, and everything was centralized.

I remember there were coupons. The fishermen would go to the company and collect these coupons, and the coupons were considered currency, and they'd have, they would



be labeled two dollars, five dollars, twenty dollars. You could get a thousand dollar book of coupons. They were just like any other little ticket you'd get, in a 50/50 raffle for instance. But we were able to use these coupons anywhere in Prince Rupert, Port Edward.

GG Oh, in the stores?

AJ Yes, in the stores, in Terrace.

GG Like company script.

AJ Yes, in Terrace, and as I got older I realized that you were able to use them in places like Bella Bella, and Bella Coola and Namu, and Steveston, and Port Hardy, up and down the coast. I don't know far inland the currency was recognized, but as far as the fishing community went it was usable anywhere. And you can pay your net menders, you can pay your fuel, you can buy your groceries with these coupons. You can buy your ice cream and pop, you can give a two dollar coupon to your kid, and that's what we received.

GG And your dad was a fisherman.

AJ My dad was a fisherman, Robert Jackson. He spent a lot of years fishing, and he learned how to fish from his uncle, Peter Wilson. And there is a photo of him, he's about thirteen years old or so. He had hair then, a lot of it. *(laughing)* But...and I don't know where Peter Wilson learned to fish, but my dad taught all of us to commercial fish, and I ultimately ended up being the last commercial fisherman of our family. The last to go out.

GG And when was that?

AJ I stopped fishing in '92. I sold my boat and equipment, and took on a whole new career, saw an opportunity. It didn't pay near as well. It paid a fraction of what I was making fishing but the fishing industry was... the writing was on the wall, where it was going... there was not a lot of money in the future of that industry. But I had an opportunity to learn how to fish from my dad, and from my uncle, Fred Starr, and my uncle Stanley Williams and Percy Sterritt. A number of other, elderly, well many of them are deceased now, but elderly gentlemen who had a really unique camaraderie. Well it was very interesting watching them work. I mean, learning their work ethic.

GG These were Gitksan?

AJ Gitksan commercial fisherman.

GG Gitksan commercial fisherman, who every year would go down and ocean fish.

AJ Yep, exactly.

GG Gill net?

AJ Gill net. They were primarily gill netters. I bought a gill netter and that sort of stuff, but gill netting is only seasonal, it's during salmon, and as a commercial fisherman I found other employment in the commercial industry as an engineer on the deep sea trollers for ocean fish and engineered on a number of boats. I engineered for the Japanese, the Russians, the Polish. Yeah, it was an interesting time in my life.

GG So how long did you do that, from when until '92?

AJ Oh gee, my first real fishing job, on a fishing boat, I was thirteen years old. And my dad thought I was too young to fish, so I went and pounded the docks and I ended up getting a job with this gentleman named Pat Brown. Who is deceased now, a very nice man, he is deceased now. He was very kind to me and we fished Area Six primarily.

(laughing) And I can remember he was a drinking partner of my dad's, and I remember at the end of the season, I guess that him and Pat got together, and Pat was asking my dad, "How much do you think I should pay him?" And we'd already agreed that he was going to pay me five percent of the catch that we'd fished. I had it all calculated out. I had my money spent. But after my dad and Pat got together and finished, after their night of drinking, Pat came to me with sixty bucks!

So there you go. That's what I got, for the season. Thirteen years old, sixty bucks for the season. All I could afford with that cheque was a new pair of runners. And some jeans for school, but that was okay.

GG So at thirteen you made sixty bucks, but you kept at it.

AJ Yeah, yeah, I kept at it, but I mean the fishing was good. We caught a lot of fish, and we fished hard. Pat was a very hard worker. I was, thirteen, I wasn't really; I didn't really know what was truly expected of me as a deckhand. I think I was really there more for his company than anything. But during those years, and particularly when I started fishing with my dad we fished Area Four at the mouth of the Skeena, and we caught a tremendous amount of fish. I can remember catching, with my dad, as a deckhand for my dad, 1,500 or 2,000 sockeye in one set.

GG What year was this?

AJ Oh, this was, gee this would have been...

GG 80s?

AJ Early, no, even 1979, '80...somewhere in that area.

GG So there were still lots of fish and you were catching lots of fish.

AJ We were catching a lot of fish, and everybody around us was catching fish. Anybody who knew how to fish the mouth of the Skeena was doing very well. As the years went on fishing changed, gear development had changed, gear technology had changed, and monofilament came in.

GG Monofilament?

AJ This a type of material they use in the net.

GG And how does that make a difference?

AJ It makes the net less visible to the fish and so back when my Mum was young and building nets out of linen, to this synthetic material, a lot of monofilament strands in there... and Fisheries and Oceans made regulations. I can remember fishing thirteen days

straight. As much fish as we could catch. And Fisheries started with the forty-eight hour opening typically, and would extend it, and then just kept extending, extending, extending and thirteen days later the fishery would close. And everybody's catching a lot of fish, and cash buyers always had, well rumour had it, had anywhere from a million dollars plus on their vessels. And the big high liners fishermen would fly things in, no expense spared. And after the fishery was done there was a lot of money around, and everybody got together and celebrated in downtown Prince Rupert. (*Laughing*) And most of that money went down the drain!

GG Well, at least it stayed in town.

AJ Yeah, at least it stayed in town. And over the years, less and less fish, less and less fishing opportunity, and there were rumblings of (from) the sport fisheries, of concerns I guess about the fishing opportunities for the sport fishermen, because....

GG They were seeing less (fish)?

AJ They were saying they weren't getting enough fishing opportunity, and they would like to see some practices that would protect certain species, like steelhead, for instance. But they, you know, the fishermen didn't really put a lot of weight into it, because the industry was thriving. The commercial industry was thriving, and over the years the sports sector voice got stronger, people were getting more involved with sports fishing, and those people with influence in the fishery began sport fishing more...and changing that way.

BREAK

GG So sports fishermen started getting concerned, you're saying, and the commercial fisher people weren't that concerned, because they were making good money. So what happened?

AJ Well, gear development legislation came in, and there were restrictions. Well there were conditions to the license and those conditions started interfering with the methods that people fished, and they would interfere with the places that people fished and were able to access. And how the gear performed, and there were new developments, a learning curve, that sort of stuff...and fishing ultimately, and the catch just just ultimately just started becoming less and less and less. And there were other restrictions, other conditions to the licenses that were implemented, and the steelhead box which was a tremendous cost to the fishermen.

GG The steelhead "block"?

AJ That's what they called the steelhead **box**. It was designed to revive the steelhead. It was very effective, I thought, but very expensive. And if you didn't have it then you were removed from the fishery.

GG So it was something that would block, to keep you from catching them?

AJ No, no. It would be something to revive them after you had caught them.

GG Oh, oh! To do a little CPR on the fish!

AJ Yeah, and so I spent my thousands of dollars installing one of these boxes on the boat, and I got my first steelhead after installing the box and I performed, I followed the instructions that I was supposed to, and put the steelhead in the box. And a few hours later I heard this slapping around and I said, "Wow!" It was incredible. And so I called, I can't remember what the boat was called, but the program was funded. Anyway, so I called in and said I had this steelhead to be transported, and what they did, whoever the contractor was, would come and retrieve the steelhead, one fish, from wherever they were, and run that fish above what we called the Blue Line, and that was the boundary for the commercial fishery. So up, up, upstream in the Skeena River and drop this fish off.

So they arrive and they pull out this black bag, come aboard my boat and take this fish, out of the steelhead box and with the black bag sitting on deck, they drop the fish into the bag on my aluminum deck by hand, and threw it into their skiff!

I was absolutely livid! I gave them hell. And because, we want to comply, we want to keep fishing and we want to participate in the conservation of these stocks. And spending a lot of money to do so. When you consider, there were 2,800 plus commercial gill nets fishing Area Four, Area Five, and Area Six, and all were required to have steelhead boxes. That's a significant amount of money. And to have these guys come and toss, to toss the fish around like...

GG That you just revived.

AJ That we just revived, yeah, revived. And yeah well I hardly finished giving them hell and they were gone. Away they went in their jet boat, screaming upstream to drop this fish off in the water. Now whether...the condition the fish was in, I don't know...that was a short lived program. I think it might still be a requirement in the fishery now. Over the years the fishery just started....fishing opportunity became less and less.

GG Do you think it was the commercial? Overfishing?

AJ I think there was a lot to that, yeah.

GG That was part of it, and improvements in gear, and then restrictions made it more difficult, and it just became not...a valuable occupation any more...sounds like.

AJ Yeah, I mean that kind of summarizes it, I mean for various, a variety of reasons. One was the influence in the sports fish sector. Yeah their lobby became a lot more aggressive, a lot louder, had more professionals getting involved in the industry. Guiding became a factor, a greater factor, and those guiding opportunities, you know, bringing out those big mucky-mucks of society to enjoy their weekend of fishing.

And they were spending a lot of money, and a lot of that money was spent before they, well, if they were coming from other countries...before they left their country. But the guides would get their groceries at Safeway, but most of the gear was brought in from the States.

Anyway, getting a little off track there.

BREAK

GG I'm going to ask Aubrey for any other thoughts he has on the fishery, closer to home, up the Kispiox.

AJ Well, the fishery closer to home, well, the commercial fishery has changed a lot, due in part to being involved in the buy back, and the terminal fishery, and the SSR fisheries that are being geared to the various First Nations in the area.

And those fisheries, for the most part, work well. Because if you can target a commercial, if you can collect the commercial product, such as sockeye salmon, in an area of the river that doesn't interrupt a run of that particular species, for instance, the Kitwanga run which is in trouble and is always of concern, and we're always trying to build that. If you can collect that fish, sockeye, commercially, without interrupting Kitwanga stocks, than that's a bonus, because...

GG Is that a terminal fishery?

AJ Well, there's terminal fishery and the SSR fishery.

GG And the SSR is, let's define those terms.

AJ The terminal fishery is a fishery that is a commercial fishery based on allocation. And the SSR fishery is a fishery that is based on a surplus of fish, once the spawning stream requirement (SSR) has been met. So it's an estimated spawning stream, so it's an estimated requirement. Once that's been met, and a surplus has been identified, then that identified, or a portion of that identified surplus can go to various First Nations.

GG And that is identified at what point? On the returns?

AJ Yeah, on the returns. So they estimate what's being returned, what the return is and what is required, and then based on that the test fishery will determine whether or not that requirement is being met.

GG Ok, and a terminal fishery takes place where they (the fish) are returning to?

AJ Where they are returning to.

GG But aren't they pretty much not good anymore by the time they come back? Because they're ready to spawn? I'm a little vague on that.

AJ Well, the quality of the meat hasn't necessarily decreased. The colour of the fish has changed, or changes, depending on how long the fish is in the fresh water. During the peak of the season when the fish are really motivated and in high spawning, spawn mode, they can make, cover a lot of distance in the river before you really notice any change in the colouration.

GG So that would be based on observing how many fish have returned instead of catching them out at sea, and saying, "Okay, a third of these need to spawn, and two thirds could be taken." Something like that?

AJ Something to that effect. So ultimately this type of fishing, this type of commercial fishing in the river does offer select, a greater ability to be selective what you're going to harvest

GG Than the big nets out on the ocean.

AJ Yeah, Because essentially, I don't know the exact numbers but like seventy five percent of our Skeena system fish come from the Babine, and those are enhanced. So if we can focus our fishery on Babine stocks specifically and allow the weaker stocks to run their course in nature...so to speak...

GG And we could do that by using those two methods?

AJ Yeah, and in by those methods and in those fisheries, are, those conditions of those licenses are selective gear, where the gill net fishery is non-selective. Whatever swims through the net is what is caught, and if you don't get to that fish in time the chances of mortality are much higher.

With that steelhead that I spoke of, that first steelhead that I got, after I got that steelhead box, I was amazed that that fish had recovered. I couldn't put a lot of time into handling the fish or whatever, I just followed the instructions and put the fish in the box and it recovered. Three hours later. I was astonished, actually. I couldn't imagine what would have happened if I'd caught seven of those steelhead and had to pile them all in that box! Because it just didn't have enough to accommodate. But I was astonished.

GG What about catch and release?

AJ Catch and release has always been a contentious issue with me, because my people, the Gitksan, have always been taught to not play with our food, and the fish are here to feed us, among other things. But for our purpose, that is why we fish them, to eat and to feed. So when we play with our food, in history, our Gitksan history, it tells us that (that action of playing with food) comes with great penalty. So it's always been a point of contention for me. However it happens, it continues to happen, and that's part of the sports fishery now. It's a big part of the sport fishery.

GG That IS the sport fishery, from my understanding. That basically is the sports fishery. Which, it's an economic driver for the area, but like you say it's...a deeply divisive issue.

AJ Well, it is part of the sports fishery and the sports fishery also includes the retention of spring salmon, the retention of sockeye salmon and halibut and all the rock fish. But as far as steelhead goes, in Region Six, that's catch and release. So...

BREAK

GG So, your perspective (on the fish and rivers) as Yaal, Y-A-A-L, that's your chief name.

AJ Yaal.

GG Pronounce it.

Y Yaal. (*Yaahl*)



GG And what does it mean?

Y Well, it depends on the dialect.

GG Up river or down river?

Y Well, it's even more complicated than that. Yaal is an ancient term, and the name Yaal comes from the time before Demlahamid. Yaal was the first chief of the Gisghast,

GG The Fireweed (clan)

Y Yeah, what I've been taught about Yaal, and to just simplify things down to the simplest ground level, as Yaal is when you're almost a centrifuge, where you stir stuff and you sort things out and separate and identify the good from what is not good, or incorrect or inconsistent and you bring attention to it so it can be remedied. And that's Yaal.

Today, in today's language it's evolved a lot and the modern Gitxsan language today it simply means "liar".

GG *(both laughing)* Well, that's what you get for sorting things out!

Y Yeah, so when you hear Yaal in a sentence, used in a sentence in common Gitxsan today, then it is typically talking about somebody lying, or a statement that's not true, or...

GG Well, what's true about the river and the fish, from the perspective of a Gitxsan, with an ancient name?

Y Well, what is true is that if we don't take care of what we have we'll never see it in the future and we'll see some of it in the next generation, maybe the next two generations. But four or five generations down...

GG Of fish or people?

Y Of fish and people. Then it may just be a story, it may be a concept, maybe something that their grandfather told them about, and their grandfather had the opportunity living to the very end of that era.

GG What could they do? What can we do?

Y Search our core...spirituality, search our core, our soul. Determine what's really important to us, to our life, our life as man. Not as a corporate entity or what is important to Canada, or to British Columbia, or what's important to Nelson Brothers or BC Packers, but what's important to us as individuals, as man, and what's important to us in our

survival. And put on your priority things to consider in making decisions as to how to manage our resource and how to act in life.

GG What is the greatest threat to the river and the fish at this time?

Y Man.

GG What can we do...you just said that... *(laughs quietly)*

Y Yeah.

GG Okay....

END



Elders, Oldtimers & Salmon

Lily Jackson Gitanmaax, April 6, 2010



GG Okay, this is Gretel and Lily and we're sitting in Lily's house in Gitanmaax and we're in Gitanmaax...and we're going to talk about the river and the fish.

LJ I was born in Andimaul. Yes, I remember when I was growing up. I grew up in Kitwanga. I was born in Andimaul in 1926 and I grew up in Kitwanga with my parents. I remember my grandmother used to fill up the smokehouse with fish for the whole family. We had a big family, there used to be lots of fish. Now you try to catch fish, there isn't enough to go around. For the family. They're dying off, or I don't know... the river is poisoned or something.

Yeah, and we used to move back and forth to the canneries. My mum was the best net woman and I remember it was, what you call it, it was steam engine. They use coals. They used to take eight hours from Kitwanga to Haysport and I remember all the canneries that were there

operating, cause there was so much fish, you will never believe it. I remember my brother come in twice to unload his boat, overloaded, and the packers were overloaded and the people were working right around the clock. Shift (work), three shifts a day canning fish, by hand. There was no machinery, and every time you fill a tray they punch your ticket. They go by ticket. And the fastest woman has the best pay on payday.

Yes, I remember all that and they used to put the men in the box car and all the women sit in the passenger car. And that is how they transport people from the villages to the cannery. And I remember we used to get off at Haysport. I was little but I remember this,. Then we went on the same boat across to Billmore and that's where Mum works, and then later on they closed Billmore and they moved to Carlisle and then she moved to Klaxton, and there is Porcher Island there too, another cannery where people do nets. My mother was a net woman. That's how I got my training, from Mum being a net woman.

And then they move to Prince Rupert when Nelson Brothers came into the business of canning fish. And to tell you the truth, I think that's the best move she made. It was fun. And then we worked. She worked two years in Prince Rupert and then we moved to Port

Edward, and that's when I started work. I was 16 when I started work. There was child labour in the cannery, but our Dad won't let us work, my sister and I.

GG So when you worked in the net loft, what did you actually do? Were you tying them?

LJ I remember when we first started work in the net loft, my sister and I, my sister is two years older than me, but she didn't work in the cannery. Our Dad was so fussy over us. We started in the net loft in Port Edward. What we did was, the nets come from the factory, linen nets, and they spread it and they put it through, they oil it, and they put it through the wringer and we'd spread it on the other end, and the professional net workers they pick up by mesh, right in the middle. And then they'd put a big stick through, a big round rod and they hung it up. They hung it up to dry. It's all waxed, it's oiled.

And they waited until the nets are dry, and then the women, they hire other women besides the net women to selvedge the net, they put heavier twine at the bottom of the net so it doesn't rip when they hang it on the lines. Like cork line and lead line, and they...oh my Mum, I remember my Mum, were only paying, there were 200 fathom of WHIP and my Mum used to do two of those, starting at seven in the morning and finish at ten at night. No overtime then. We were only getting 25 cents an hour, when we first started, and that was lots for us, kids.

And things were cheap back then. You can buy a pair of jeans for 25 cents, but now you can't get one for less than a hundred bucks! I seen a lot of changes as I grow up. And another woman from Port Simpson, she was fast too, selvedging those nets, and she competes with Mum and they were the top ladies in selvedging.

GG These were nets that had already been used?

LJ No no, they're new They come from the factory.

GG So when you say "salvage"?

LJ That means putting the heavier...

GG Oh it means "selvedge"! The edge...oh.

LJ Putting a heavier edge

GG To make it stronger...So did you attach the floats too?

LJ Oh yes, they did.

GG And so you learned to do that.

LJ I learned to do that. Our first job was just filling needles. There were twenty- two net women, and it was just me and my sister filling needles, and they were fast!

GG Putting the twine in.

LJ Putting the twine in the needle and we managed to keep up with all those women, but by the end of the day our thumb is so sore, that we soak it.

GG So you'd fill up the needle with a certain amount of the twine, and just kind of keep giving it to them?

LJ Yes, we deliver the needles, and we enjoy it, it's our first job. We were thinking of the money!

GG Thinking of all you can buy!

LJ & GG *(laughing...)*

GG So did you go back to Kitwanga in the summer, I mean the winter?

LJ Yes, when it was over yeah, they used to fish spring (salmon) and then they go into sockeye, and then they go into coho, and we used to come back in August. That's how long they work. There was lots of jobs then, but cheap wages. Everything was by contract. If you hang a net in the day you get so much. I forgot how much they pay for hanging, but that's a heavier job. The women were pretty fast in doing that. Yes, it was fun. I love it. I think back and now I...the modern days we have filling machine,

GG To put the fish in the can?

LJ Yes, and filling machine for needles. We don't have to fill them by hand, the modern days these machines come out. They hire younger kids, students, to fill needles, so they earn their school money.

And that's why I said I think that Nelson Brothers Company was the best company my mother moved to because they concerned about kids. They concerned about the people.

GG They cared about the people?

LJ They cared about the people and they give them bonus on Christmas. I don't see that anymore. I remember they used to come to the house. They knew Mum had lots of children, and they'd come with a big turkey. Every Christmas. We moved on. That's when we moved off reserve, and then we grew up in Prince Rupert.

GG Prince Rupert or Port Edward?

LJ Prince Rupert. We used to travel by bus to Port Ed. While they were building the cabins, houses. There's Japanese building on top, and there's white on the other side. They separate us. And they call it The Village on the waterfront.

GG So you guys lived down in the cannery housing.

LJ We lived with the Japanese. I don't know why, maybe because my Dad was a highliner and my Mum was the best net worker...they, but the other people lived down on the waterfront. Cannery houses.

GG And your husband was a fisherman.

LJ Yes, yes, And that's where I met my husband (laughing) down at the cannery. Yeah. He's originally from Gisga'as.

GG So how long did you work down there?

LJ Oh in 1970, 19...good grief I don't remember. I put in fifty- two years...

GG Wow.

LJ Yes I put in fifty- two years. I think it was 1973 when Nelson Brothers sold out to BC Packers, and it changed, it was different company....and...

GG Well, what about the fish? Did you see changes in the amount of fish?

LJ Oh yes! Oh yes, lots of fish, there used to be lots of fish...and we used to work from seven o'clock until eleven o'clock at night, yeah, and it was after the union came in that we started to get bigger pay, and coffee breaks. We never had coffee breaks, just an hour for lunch and an hour for supper, for dinner, and then we'd go back to work.

Yes, the seine boats used to just load. There used to be three shifts a day, so much fish, and the Chinese they were paid pretty low too. They are the ones that are unloading. There was no such thing as machinery.

GG It was hard work, everybody worked hard.

LJ Yes, there was lots of Chinese, and Japanese, and us people. Yeah, I remember people coming in with their boatloads. The packers are loaded so they run into Port Edward to unload. And they used to hire students, and some people they can't, they can't, not enough time to pull off their fish. Their net is just loaded they just roll it on the drum and the company would hire students to pull the fish up... I remember those days.

GG So it was hard work but it sounds like it was fun.

LJ It was fun. Different nationalities...

GG A lot of friendships, and everybody from the village would come too, but then you'd meet people from all these other places.

LJ I understand Tsimshian language, I understand the Nisga'a language during my employ down there, except the Haida. I couldn't catch on to the Haida's It's altogether different. They used to come over. They had bunks for single girls. They'd bring them over from Haida and they have a nice big bunk, nice big, what do you call it...

GG Bunkhouse?

LJ Yes bunkhouse, yeah. And they have somebody going there cleaning, because everybody's working so hard that they don't have time to clean up. They hire some, couple of women, to go and clean the bunk houses.

GG So what about the food fish back home? How did that work if you guys were away all summer? Did other family members...do the fish for you?

LJ They stay behind, my grandmother, doing the fish for us. Not until I was about seven years old did I start going to the canneries with my parents. I used to stay home with my grandma, me and my brother, Ken, the one I just lost. Him and I were very close. And they used to take the oldest girl, Masie, and Mollie, the youngest, the oldest and the youngest with them every year. When they would go down, and it wasn't until I was about

seven years old, and Grandma was starting to get weak and can't do anything. But our other grandma, Mary Williams, used to stay behind and do the fish.

GG So when you went down and you were seven, did you work?

LJ NO! (*laughing*) Our dad won't let us work.

GG So what did you do all day?

LJ We looked after the youngest.

GG (*laughing*) You **were** working! You were daycaring!

LJ (*laughing*) Without pay!

GG Well they fed you...

LJ Back then you don't think of pay, you help...

GG Because that's what you do.

LJ Nowadays kids don't do anything unless they get paid. If we see somebody that needs help, we help. We didn't expect to get paid. It's so sad. That's how our people is... greed setting in.

GG So as far as the fish, the quality of the fish in the river, and how many fish come up, what kind of changes have you seen?

LJ What do you mean, what kind of changes?

GG Well, people have said there aren't as many fish, and some aren't as healthy. I mean, because you prepare fish, have you noticed? You're going to be seeing the differences...

LJ Oh yes, the farmed fish, yes. I notice their bone is so hard, even....

GG They're not supposed to come up here, are they? The farmed fish are supposed to be...

LJ No, no I mean down the cannery. They start farming fish we notice that. BC Packers bought fish from a farm, and we put it through to sample it. We put it through and they give us these little cans to test to take home and I notice that the bone is still hard, Not like the natural fish.

GG Because when you process it, then it gets soft?

LJ It's soft. You can eat the bone as well. You don't notice.

GG Did they look healthy, though?

LJ No, no, it's some of them are deformed, and some of them have big lumps, and we have to cut out the lumps.

GG Now what do you think that's from?

LJ I have no idea.

GG Well, do you think it's the ocean or the fish farming, or who knows?

LJ Might be the change, from the farm, and then they let it go into the ocean. It could be the change, I don't know. It's hard to say. The scientist will know.

GG Yeah, where's our science guy? So what were you able to teach your children about the fish?

LJ Not much.

GG Oh really?

LJ No, I never smoked fish, my husband does all the smoking. I never did it. But I can it, I jar it. And that's what I taught them, how to jar.

GG And you learned that from your mum.

LJ And I learned it from my mum, and I guess she learned it from her mum.

GG I'm thinking about your family... *(two of her sons work or have worked in the field of fisheries research and management)*...so I think that fish and the river seems to be a part of your family's life.

LJ Yes, I think that they learned from their dad, because he took them with him when they were old enough to go with him on the boat. He takes them out, yeah. I think they learn the difference of the species just, 'cause I don't know too much.

GG *(laughing)* You just know how to do the nets.

LJ *(laughing)* I just know how to do the nets.

GG Well that's important too! Do any of your daughters....get involved with the fishing?

LJ Yes, Audrey, Barb. Marlene didn't want to train. She didn't want to do the nets. Too hard on the hands. Too rough on the hands...*(laughing)*

GG Yeah, it would be.

LJ Big pay, now.

GG So they still do it, some of it is still done by hand? So you get the net from the factory, and then you're going to attach the selvage?

LJ Yeah, and later on they change it. They start coming in with synthetic and different kind of string. And we don't have to oil it anymore, and there's lots of jobs lost then, and it's already selvaged. So we just spread it and get it ready for hanging. Lots of changes.

GG Well, what about the Inland Fishery? I mean, for the longest time the people, the Indian people could fish for themselves, but they couldn't sell it.

LJ Trade.

GG Well, they could trade, but there's been changes so they could be legally "excess to spawning." A certain amount could be sold, and we've had been the big fisheries...

LJ I guess so. You know I've never sold a fish.

GG Some of the house groups were quite involved in it. It was quite controversial...

LJ Oh, you mean the Inland Fishery?

GG Yeah, the Inland Fishing. Any thoughts on that?

LJ When that first started, I said to my son, I don't think it's going to work because you have to use your own fishing hole to fish, but not too many people have fishing holes. We have, and we share with our family and relatives so they are able to fish the Inland Fishing. But there are a lot of people who didn't have fishing holes. I don't know if it's still going on. I'd never heard anything, but Vince (a son) was really eager to start that...

GG He was, I remember. He was quite excited and quite involved.

LJ Yes, he wanted to help his people. I don't think they realize the work that Vince did to help them. The way they treat this, I don't think they remember. It's sad.

GG Well, it did seem to create a lot of conflict, a lot of arguments about fishing holes... because suddenly there was money involved, and it seemed to get really far away from... from some people fish and then they share.

LJ Um hmm... I remember when he first started, his plans were, if they use somebody else's fishin' hole they have to get permission, and they have to have an agreement that a percentage of the fish they sold will go into the house (*house or clan family group*) like what's happening when somebody dies. It takes lots of money to bury a person. And they could use that money. That was Vince's plan, but it didn't work like that. Everybody too greedy and they want to keep it all to themselves.

Like our family in Kitwanga. They use Aubrey's (son) fishing hole, for Inland Fishing. They never even put a red cent in his house... so greed sets in.

GG Greed does seem to be the downfall of humanity.

LJ (*laughing*) That's true, that's very true.

GG We take more than we need and...I mean, there's enough food, and enough water in the world...but it just doesn't seem to be getting to everyone.

LJ Um Hmm.

GG Well what would you want to tell the great- great grandchildren of the future, about the river and the fish?

LJ To respect the river and to respect the fish. Not to waste. You know in the old days they never waste a piece of fish. They dry the head, they dry the bone, they dry the tail, they use every bit of a fish, they never wasted. The eggs, if there's eggs they preserve that eggs. They ate everything.

GG They ate the tail and the head? They dry it and make a soup? Yeah, 'cause they'd make a fish stock...

LJ Um hum, um hum, but they salt it down... we have to respect the earth and the river. Everything that's on it. That's what I was taught, and I taught my kids that.

GG What about the sports fishing? Do you have any thoughts on that? That whole catch and release?

LJ Well, I know a lot of people that does that, and they enjoy it! Most of my girls are married into whites and they love doing that. I don't have anything against that, as long as it's not damaged badly.

GG Well, people seem to really love to do it. And they care about the fish, but they don't keep the fish or eat the fish.

LJ It's just for fun.

GG Just for fun. It's a way for them to get out into nature, I guess.

LJ Yes, yes. Oh well what can we do about it? *(laughing)*

GG Well, the sports fishing brings a tremendous amount of money into the area.

LJ That's right.

GG And there are economic opportunities for people to work with those people, sell them things, take them out in the boats and you know, give them, you know, it's not an easy thing, it's complicated...

LJ Yeah....*(laughing softly)*...



END

Elders, Oldtimers & Salmon

Wilfred Lee Kispiox Valley, Hazelton April 17, 2010

GG It's Saturday, April 17, talking with Wilfred Lee, born and raised in the Kispiox. (Valley). Tell me about it, Wilfred.

WL Okay. Well, I was born in the Hazelton hospital in 1942, February, and spent my younger years at the bottom of Tenas Mountain in Kispiox. And where I grew up there was a thirteen acre lake called Tenas Lake and so I grew up there until I was probably, well, I'd left home so I was seventeen, sixteen, seventeen and I went to the Charlottes. Had my seventeenth birthday on the Charlottes. I was there a year, and came back to the valley and did some travelling after that.

GG Some what? Oh travelling.

WL Here and there, but basically I've lived in the valley my whole life and I never found a place I'd rather live. Yeah, I don't know, just seems like a good place. And so what did you want, did you want to know about fishing?

GG Fishing and the river. That's the focus here.

WL Ok...

GG All the different perspectives; you've made a living off the river?

WL Yes, I have. I bought, I guided for many years for Gord Wadley, and then I bought my own guiding outfit from Bob Clay in '91, I think, and ran that until three years ago and I sold to my son, Tom. And so I've always been a keen fisherman, so it was a good thing for me to do. The logging had gone sideways, so, yeah, I made a decent living from guiding and it was something that I liked to do, so it didn't seem like a job.

And the rivers have well...the rivers, the channels have deepened and the river has straightened, and the flow has gotten faster. Mainly what changes the river, the character of the river more than anything else, is ice jams. And so when you get a year when you get a lot of ice and the ice floes, especially early, you get big jams, and it really changes the character of the river. Because it's got to dig under it to find a flow and until it raises it enough to float it away. Next shallow, spot it jams again.

GG So it actually changes the course of the river?



WL It'll change the course of the river, if it's easier to run around it. or it'll deepen the channel. Because water is, you know, a constant force and it finds its way. And that



Wilfred fishing as a boy

changes the character of the river, and the river channels. In the last thirty years probably the river has eaten into the ground, eaten into the earth, and I'd say it's two or three feet lower in the earth than it used to be when I was a kid, eh?

And so the tendency is, especially when they logged it so extensively in the sixties, seventies and early eighties, you get higher highs and lower lows, because the runoff is immediate, and we saw the river straightening a tremendous amount. And of course, when it straightens, you pick up speed.

And so you move that gradient all downstream, you know. It finally ends up in the Skeena, and it takes it wherever it takes it to the ocean. And so we've seen the river currents have gotten faster. Mind you, there are places where, like, in front of the old fish camp, it's of course got a bigger turn there now. It makes a huge loop, it's about to take the road out!

GG Old fish camp, where's this?

WL At Steelhead Camp?

GG Okay, so we're talking about the Kispiox.

WL Yep. And as far as fishing goes, '98 was the best fishing I've ever seen for steelhead, in the Kispiox, including when I was a kid. And I mean it was incredible!

But they had stopped the commercial fishery. There was absolutely no commercial fishery, and that was probably a good year in the salt water for the fish; so there was a big survival. But that was a very good year and we've had several decent, you know, fairly strong years since then. And then we've also had some years when it's been tough.

GG Well, when did they introduce the catch and release for steelhead?

WL Oh...ah, in the '60s.

GG So it's been successful?

WL Oh yeah, you could imagine if everybody that came here fishing killed a fish, there would be no fish. So yeah, catch and release has saved the Kispiox, especially, and

probably the Bulkley too, 'cause it gets a huge amount of pressure. So I think it was an old game warden, who is dead now, but he was a big player in the catch and release thing, and he also was instrumental in the banning all motors off of the Kispiox. It was, it was far ahead of his time. He thought...he was a very forward thinking guy.

GG So it that a pollution factor?

WL It's not a pollution, I mean there is a bit of pollution. I mean I run my outfit, or I ran four stroke engines, so you don't put oil in the water and it should be a law that running in the river, or running anywhere, they should be four strokes. But it was a noise pollution more than anything, because on a small river if you had jet boats, it would be horrible.

GG Well, that's my first thought. I hate the sound.

WL Well yeah, so it would be bad. And you know on the bigger river, like the Bulkley, it's still a lot of traffic but at least it's a big river. And the Kispiox gets so low that motor boats would have a tough time functioning anyway. So it was a very good rule.

GG What about the runs besides the steelhead? People keep saying you used to be able to walk on their backs, there were so many fish.

WL Well yes, of course The fish runs have, have gotten steadily smaller since I was a kid, except steelhead. Steelhead I think have held on better than any of them and when they built the spawning channel on the Fulton they nearly wiped out the Kispiox chinook because they ran at the same time as the Fulton sockeye, and so they fished them really hard because they had increased that run dramatically by that spawning channel, that we almost lost our chinook in the Kispiox and they introduced a small hatchery in Kispiox (Village) which was the saving grace for the chinook. They kind of brought them back. They are, I would say, the fish are probably smaller than they used to be because of it, but at least there's fish.

So you know, I think when you mess with nature you change things, and that was, I think, the size of the chinook did change, though I've seen the odd sixty or seventy pounder hooked in the Kispiox over the last fifteen years. Not very many, but I think the average size did drop a bit. And the pinks, of course, they're in trouble up and down the coast and I think the lower coast. It's probably due to the fish farms and the sea lice but here, I would guess it's probably overfishing, or I don't know.

GG The commercial, at sea? Like at the mouth of the rivers?

WL Yeah, there's too many people depend on that resource, and so for people to make a living they have to catch fish and so they kind of, it gets overfished. And I believe that's probably a big portion of the reason. And the other reason is that we have destroyed the spawning habitat. You know like the railroad bridge over here between New Town and South Town (New Hazelton and South Hazelton). They have to truck the coho around it.

GG Oh, that culvert...that they can't jump. I've seen that.

WL Yeah, and so if we do things like that it just balls the whole thing up. Yeah they shouldn't be allowed to do thing like that.

GG That was in the '70s. And they've restored the stream habitat in New Town, but...

WL Yeah.

GG But they have to carry the fish in a bucket to get them back up! *(laughing)*

WL Yeah, so that's kind of ridiculous but things like that, where there is nobody to carry the fish, or it's not right in town so people don't see it and so you know, it virtually wipes out that spawning habitat. So that's where our fish have gone.

GG So you're a fan of catch and release.

WL I am a fan of catch and release. We just couldn't have the pressure that we seem to want on our streams, if we didn't have catch and release.

GG The pressure of?

WL Of fishermen! Like there's a lot of fishermen out there and so and the government wants to sell fishing licenses, and so they don't try... they don't... There was a big move afoot, the Quality Waters Initiative, that probably cost us a million or two dollars and it isn't going to go anywhere Nothing's going to change. Well, the one thing that it will change is I think there will be no non-BC residents fishing on weekends, which will be good, but, the pressure still remains.

GG So, it would be local, BC residents only.

WL Yeah.

GG Well, that makes some sense.

WL At least the people that live there will be able to find a spot on the river to go fishing, which in steelhead season, if you're a local, you just don't stand a chance to find a place to fish.

GG Because too many outsiders?

WL Well, you know, locals like to sleep in. It's the weekend and the guys that come here fishin' are hard core, and they're up at daylight, and so they're already four miles downstream by the time the residents get to the river and so there's no place to fish. So that will, that won't take the pressure away, but it will make it a little better for residents.

And after all, guides always get accused of, because they make a living from the resource, they always get accused of trying to line their pockets. But most guides understand that if there isn't a local fishery it isn't a possibility. I mean. to have a business, I mean if it's so bad that the locals won't go, then it doesn't make any sense for people to... I mean, the locals are the, the locals are sort of the backbone. They're the people that make things function. And if there's no place for them to fish, then the functionality is gone.

GG But that's separate from the Indian fishery.

WL Oh yeah, oh totally, yeah. And you know, I hear complaints about nets in the river, but I think it's, I mean there are people who do abuse it, but mostly it's people fishing for food. And if there isn't enough fish to fish for food, then let's stop fishing. And that's the way I feel about it anyway.

GG Well that makes sense.

WL So I've never been...people say nets are going in three at a time, and they're not checked, and there is a bit of that. But most people are pretty conscientious about their food fishery. They don't want to waste it either. So I don't have an issue with it.

GG Well, some people have issues with the catch and release, and feel that it's not respectful to the fish and makes them crazy and injures them.

WL Well, there are a few fish killed but it's by people who want to take photographs, and they take fish out of the river, which should be against the law.

To release a fish you should kneel down and be in the water, and you should never take the fish away from the river. It should never leave the river and preferably never leave the water but, you know, to be in the water. And kneeling in the water to pick the fish up for a photograph, if the fish gets away at least it falls in the water and doesn't drop on a rock! And pound itself to death, and yeah, there needs to be education about that.

And that's one thing that the guides are all good about. They're all very conscientious about taking care of...I suspect that one or two fish a year (die) I would say.

Well I don't even know of a fish that has died accidentally in the past five years that was caught by a catch and release guy that we guide. Because the guides are so conscientious about keeping the fish in the water. In fact, if they don't want a fish, you just lay the fish over on its side, take your pliers, and the hooks are barbless, and you just slide the hook out and the fish straightens up and swims away. But if we didn't have catch and release there wouldn't be any fish, there just wouldn't be. You know, I'm sure there are a few fish killed every year by people that take them out of the water and take them up onto the bank and they fall and hit their heads on the rocks and they lose their equilibrium and they kick them back in the river, but I have seen that happen.

I've seen that happen a lot, a lot with chinook. And you know you're allowed one chinook and people will drag them up on the grass and their gills are full of grass, and you holler at them and say it's not...you know, "Kill that fish!" because you've already...you might as well take it home. Because you've already killed it And they say "Oh, we're not killing it!" But....

GG What are they doing?

WL It's dead anyway.

GG Are they taking a picture?

WL Yeah, yeah, trophies or I don't know...people will drag chinook up on the grass, and I've seen that so many times...and you always make a comment to them, you know,

about not killing the fish because they are supposed to release. All except you can kill one.

GG Are these locals?

WL No, no, no no. It's mainly Europeans for chinook. There aren't many. There are a few guided people for chinook but not many, but it's a big European thing. A lot of Europeans come here. And they just, I mean they have killed all of their fish and they come here to fish and they treat them exactly like the way they killed their fish, before they have no more...and so it's not a good situation. I would really like to see a Stream Guardian (program), and I mean they've tried it before, but I mean it was not done right. The Stream Guardians were hired by Fish and Wildlife. They worked for Fish and Wildlife, and they had students. Which were fine, but they didn't understand the whole thing. They didn't have any... they didn't have any... what would you say...they didn't...

GG They didn't have experience?

WL No, it wasn't experience, but they didn't really put a value on those fish because they were... they weren't from here. Like the River Guardian needs to be someone who cares about a particular stream...or several particular streams, and then things are done properly, eh? And I would really like to see a River Guardian program. I think it wouldand hire the right people and you know, teach people how to release fish.

GG Who would pay for that, though?

WL Well, shit! Let's pay for it with our licenses! Charge for every non-resident, charge them another fifty bucks too, for a Stream Guardian. I mean they have all kinds of extra charges anyway. When you buy your license you're charged for this and that and this and that, so just put that on there, and the people who use the resource pay for it. Seems to make sense to me. I mean the people who come here and are do- it-yourselfers, I mean they don't leave any money behind anyway, so you might as well...might as well charge them up front for it, and make it a better place to go fishing.

GG Well that would involve local people again.

WL Yeah, it should be somebody who is local, who knows the river. The person has to be, has to be, has to have a way with people, because you're dealing with so many different people. I mean that was always my criteria for hiring guides. You can always teach a person to fish, but you can't teach them how to relate to people, so that was always the criteria, you know. It didn't matter if you could fish or not fish, but you had to have the skills to handle people. And it's the same with the River Guardian. You need those skills. So yeah, and somebody local who cares about the resource. The right person and it would make a huge difference.

BREAK

GG So what is your first memory of the fish, first memory of the river, first memory of fishing?

WL Okay, yeah, my first memory was when I was probably, oh...ten years old. There was a fellow who stayed at our house. They were putting a cat trail up to the lookout hill behind us and he stayed with us for the summer, and we used to go every evening to the Potato Patch (a spot on the Kispiox River), mainly catch dollies. There was nobody there fishing, and I was, I don't know, probably eight, nine, somewhere in there

. So we used to go fishing, and then after I got a little older I used to bike down to the patch to fish and one of my buddies, and there was a horse trail down to the patch and it was full of big stones and I said, "Keep your brakes on and go slow here", and he let his bike go and here he hit a big rock and flew over the bank and knocked himself out completely, cut his face and I dragged him over to the river and washed him off a bit. I dragged him up to the road and flagged down a car and the guy had a new car and he didn't want to-didn't want him bleeding in the car. But I made him take us to the hospital.

GG Who was that?

WL His name was Brian MacAlby, he was Marcella Love's nephew.

GG Wow. So your family was guide-outfitters? So you didn't learn fishing so much from them?

WL My dad was a hunting guide. He started in the '40s, and my dad actually came here from Tatlahouie. He and Chris Harris were working on a BC Land survey and they walked out to Kispiox in 1936, no 1935, because in 1936 my dad was ferrying people on the Four Mile Bridge, the dip on the far side. It was full of water, and the road is a little bit higher now, but he put a mark on a cottonwood tree, with a boat when he was ferrying people. Like he had to ferry people from the Kispiox side to the bridge side and then people from town would come get them and they'd go and do their grocery shopping. But anyway he put a mark on a cottonwood tree at the waterline, and he measured it afterward, and it was twenty six feet of water over the road.

GG Down there, just by the bridge?

WL Yeah.

GG Wow.

WL And what happened was, it was a very cold spring, big snow in those years, very cold spring and it stayed cold right to the end of June. And then it got hot and they got a warm rain, and the snow, actually the water was, the snow was so loaded with water, the water went to the bottom, lifted the snow and the snow slid out of the mountains and melted in the river!

GG Oh. so this was the big flood in the 30s!

SL 1936.

GG Oh, when the houses floated away.

WL My dad said he was standing on Four Mile Bridge and that row of houses from Kispiox, where the totem poles are, he said a house would come down the river, completely intact, and go around that corner, and there was a big whirlpool there and he said it'd just disappear in the whirlpool, come up below the bridge. There's a big rock ledge below the bridge and you get that big boil down there, and he said the houses came up in lumber,

GG In another interview, that I read, somebody talks about their dad going out and tying their house to a pole and then he went out in a canoe and saved other houses.

WL Yeah, that was 1936. Lots of water.

GG Lots of water.

WL It's not going to be a problem this year.

GG That's for sure. It's scary.

WL The rivers are...I was talking to one of the Jacks (local family), and they had walked out in front of the church (on the Skeena) there in Old Town (Hazelton) and said, "I've never seen those rocks before", so yeah, I think we're going to have some serious low water this year.

GG So what does that mean?

WL Which will be very hard on the fish, because what happens, when you get low water, you get no oxygen in the water and you get a lot of foam on top and the water gets warm and not enough oxygen and it's really hard on fish.

GG Well, let's hope for the best.

BREAK

GG You were a kid in Kispiox...

WL Yeah, when I was a kid everybody from Kispiox Village, everybody during the summer, everybody went to the coast.

GG The elders and the children stayed and did the gardens.

WL Yeah, well mainly women, I guess, went to the canneries, but the guys went there and fished and I mean almost everybody you talk to from the village, they remember fishing with their dad when they were kids, eh? And yeah, everybody went there to fish. But in the beginning they pulled boats out with a motor boat, something with a motor in it, they would pull these wooden boats out. And then the guys would fish and row back in. So I mean, they could do well, but they weren't killing the resource like now. I mean, they have depth sounders and you have every bloody electrical instrument that you can ever think of on these boats. GPSs and you just push the button and this is the spot and next time you go back, you go to the same spot and so the thing that changes is the amount of resource there is to use 'cause you're harvesting too much.

GG Even though it's been severely cut back, you know, smaller and smaller.

WL Well, you cut dates back, but I mean everybody has so much invested in their boats now, it's just so expensive; nets are so expensive, fuel is so expensive that to stay alive you have to catch a lot of fish in a short time. And if you don't, you don't survive. It's a vicious circle, it really is.

GG So do you see any hope?

WL Absolutely! I think that, yeah, the way to... and the fishing technology. Every other technology has changed, but the actual fishing technology hasn't changed in fifty, sixty years. It's still exactly the same thing: a gill net. And there's purse seining or you braile your fish where you only take the ones you want and you turn the rest loose. But the real way that these fish should be harvested is in a weir on the Skeena!

GG Destination!

WL They should have a weir on the river and people could go to the river to fish and then you'd pick and choose the fish that you need to take, and the ones that you don't need to take, you don't harm. You just open the gate and let them go.

And when that happens, if it was to ever happen, it would make a huge difference because there's so many fish taken in by-catches. Like, with steelhead, they're allowed a by-catch of twenty five percent! That's what they're allowed, twenty five percent of what they catch in their net, and kill, can be steelhead. So it, yeah, it's pretty, it's a major deal.

GG But if we went to a destination fishery, there wouldn't be any commercial ocean fishery, right?

WL Right. The boats would have to be bought back. Or the other thing that they could do, I don't know, it wouldn't work for sockeye, because they don't bite very well, but for chinook, they could do all troll-caught chinook.

I know a guy who trolls for chinook and he's only allowed, I don't know, it's only something like two hundred and fifty fish a year. Not very many, in comparison to what they catch by net. It might be four hundred fish but he, there is not one scale that's damaged on these fish. He handles them with kid gloves. He's got a flash freezer on his boat, he flash freezes them on his boat. They have to be perfectly flat. And he sells them for five, six, seven times what net caught fish...

GG Well it's quality. People will pay for quality....okay...

WL Okay...

END

Skeena Elder Stories

Sadie Mowatt, collaborating with daughter Lucille Stoney

My first memory of the Skeena River

I was very young, about six or seven when I went with my grandparents to Anabiisxw (grandmother's fishing site). We went to the site using the wagon and horses. It took us about two hours. We made camp in that area for two months. At the site we had a large smokehouse, a large tent, a canoe, and a net.

To begin, my grandfather set the net. Twice a day he checked the net – early morning and evening. We had to walk a distance to bring the fish to the smokehouse. We had to pack the fish up a steep hill. While we couldn't carry all the fish at one time we made a place where the fish would soak in cold water till we came back for more. The fish were gutted by the riverside. At that time there was no such thing as tubs. The fish were covered with *haas* (fireweed leaves). This prevents the sun from drying out the fish. My brother and I went with my grandfather to check the net and bring up the fish. Thirty sockeye fish were caught at one time. My brother and I and grandfather would carry the fish in gunny sacks over our backs to the smokehouse where my grandmother was waiting for the fish.

I was a bit too young to work in the smokehouse with my grandmother. The job that I did in the smokehouse at that time was hanging the fish strips. The grandparents made a step ladder to help me hang the fish. The next day the fish needed to be turned and that was also my job. Once the jobs were done in the smokehouse we used to go out and gather wood from the forest floors. The wood we gathered had to be old so that they would sputter and not burn but just produce smoke. After the fish were dry, I would climb a

ladder and remove the fish. The fish were stored in a house above the ground and this was locked up. Bundles of ten fish at a time. There was no need for freezers when the fish were completely dry.

Today

The men go to set a net using a motor boat, drifting the net along the river. Fish were brought back to the smokehouse. Emptied into the water bin. The men's job is finished. The fish is then left for one night. My daughter Lucille goes to the smokehouse early. She guts the fish and then hangs the cleaned fish for one night. Next day the fish is sliced open and fish strips are taken off and then the fish is hung again. The fish strips are hung for three days. These are then taken off and stored in a zip locked freezer bag. Half-dried fish is stored in the freezer and canned as well.



Elders, Oldtimers & Salmon

Sadie Mowatt Recorded interview at Gitanmaax, April 22, 2010

GG So it's Thursday.. May, April, I wrote May! April 22, sitting with Sadie, in Gitanmaax. Say something Sadie, just for practice.

SM *Amh a hay luu.* (Good morning)

GG So, starting again, what would you like to say about fish and rivers, memories, for the grandchildren and the great grandchildren...

SM Started at a very young age, around six, seven, there was a lot of us in our family. I am the third eldest, and we take turns. Cannery starts in June, that I remember. So everybody packs up and moves to the canneries, their families to go fishing, and someone has to stay with our grandparents, and Mum. We take turns and she takes the other one for babysitting at the cannery, for the younger ones. What I remembered is it was quite lonely when they first go back, and the other people, when they go to the coast seems like the whole village went, in them days They pack up and they go around June, middle of June.

GG Was that Kispiox or Gitanmaax?

SM Kispiox, I grew up in Kispiox. It's my home town. My grandparents were the late Abel Tait and my grandmother was Lizzie Tait. My Mum was Lottie Muldoe and Pete Muldoe, so with this I used to go with my grandfather a lot because I was quite interested, so they had a lot of cattle that I remember. They had cattle and they had horses, and lots of dogs and the other people that go to the coast they bring their dogs. I remember these rolled oats. They were about fifty pounds. They were huge (bags) and that's all they bring us to feed the dogs in the summer, and I used to feed the dogs and water the dogs. There was no hose or anything. We had to get the water from the river, we water our garden that way too.

GG So this was when you stayed home when you were little.

SM A very young age, yeah. I was seven maybe, and it's just a routine for us because we didn't know. I mean the other kids would be playing, and we'd be working, I mean not working but chores, 'cause we had a lot of cattle and horses, and huge gardens. Huge hay fields that my grandparents used to do. When it's time to go fishing we move out like we go along the Halliday Farm, you know?

GG The Halliday Sisters'? (*a place up the Kispiox River from the village*)



SM Yes, the Halliday Sisters, past there quite a ways, all along the road. The road goes right along the river like, they travel along the river, not right next to it, but they have a wagon road. We went quite a ways, it's called *Anabiisxw*, (pronounces "anna biss whew"). That's our fishing hole.

GG And that was your grandparents, Lottie?

SM That's my Mum.

GG Oh, sorry.

SM Lizzie and Able are...

GG So it's Lizzie's?

SM It's both of theirs, I think...*Anabiisxw*, it's along the Skeena. If you go on the Salmon River it's past, I don't know how many kilometers, across...it's quite a ways. After you passed the Salmon River and quite a ways, you know that bridge and quite a ways over and then you go down and then it's right across. But he fishes both sides. On Salmon River Road is where he puts his spring salmon net. He says they only travel on one side. More on one side, that is what his explanation was to me, and then he has a net, you go down by the Love's (Kispiox Valley family), way down, that's where it is, that's where *Anabiisxw* is. I don't know who else lives there, but there's some farmers...the Combs built their cabin right on our territory.

That's a fishing hole, that is where they built their big cabin there. I don't know if it's still there. That's where it is, that's our fishing hole, that's where our big smokehouse used to be. And there's you know those stores, with the long legs. That's where they store the fish and they put shiny things around on the long pole like, so the mice won't get in. That's the purpose of it.

And they bundle it (the fish) after it's dry. They bundle it like this... skin down and then you put the other on it. That's how you stack it (*demonstrates bundling fish*)...

GG Criss cross?

SM No, this is the front of the dried fish, and the other one goes that way. They lay this way...

GG Almost like putting them back together.

SM Yeah, twos, and then you bundle them as ten. And then you tie it tight, and that flattens the fish. The dried fish, I've showed my kids that, the way we used to bundle. You don't just throw them in, it's nicely piled like that. It's about that high when you're done (*indicates about 12 inches*).

GG So it squishes it down.

SM Flattens. That's how they store their fish for the winter. In about this time of the year, or maybe earlier, they start taking them down, because the fish only lasts, even dried fish

out where there's no deep freeze. So it's out in the cold, and they start distributing it, and they trade.

We were a well-to-do family I, think, because of all the stock, all the horses and the cattle, and we had milk, and we made cheese, butter We made our own butter.

GG You were self-sufficient.

SM Yes, they were hard working people. My grandfather was a nice, nice man. Used to come to Mum, and she always lets me go. He holds my hand while he tells me stories. And then I spent some time, him telling me things that other siblings don't know, And I wasn't the oldest. They know who to talk to. And then he talks about the mountains and talks about the fish, the animals, to be respectful of all kinds of fish so that's why we respect everything. And I train my kids now. I tell them about that you cannot abuse anything, so it's our survival.

Sometimes we have a really good summer and I'm the one that helps my Grandma. She was quite, she was always old, that I recollect. And she sits down while she splits the fish and then she tells me how to hang it up, too, after she splits it, and then it has to be the same way. The head goes this way. All when they build the smokehouse, all these sticks go this way, up river. And that's how we line up the heads.

GG So the heads are going up river.

SM Yes, they're going back.

GG Like they were going home.

SM Yes, that's how we were taught, how I was taught. And then they split some, you call that huxws, and that's the strips. And then I hang it along, you have these poles along, about this diameter, and I put them over. That was my job with her, to dry, and then I turn them over the next day. They dry on one side.

GG So this was in the smoke house?

SM Yes.

GG So there was a fire going the whole time?

SM Ummm just smoke It's not really a fire. If there's too much fire then it burns the fish and it's no good.

GG So it's just embers. What do you put on it to keep it smoking?

SM Just old (wood). I remember we gathered stuff in the bush, just little twigs, but it has to be the right ones, and I remember that she used to carry it on her back; you know, they put it across like this?

GG Like this?

SM And they carry it. And I used to go with her and then we'd do that after all the fish is up, and we start gathering for the smokehouse.

GG So you'd split it and hang it before you built the smoky part, get it all ready.

SM Yeah. See it's, you gut it and you hang it by the tail. That's the first process of the fish. And then the next day when the skin is dry, not really dry, but enough to hold and then you start splitting it. That's the next day. That is when she fillets in what I recall they were thick, not like Lucille's (daughter). Lucille's is quite thin. And hers were quite thick. They save the belly part and they hang it up too, to dry.

GG So they would cut that out?

SM Fish, you know how, Lou knows how to. If you don't want to save the belly part of the fish, it's like this, about this big, you just cut right in half. If you want to save it, you just cut on one side and then you cut it off as you're going to split it. That's how it's done.

GG So you'd dry the belly part as well.

SM Yes, separate. But if you only leave it on, you just cut it right in half. It stays on there. It's actually very good. We try all different stuff from what I remember. But she's not well, my daughter, Lucille. But Victor used to do it. I learned this as a little girl. As I grew up I didn't want to do any fish. But I do a lot of preserving.

When I was a young lady I helped a lot. We go pick berries. The thing is we do all the fish. Right after they're all up this was about July, the end of July, and there was a lot of humpbacks then, you know, the pinks? There was a load of them, and they see there was too many so they just take their nets out. They just smoke a few for the dog food. That's the pink salmon. They're tiny when they're dry. They dry it too. And that's for the winter, like when we go to trap line, that's the dog food.

And then they take all the nets out, and the fish are up. It hangs like two or three weeks before it's put away. It moves up, you know, when you dry it. It's just... that's why you see the smokehouse is so high. The dried fish goes up on top.

GG So do you keep rotating them? They're on these like rods or poles?

SM No, they hang up, way up. And they go on the side so they have to keep smoking while you're smoking the new batch.

GG So how do you rotate them?

SM Well you just know, where it is... just lining them up, like I said with those those tee shirts (*the family had been silk-screening a number of tee shirts in the house*), we line up, way up. We're more modern now, we just put it aside, like we don't climb up, like that big smoke house, it goes in the corner....you know it's done already, .so instead of hanging on that thing we: this is the fish you know it's dry (*demonstrates*) and you make a hole there and get a skewer or something and you line them up there and they stay there until they're dry.

I mean they are dry, but it has to be fully dry like two three weeks, then you put it away. As before you used to wait until the end of the season to start putting it away, that's what I

remember, I might have forgotten something. I was a little girl. That's how I showed my daughter, how to do fish.

GG She does a good job.

SM Um hmm. But she's not well now. She seems to be a natural, so we just leave her in charge. All kids are natural at what they're gonna do. They're gifted at different things. That I find, that we are gifted at certain things, and it's up to us to recognize what our gift is and use it. That's what I say to my grandchildren.

BREAK

GG So there would be a big rod, in the smokehouse...

SM In the top part. So you take two together like this and then put a skewer of about ten fish, and then they go in a big pile, in tens.

GG In tens.

SM Yes, in the skewer, so you'll know how many fish you got up there. I don't know why we do in tens but that's what we do, even when we...

GG Ten fingers?

SM It's just right. It goes along. They even dry the head too, my grandparents. But the head of the fish, but it has to be the spring salmon head. You dry that, you bake it first, bake it, think we BBQ it because we didn't have an oven (*laughing*).

GG So then how do you prepare that to eat?

SM You just cook it.

GG Like in water, or bake it or...

SM It's quite dry. I think we cook it like in a pot. It's good, very rich. But you eat, you know how the fish when you bake it then you eat the stuff out of it, what you can eat, like the eyes and the cheeks. Then you just have the skin and the bones left on it, and that's what you dry. That's what we tried it one time; it was quite rich for us. For the survival a long time ago, you take it to the trap line. Yeah, it's lighter to carry. It's a long walk.

GG And concentrated. It's rich.

SM It's very rich, and then when like I was saying, when the fish, when the pink salmon comes we take all the net out, just two nets. And then we go to the hay field. He's got a big hay field, my grandparents. It's just past Kispiox there, you know where they would go fishing, where the water tower is there on that side, and away along that big hill. It's not ours down below but you go a little ways and there's a big hay field where they do haying.

GG For the farm they had.

SM For the horses and cattle that they had. It's a huge one. And that's when they go haying. That's when they take their nets out and they go haying. And then they have to put it away after it's dry, he has all his equipment. That I remember. I was only eleven when

they died. And I worked with them four years maybe. But I was sent away to school after, residential school.

GG Which one?

SM Alberni. 1946 I think, I was there for four years. That's when I was eleven. I think I was eleven (*laughs*). I was born in (19)34...Anyway there's three of us. There's me, the eldest that went, Earl and the late Kenny, in our family. I don't know about the other families. There's a lot of us that went, 'cause they closed the day schools, and I remember, I think my Mum and Dad were very...School was a source. I guess that they want us to finish school to learn, and so we went to Ted Campbell's for school. There was a school there.

GG Way up the valley?

SM Yes, we had an uncle, my Dad's sister and husband. Gabel Louie family, they had a big farm along on the way. That's where we stayed. You know Beverly Anderson? They're related to us. Her Mum, her grandparents were Gabel Louie and....I forgot her name now. Flossie., Flossie is her grandma, and Gabel, grandpa. That's Beverly Andersons'.

GG Gable?

SM Gable, Gable. I don't know if it's the right way to say it.

GG Sounds good...so they were teaching?

SM No, no, no. We stayed with them. They had a farm with chickens, and I don't know what else they had, but we helped feed the chickens so I know they had chickens, lots of them. And then he has this Model T they call it, this little car, used to take us home to Kispiox. And there's a big thing there, we had fun, big road, a thing like that... it goes down, the road goes down and up and we used to tell him, "Go faster, faster, faster!"

GG I remember that when I was little! Makes your tummy jump.

SM Yeah, and he does what we say and we all holler and that's how we get home, and then our Dad takes us there when it is time for school...next...

GG So who was teaching at that school?

SM I don't even know. I don't recall any teachers' names.

GG So was is just kids from the village or was it valley kids too?

SM No, no, no. The valley. We just join in with them because I think we're the only family that went from Kispiox, but I'm not sure because Dad, Dad's sister is Flossie, that's why we stayed there, joined them. But in exchange, maybe they gave something, but we did a lot of the chores, yeah. And we walked to school. It's about two, maybe three miles.

Anyway Campbell's bull was loose one time, and we were meeting it on the road and we ran away, into the bush. We ran really hard and I fell and it hurt on my rib. And my rib still hurts today. Where I got hurt, I passed out, I guess They just picked me up and ran with

me. Because I fell down. We were scared of the bull...huge, huge one. Huge bull. Maybe we were just young; that's why it looked so big.

GG Well, bulls are big.

SM Yeah.

GG So when did you start going fishing on... how old were you when you started doing that? The commercial, with your husband.

SM Oh no, no, no...

GG Not yet?

SM No, I was in residential school. This is my recollection as a little girl. Then we went... they took me to the trap line for a couple of years.

GG Your grandparents?

SM Yes. I must have been young. And I look after my Grandma.

GG Lizzie?

SM Yes. I didn't actually look after her. I run after my Grandpa. All the time. I cry, cry, cry. Then finally he takes me, and then I see my Grandma going like this (*waves hand*) letting me go, because I was his, her companion, and then that's why I was sent along with them. It's quite a ways, you know where the Kuldo is. That's where we were.

GG That's a long ways.

SM Yes, by walking, it was a long way. That's where. My Grandpa was Luus. His name was Luus, that's Able.

GG Roy Wilson has that name now.

SM Now has it. A couple other people had it before him. And then we used to fish down below Kuldo there, just my Grandma and I. Every day we had something to do. We're gone all day doing things, we don't stay in the cabin. That I remember. We gather wood again, and we used to go up on the, it looks like a big hill to me when I was little, I guess. I went back there today. It didn't look like how I remembered.

Over sixty years ago, and then there was some branches there where she dug for this potato, like it was like a squash. In early... when we first get there in October. There was snow already and she just digs in there and found this, found what she knows what she's doing, and then she roast it after. We call it Ax. Ax, it is Ax. (*Cystopteris bulbi fera*)

GG It's some kind of root?

SM It's not a root, it looks like a potato. And looks like a banana, (*laughs*)... that I recall. And it's kinda sweet when it's baked. They build a big fire outside and she digs in there, in big fire, it's huge, and digs in there, lines the rocks around it, like a pit, and then she puts what we picked in. We didn't pick that many. Just enough. That's where we get out, you

know, (the materials) we use for making snow shoes, you know. that kind of wood? I don't know what it's called. Victor knows.

GG Is it the tree or the root?

SM No, the tree. They use it for making snow shoes. When we take a break, I'll ask him. What you call it. Anyway that's where we went, picked couple of those for my grandpa to use. He's making snow shoes, getting ready. I had my own snow shoes. I don't know what happened to them. They were supposed to be a keepsake,

And anyway I had my own pot, cast iron pot. It's only that big (*indicates small size*). It's got three little legs on it. That's where I cook my own, my own food, and it's over the fire.

GG Did you hang it over (the fire)?

SM Yeah, he fixes something, you know, it's like this, and it goes across, and that's where I hang my little pot (*demonstrates hanging the pot*).

GG It would have a little handle on it.

SM Yes, they're regular pots like, but mine was small it was only for me. The bigger ones are used in cooking the bigger meal. I cooked, I liked fish eggs, I mean fish. Then I cook the heart of the fish, is that what you call it? That's what I cook. (*laughing*)

GG That's what you liked.

SM I loved that, and then I shared with my dog. Had my own dog. He knows I'm going to be giving him something, and then he sits, sits behind me all the time. And my grandparents used to feed me just anything and I don't like it, my dog loves it. But we're not supposed to do anything to do with beaver, meat or beaver or whatever. Anything to do with beaver I don't like, I'm not supposed to feed it to the dog. It's bad luck. That's what they told me.

SM For people, but I didn't like it.

GG But some people did eat it.

SM Yeah, a lot of them. Not me.

GG But it's bad luck to feed it to the dog.

SM Yeah, to the dog, anything. That's what they tell us. It's bad luck. Certain things we don't feed our children either. Because, like if they're shaped different like, umm, a head or the eyes, the kids don't eat it, or young young woman that will bear children. Might look like your child. That's what they tell me anyway, especially when I was pregnant. That I wasn't allowed to even go where the circus is, because they might frighten me, especially in your last eight, nine months. I get frightened; my child's going to look like an ape!

That's what they tell me...so it's quite truthful of what my teachings were. Although I didn't like it. But my Mum said when your kids are all gone then you pass on what you were taught. That way your kids won't be...won't be like...There's a lot of other stuff you know people have, disfigured stuff, and their face. It is something to do, they call it *mo-ous*, I

don't know what *mo-ous* means, you look like that person when...or you play with animals...it wasn't allowed in our days. Like they're little, they can't defend themselves, or you're mean to them.

GG So you would never mistreat animals, and always be respectful.

SM Yes.

GG So the *mo-ous*, is some kind of disfigurement.

SM Yes, or else you could turn into, not turn into a pumpkin or anything, it's just they are teaching. I didn't really understand, but as I grew older I know what they were trying to get at. And you tell it to the kids today, they don't believe you. But as they grow older maybe...

GG Let's hope they remember. Pay attention.

SM They do, they do. Because I experienced it. As a little girl, there were teachings that I had, my other siblings don't know that I know today. Because of what I was told when I was a little girl. Because he chose me, to tell me all these. And as I grew older, much older, not thirty... I was fifty, sixty, when I start remembering a lot of stuff. I remember.

Just comes back, my teachings, as if it's yesterday. That's why I always stress the young mothers, even when the baby is still in your stomach, you be nice. You don't say ill things because the baby will be listening. That's what they told me. I never believed that when I was young, but I try and go by it, and talk to the baby when they are little and I passed that on to my other granddaughter. She looked at me strangely, but she didn't say anything, so that means she's listening.

You know, when they're little you just talk to them normally. You don't say, "Oh so and so is this and that" because they'll repeat and then I noticed with a lot of babies, that I talk to, I talk my own language and they pay attention, and then I ask another question in English, they don't pay attention! They listen to my Indian language. So I say, "Oh, you came back as so and so, maybe you my boyfriend" I usually say to them. (*Both laughing*) And they smile!

GG There's a reason they came back.

SM Yes. They're nice babies. I enjoy talking to the babies, I just talk my own language and then they listen. And then I think I was on the trap line three years, and then I got sent away to.....my grandparents died first too, before I was sent, I think. They died in (19)46, that fall, I mean, like now, when we were sent that first summer. They died within a week apart. Yeah.

GG So you went to the trap line with them for two years, before you went to school.

SM That's before I went away to residential school.

GG You learned a lot, before you went to that place.

SM I learned a lot of, how to live, how to look after myself, to protect myself. They don't actually tell you, but... but you know how to protect yourself from other harm and anything else.

So I went away to residential school. We worked first two years, half a day, and half a day school. They put us to work at a young age. I worked in the laundry. Half a day, and then they put us, they rotate us, and then I worked in the kitchen, cooking for night before, mush (*laughing*). I hated mush when I got out of there! (Out of) Residential, yet I loved it before I went...and then I hated mush because it was sticky. Just sticks. Double boiler, just huge, about that long (demonstrates large pot).

GG When you cook that much of anything it kind of loses it...it wasn't a very nice place.

SM Well, it was... you cooked the night before and it was, it's all night, and you know slow boil. So I guess mush was hard to cook them days. I don't know with Mum's she just whips it up! But my grandparents, when they eat mush, they add salt, not sugar, but we always had milk. But in the trap line we didn't have milk cause we can't get it up there.

Anyway and then they shoot some moose and then he dries it, my grandfather That's up in the trap line. So in order to bring it home, it has to be dried. Smells good...yeah, they had in the fall they fished the coho, up Kuldo there...

GG Just a sec, how would you dry the moose if you're up on the trap line? Just cut it and hang it?

SM Cut it in strips.

GG Would you do a smokehouse thing?

SM They have a smokehouse.

GG Did you have a camp out there?

SM It's like a regular... like, there's a regular cabin there and they have their own smokehouse, it's usually on the top of the hill. There's a big waterfall, there at Kuldo right on top of it. That's why I was looking for it the last time I went there, exactly where our smokehouse was and then it's right on top. Because when you gut the fish you just throw it down the hill, like it goes down.

GG Back into the river?

SM Eventually. That's how it is at the one up the valley there. It was huge because they used to dump guts there, cause it's a long ways to go dump it. We didn't bury it or anything, but other animals feed on it, other stuff. But it's, I see it go down. You can't do it around here. We go by the river. We got a lot of minnows here, down here cause we dump the guts here, down by the river.

GG Well I heard that's what you're supposed to do, put it back in the river.

SM Yes, yes.

GG Not in a plastic bag!

SM Oh no, no, no, we have big buckets. We never put plastic in the river. Even though we're fishing at the coast, we're not allowed to. You just dump it over the sea.

BREAK

GG So your Grandma used to can the fish?

SM Jar, jar!

GG Jar!

SM Yeah, the good fish. It's fresh. Yeah, I remember her she has it on the table. She doesn't allow me to clear the table completely. We have to have sugar and cream and salt and pepper on table. I used to try and be really clean and scrub scrub scrub and I clean the table right off and make it look nice, but the pussy willow on the table, make it look nice. She didn't like it, the stuff that she had on there, to leave it on. That I learned. It makes sense. She doesn't want to go look for it. Whenever she's hungry she comes in and eats, just gets it from the jar.

It doesn't spoil that quick! I was telling my husband the other day 'cause my grandma used to eat out of the jar all day long, you know just eat, it's good, and lots of hard tack. That's that, it was really hardtack then. It's not like the pilot bread now. Really hard, really hard, it's hard. You have to soak it in here, but it's good.

I always look for it but I can't find it. Like it's crunch when you now, but it's really good. That's what they take along when they go trapping, because it doesn't mould like the bread. And my recollection was that they take big slab of bacon to go to trap line, big slab of bacon...big cheese, you know those huge cheese, I don't know how big they were, it's that long, they take.

And about First Cabin (on the Telegraph Trail) they call it, they have this big tree. We used to stop there for a while. That's where the horses stayed. The pack horses, and then that's where we stay, and then they have about four big packs, plus all the dogs and then it's only him, four packs, and then he goes ahead, like relay. He takes the first pack and puts it there, and then the next pack he puts it further and then it rotates, until we get to where we're going. That's why it takes longer. But they get it there. I know they were huge. I can only pack myself, and my dog, pack my stuff. And we play around all the time, I remember playing in the snow. My dog was packing my pack.

GG So you wouldn't have a sled with dogs? You didn't do that here?

SM No, not when I went with them. They didn't have a sled with dogs.

GG What time of year was that? On the traplines?

SM They go around October, in the year? 1943, 45, I just know I got out of there at '46, when they died, and then I went to residential...it's a long time ago. After I went back, I

wanted to see where I partly grew up, I want sit there...still didn't make it yet, just to actually tour where I...

GG Up where the trap line ...

SM I wouldn't go up the trap line, but just up by the river. Spend most of our time there, we walk quite a ways...

GG Who fishes there now?

SM I don't know. I haven't been there, since, it was getting dark so we had to come back...nobody else wants to go with me. I know I can make it. It's a lot of walking, I'm quite at ease in the bush.

So you know that Hagwilget Canyon, you walk down there? I always wanted to go there, and nobody wanted to go with me because they say I can't make it. So Tamara, my granddaughter, about four years ago, "Granny" she says, "all the men are gone! Let's go, take you down the canyon, make lunch, a snack!" and we took our great grandchildren, two of them, Bonnie's boys, and Jenny's three boys, that's great grandchildren, and Tamara, and me.

And we went down. And it was quite easy how they done it. I just, all this time they told me I can't make it and I said, " Well I want to go there, so I'm going!" And we did! And Tamara was quite good, she stayed right with me, and everybody was down before we even started off. The kids just ran down, they were so excited.

See they're not allowed to go just anywhere without supervision of an elderly or an older person, because it's dangerous down there, for kids. The youngest one in there was ten at that time when we went down, and they active. And we had lunch down there, and then we came back.

GG How was it coming up?

SM I had no problem, just rested two or three times, took it slowly, and Tamara was quite good. She walked right behind me in case I fall. When we got up she gave me a hug, three times, ' cause I made it.

GG I bet that felt good, because you'd always wanted to do it.

SM Oh yeah, we did it. So you always want to go back where you've been. This is what I remember today. Like the coast, we grew up the coast. When I got married, I got married when I was young, I was seventeen and a half. Victor was eighteen and a half. We went fishing. But I didn't go fishing right away, because I worked at the cannery.

.... See in residential school I decided what I want to do with my life, so they gave us Bibles, which was good. Well they say residential school so bad, and all bad things. Spme bad .but there's some good stuff there...They gave us little Bibles and I read this Bible before I go to bed. I read it all the time so how I learned how to read. It is not the first time, but I read before, I remember my Grandfather was really proud of me cause I could read names

The first name I read was George Biernes. That's where Lil Love lives now. It used to be George Biernes, and so he had it (name on a sign) on there and I said, "George Biernes!" Oh, he was so proud of me, 'cause I read his name...anyway I decided for myself, that's how I going to live my life.

This was way before I got married. I was in residential school. I protected myself. I know what's wrong and what's right, you know, anybody abusing you or sexually abusing you, I protected myself, just by reading the bible. What I decided to do, I know when it's wrong. I see a lot of stuff today that I don't like, but I cannot tell people how to live. It's their decision to decide.

GG So it sounds like you got a lot of strength from it.

SM My grandfather gave me the strength when I was very young. He helped me here. He gave me that strength. Whatever he gave me that's what kept me from, not taking alcohol and stuff, part of what he gave me, and the Bible. Still today.

Although I'm not perfect, but that's how I live. I'm not saying people are bad, but it hurts to see how they live, how they react. It hurts, because they are abusing themselves and (others are) taking advantage of them, while they're intoxicated. This is what I see. It's ugly. Even more so today, because of the drugs and the different things.

We have strong beliefs about the fish and the river. It has to be pure, they don't even allow us to swim around, or like when the woman is in her.... when she first becomes a woman.

GG Her period?

SM Yeah, yep, you not even allowed to go with the hunters or the fishermen.

GG And you don't touch the fish.

SM It's only a week and you're okay again. But when you first become a woman, like the first, then a whole year you refrain from eating anything fresh, like fresh fish, fresh meat, but it's okay after it's smoked. That's how we were brought up. I asked about it. The only answer my Mum gave me was, so the fish, I mean the fishermen or the hunters won't have bad luck if they see a young woman that just became a woman. They see a hunter goes, it's bad luck, or they won't get anything, so that's why they leave in the wee hours of the morning! (*laughing*) That's what she told me.

GG Well, didn't a young woman go off by herself for a while too?

SM Long long time ago, she doesn't go off. They put her in the cellar like, a hut or, and they just feed her in there...it was a long long time ago. Way before my time and before my Mum's time, they just heard about it. And way way, way back, I said, "Gee, I'm glad you don't have to lock me in the cellar!" (*laughing*) Too many girls to lock up! And you have to feed them.... I don't know.

GG So you were taught to respect the fish and respect the river and respect everything...

SM Yes, that's where the fish go up, so that's what. Coast fishing is different, now, big canneries running and everything gets used. Where we stayed at North Pacific Cannery they have the reduction plant they call it, I think it's reduction plant, where they got all the guts. They put the guts and the head in there, really smelly when it starts going.

We worked long hours in the 1950s, double time sometimes. We finished two or three o'clock in the morning and as the years went there's more people, so they start making, not making but giving everybody a chance to... they go on shift like they work eight hours, that's it, and then the next group comes....

GG But the canneries were going twenty four hours, weren't they?

SM Ummm, I don't know, pretty well, as soon as the fish are gone it's finished. They run out of fish to do that day, if they don't run. If the packers keep coming with more fish the longer it operates that day and night, if there's fish coming that day... They fished five days a week in the (19)50s and then, I don't know how long before they start, DFO (federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans) controlled it and they can't fish as long.

GG I think that was in the 1960s, I think that's what Victor said. When they started cutting back.

SM Yeah, and even more so, and more boats that I see. There's more boats and more people, so it's huge like I think that's the reason, and then they sent a lot of fish away, the canneries closed. I remember North Pacific was closed in 1969, the cannery. And then mostly they shipped out, frozen. And then more canneries closed down, I don't know what year. And then it's mostly just one cannery operating. It's Port Edward, and Prince Rupert, and then eventually they closed.

And then just Prince Rupert was operating for a while and then they closed it down. When we quit fishing, we were fishing for two days in the week, they split it. Like it opens twelve hours and then we had to come home, and sit around for a day or two and then go out for another six hours; they split it and it's hard work.

GG How long did you fish with Victor?

SM Ummm, I don't know, I just go by age..*(laughing)*

GG He said he fished for fifty two years I think.

SM That's him.

GG So you were married, and you were working in the canneries,

SM Yes, I was in the canneries but I can't fish with him, (because) the kids were too small, it's too dangerous with them, too dangerous. Mum looked after the two when I went fishing with him, just in the fall like, maybe a couple of months. And then after they're grown up, Alex, was born, I mean Albert. He was a baby so I couldn't go fishing. I think I started when Isabelle was born in 1963, just off and on, not steady, cause I had to look after the kids and then, Al was born in 1971 and he got older. Then Lucille and them were

old enough to look after their brother with the help of Mum. Then he fished with us, yeah. I think I went steady with him for ten years. He's my partner. We went everywhere.

I miss the coast, because I travelled with him. We went in strong, big waves I remember one time he was tired, so he went down the bunk and told me "take over" I say, " Gee!" a lot of praying, huge! (*demonstrates giant waves*) You go way down like this, way down, underwater. The waves going right over you, seems like you're underneath. All you see is water, and then you come up, you see other boats go down. (*laughing*)

GG Like a see saw!

SM HUGE!

GG How far out to sea were you?

SM Queen Charlottes.

GG Oh, that's rough out there.

SM Yes, when it's rough...

BREAK

(GG asks Sadie if she has any last things she wants to add)

SM For instance what?

GG Well, for the great great grandchildren, what's the most important thing to know about the river and the fish?

SM Respect. And preserve.
Take whatever you preserve for the winter, mostly, for the winter I do a lot of canning, and dried fish. It's always important to do canning and preserving and think of the winter even though you have lots in the summer. Like some of them say, it's too hot to can...the fish not going to wait around while it cools off!

GG That's when they come.

SM Yeah, we respect that, we don't complain. Well we don't complain and then something happens, and we know we're not doing the right thing.

END



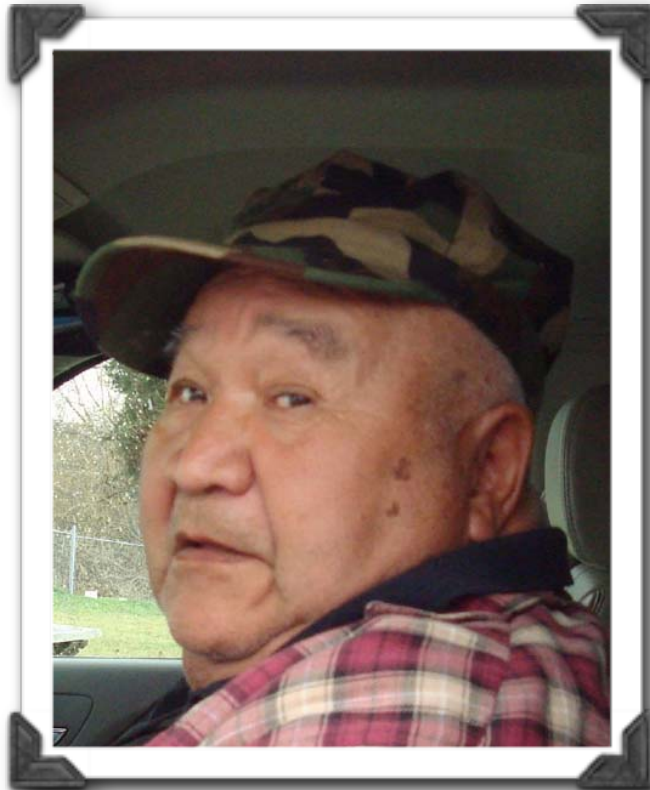
Elders, Oldtimers & Salmon

Victor Mowatt March 29, 2010_Gitanmaax, BC

GG It's Monday, March 29 and this is Victor. He's going to talk about the fish. You grew up here.

VM Well how far do you want to go back?

GG It's up to you .(On the list of questions) I said: What is your first memory of the river? What are your first memories? Who taught you? What does the river mean what do fish mean to you? What changes have you seen in the fish and in the river? And what would you tell someone is the most important thing to understand (about the fish and the river) and what would you say is the most important thing to know?



VM What I remembered when I was a young kid, down the river here, and we were small little kids then. The old people were fishing down the river. We go and help them and we play around on the sand bars, running around, and they put a stop to us running around, and we asked them why.

And he says that the eggs are under the sand, and then we run around, we run around the (sand) bars and can kill the eggs. And someday there's going to be no fish. So we get our poles. We used the hazelnut bush for poles to put our hooks on and we catch nice trout and then we

take it off the hook and that's when the old people seen it, and we put it back in the water. And they told us, "What you catch you keep, and take it home to eat. For your family."

So we done that. We never run on, we never play on the beach, we never run around, and only where we got the dugout canoe to help the old people. We had a trail going up to the smokehouse. We only use that one trail We don't go off the side. We don't go off to the side of the trail, because we might kill, what word they said, "You get off the trail, there might be a egg, a fish egg there" and if we get off the trail we kill that fish. That's one less fish in the river.

So we really watch what we done.

There was two or three young guys about the same age. And while we taking the fish off the boat to take it to the smokehouse, we never missed that trail. We stayed right on the

trail. We don't get off the trail. We kept it in mind what they said: "Don't get off the trail, there might be a fish egg."

So we done what they said, and when we fished we kept all the fish that we got. We took it home and then my mother and grandmother, they cook it, they smoke it, and then we survived on it. They never throw anything away; in the fish, they clean the fish, they kept just about everything in that fish... and it hurts me to see... I fished commercial fishing for fifty- eight years.

GG When did you stop?

VM When I was sixty-five. I run the boat, my wife was my partner. I could never keep a partner, because they can't work like I do. They can't stay awake. They just sit there, then sleep, and then they quit. So the only one I had for partner was my wife.

GG Good partner!

VM And when we're fishing she stays on the wheel. I stayed at the back and I work, and the time for lunch, for coffee, and we had coffee twenty- four hours a day and she had it, she kept it hot. She goes to sleep, and if I make a set on my net and set out there and watch it, and she goes to sleep for an hour or so.

GG What kind of net, what kind of fish boat?

VM It was a wooden boat I got the first time.

GG When did you first start?

VM I first start fishing when I was about oh, thirteen years old, I guess, more or less, give or take.

GG With your family?

VM With my dad and my uncle.

GG Down in Rupert?

VM Yeah, and then I got to be a man when I was about seventeen, well, that's when the company figured that I could fish by myself. So I got a boat, went fishing. I never...the manager said, "You're going to ruin that net, you're going to ruin the boat" My dad says, "No", he says, " I raised this boy to be a fisherman" and I fished. I worked hard.

The old people come along when they see me in, coming, tired, and they pat me on the head and they say, "Did you sleep?" I say, "No" and he says, "You're gonna make a man some day." And here I thought I was a man....but...

GG (*laughs*) At seventeen?

VM And they told me each time at the beginning of the season they give you an anchor and an anchor rope, tied together, the company.

GG What company?

VM ABC Company. An anchor and a rope and a boat, and then, (*laughs*), this old man his name was Able Oaks, he was already old. He'd sat me down, and he said to me, when I had my anchor and my anchor rope

GG Able says to you....

VM He said,, "Son" he says to me," I don't tie that anchor to the front of your boat, tie it on the front of the boat, tie it there and leave it, and when we finish fishing this summer just untie it again and take it back up to the boat shop. I don't want to see you to use it."

So I done what I was told, I didn't use the anchor. He says, "You got your net there to anchor on". You set your net in the water and the fish will hit it, and then you got it, and that's your anchor. So on the end of the season my anchor was still tied up and he tied up beside me when we was cleaning up the boats those days and he looked at the anchor and he says, "I see you didn't untie it". I says, "No, I followed what you said." And so he was happy, he was a happy man to see that, that I done what... that advice he gave me.

And my dad is a highliner, a real highliner fisherman and I was right up beside him, and he caught more than me and he, the old manager was happy, I never ruined a net. My nets was clean and then we just kept on going and in a few years time the old man died, that old man that give me advice, and I never forget the words he said to me.

So we went on. Finally one year, one year I beat my dad by one sockeye, and he was unhappy, oh he was mad cause I beat him and he got into his boat again. He went out and tried to get one more fish, so, or two more fish so he could beat me again.

GG How old were you when you beat your dad?

VM About twenty, twenty-one, and the old manager came alongside Dad and he told him, he says, "Arthur, you've trained your son, you've trained your son good." He says, "Now I know what you mean," the old manager. And I never had no damage to the boat, no damage on my net, just work.

GG And you were careful.

VM I was careful, never slept, just...just the only way to keep awake, when your net is out and you're hangin' out your boat, you hang onto your line and soon as it goes like that (indicates a pull or jerk on line) you awaken, you see what's going on.

GG Hold that line.

VM Hold that line. That's how it was, but later on in years it got worse and worse. We were fishing six days a week those days, from Sunday to Friday.

GG How long was the season?

VM It opens around June, July, August, part of September. But later on in the seasons they keep cuttin' it down. To five days a week, four days a week, three days a week, two days a week...

GG The Fisheries? (Federal Department of Fisheries & Oceans)

VM The Fisheries, yeah.

GG So that would have been starting in the 50s, when you started? And in the 60s?

VM That would have been in the 60s, it got worse and in the 70s it got worse until I sold my boat and got out of the business. And right now there are maybe two or three native people are fishing down there, trying to keep up. How can you survive on two or three hours a week to work to fish? There's no way. That's why we, I sold my boat, that's why I sold my boat, sold the license...and but I sold everything.

GG In the 90s or the 80s?

VM When I was sixty –five. How long was that now? That was twelve years ago. That was we getting cut down to about two and three hours a day.

GG Were there still fish?

VM There was some fish. We were still higher than any other fisherman, Sadie and I. The young manager we had at the fishing company, I still go and visit him, and I told him what was happening, "No good". I should have bought into that company. It would have been big bucks. (*laughing*)

But it's, life is cruel. I keep telling my grandchildren, the young people, the young generation; they have *their* ears plugged all the time. And they get home and computer, the computer tells lies about., and they read the computer, and they say who's saying this and who's saying that on the computer, that's... that's trouble. Even in the government business, they put it on computer and everything else, and it is all trouble. You can see it on the news and stuff.

GG Yeah, it's... there is a lot you don't see. Well, you said you have seen a difference in the fish?

VM Well, yeah...

GG Well, let's hear it.

VM Well the difference in the fish, it's kept it's... well, let me get back to this, when they destroyed the fishery. This is in the 1950s, early. About middle of 1950s, there used to be pink salmon up that river, chum salmon, that's dog salmon, sockeyes, springs. They used to plug this river up with just, you could walk across the back of them you could just see them all the whole river.

And then the fish spawned, the humpies, the dog salmon, the sockeyes. They spawned and the carcasses are sitting' along the river and they stunk the river and the tourists would come around with their rod and reel, to fish and they complain about; it so the fishery hired the university students in Vancouver... God knows how many there were. Just young people all along the river, just raking the carcasses up. And then when that river is all raked up and cleaned up they burned it.

And the old people were just arguing and crying about it. "Don't burn the carcass!" and they told the Fisheries what would happen. "In the next few years," the old people told the Fisheries, "there'll be no more fish." And today, the next four years there was no sockeyes, there was no pink salmon and there's no chum salmon going up the river today. There's no pink salmon either. It destroyed it.

GG Was that here?

VM All along the Skeena.

GG All up the Skeena. They cleaned it up. They burned it. Well what..because all that is for the birds, and to go back into the river?

VM No the carcass on the fish, they have what looks like sawdust, on their meat, and when their eggs hatch, the little minnows, they feed on that.

GG Oh right, it would feed the babies.

VM They feed the babies. And they had, the babies starve, and that's it! And that's why we got no fish.

GG That's part of the cycle. They broke the cycle.

VM And that's what's gonna happen in the near future. It's going to, it's coming, whether anyone's gonna do anything about it. They just gotta get that sports fishing out of the way. If they catch a fish they keep it and eat it, and not torture it.

Now when you release a fish, on the fishing rod, it's already hurt so bad, and the fish is mad. And they see another wobbler comin' down river, and they go. They so mad they bite it again. And I've heard this on young fisheries, sports fishers, "Hey I got another bite!" Yeah, you got another bite from the same fish that they caught before!

And that fish was so mad and he was gonna get anything, I mean they mad.

GG So they're getting injured over and over.

VM Over and over..and then the seals come in, and then they see a tired out fish and kill it. And that's what's happened. That's what's destroying our fish, destroyed the river. And who gets the blame? The Indian people, they're destroying our fish. Which is the other way around. And that's what hurts. I'm seventy- seven, and that's really hurting me. I mean, as the older you get wiser, or whatever. I couldn't stay still. I just gotta keep moving, working all the time.

And that's the reason why I'm hurt, I am hurt, and I'm not lying about that. I'm hurt of what I see. And if I go to Terrace or Rupert and I see all these sports fishermen just (all along) down the river, and if one Indian just puts a net out then, "Oh, that Indian is killing our fish off!" That Indian person is catching fish to use and to survive on, not to play with.

GG What would work better?

VM Well, cut the sports fisherman right down to nothing. They done with the commercial fishing. Why not do the same thing with the sports fishermans? I mean if you

go out, out around Dundas Island, out Niagara Straits, you'll see boats just thick with sports fishermen out there. It's just all over, across the States.

GG And it's all catch and release?

VM It's all, it's mostly 99% of it is catch and release.

GG Well how would it work if you wanted them to still fish, but not keep torturing them. Maybe if they could only catch one or two?

VM They should be taking one or two to eat and if they catch it, then they go make food for themselves, preserve it, freeze it, dry it... not catch them and release them. Even the Fisheries see that the infected things on their (fish) head, we showed them. But what we say don't count, and they know. They know everything. What have we got,? We got nothing.

GG Well, you have a lot of knowledge.

VM But that's what's happening today. I see it. And it's not going to get better. It is written in the Good Book that when all these pipelines go through, when it's all completed, only God knows what's going to happen.

GG It's written in the Good Book? About pipeline?

VM Well, it's similar to it. It's on there. Every time you look at it.

GG So what do you think about this pipeline thing?

VM I don't think it's too bad, as long as it don't ruin the land, don't get close to the lakes and rivers, not destroy it. I mean, they will destroy it if that oil breaks, that line breaks, there is no survival It's whatever it is.

I seen it in Port Edward in that smelter there. We used to, when I was fishing in my days. That whole place, where the spawning bed is in behind that bridge going to Rupert, and you can just see fish just loaded in there. Now you don't see nothing.

GG There was a smelter by Port Ed?

VM It's a poison.

GG What were they smelting?

VM Well, it's a plywood factory.

GG Oh, so the runoff...

VM Yeah, all the runoff, yeah. But that's what hurts, to see that. People gotta survive, but still. Be more careful with it. You know yourself who is destroying the whole earth.

GG Well, human beings.

VM Human beings.

GG And greedy human beings!

VM Greed! Lots of greed!

GG It's like making money off it, instead of saying well let's, we don't need...we don't need more than, people take more than we need it seems.

VM Well, it's the same with the native people today, with the land claims. These new chiefs come in today and they say, "This is my territory, this is my territory!" and they weren't even around in times of, the tough days. Today they chase you off hunting grounds somewhere. I've hunted all over top end of all over up north, up the Babine area. They've never ever said nothing to me, I've talked to them.

GG You've talked to the chiefs of that area?

VM Yeah.

GG So have you seen that changing?

VM It's changing a hundred power....especially in our little town here in the Skeena River. The chiefs got no business saying anything, and yet they say they own this territory. My territory, and that's what hurts. It hurts another chief. It really hurts. So that's what's hurting me so bad. And when you hurt, and when you are as old as I am, then you can get sick just like that, because you are already hurt.

GG Well it makes you weak.

VM Well it does. You know the hatred of other people gets you sick.

GG It's a poison.

VM It's like it says on the comic book, those arrows, going like that when you hate someone, and that's exactly what's happening. How we doing?

GG Well, I'm sad! (*laughs*)

VM It is saddening...

GG Well, it is sad, but what I feel like, with this project, what I want to do, is give people the opportunity to tell the story. And like I say, I'll give this back to you and if you want to pull some of it, nothing of it is going out on paper that you don't....

VM Well, the truth is, what I'm saying is the truth of what is happening.

GG Well, what about the river itself and the changes in the river and the fish that you've seen in your life; more fish, less fish?

VM Ninety-nine per cent less fish.

GG And what do you think that's from?

VM It's well.....

GG I mean it's not going to be just one thing...

VM No, no. But it's the anglers again, the sports fisherman. The fish get mad and they go back where they come from. Like you, if I start torturing and getting mad at you and

calling you names, in a few years time you gonna get fed up, "I'm gonna get out of this town!" Just gonna leave. That's what's happening.

GG So you think they're just not coming back?

VM I wouldn't come back if I was tortured. And I am tortured in this town. I was brought and raised up here, I was born around here. Used to be a house on this campground here. 'Cause I used to work, packing water, packing wood.

GG Well, what would turn it around? What would be a good direction? What would turn it around? What are you managing to teach your children and your grandchildren?

VM Well we're teaching them to survive. When we go out hunting in the bush, my grandsons, we're only going to get one game, the one we want. We look them over. We don't just start shooting when we see anything. We take one. After we finish butchering it we either smoke it or can it or freeze it, and when it is all finished we ask if anyone needs more meat. And then my girls, grandchildren wants more, then we go out again. We don't just go out for the sport of it, we go out to get our food. But people come from the States are comin over here and paying big money to go and shoot a wolf, a deer, with nice horns on it.

GG Trophy hunting.

VM And then they cut the head off, open it, and leave it in the bush.

GG They do that here?

VM They do that. We found lots of it.

GG That's pretty depressing.

VM It is That's destroying, it's destroying our animals, destroying the fish, and destroying just about... you name it! ...Yeah, clean them up and whatever's blocking the river or blocking the creek. Well not the river because the river cleans itself out, but the creeks and the little salmon go into the spawning beds. And I've seen...like I say, I've been all over.

GG So people just aren't, we aren't taking care of what we have?

VM They're not. It's sad, it is really sad. No it makes me....me chill in the spine or whatever it is...(laughing)

GG Well, what does give you hope?

VM Oh...

GG You are too strong a person for me to believe that you have no hope. You've got such a huge wonderful family surely there's some brightness there.

VM We pray a lot. And use your own language when you pray. That's a hundred per cent stronger than the minister. Where do you find a real minister? They out for a buck too, they get paid. I don't blame them.

GG Well, they're making a living.

VM There are some real A-1 ministers. I listen to some on TV. I got a Christian channel, and some of the ministers I listen to they talk to you like I talking to you. You be the judge of that if he's telling the truth on the Bible talk, you can feel it, you can tell if they a good minister and then you be the judge of that. Now the minister is talking and then some of them on TV when they ask you, just like I'm talking to you, the same thing, they ask you if you believe in what they're saying, they don't ask for money, like most of them do. I understand that, to get on TV cost a lot of money to get on TV. They don't ask, if you have lots of money, fine, I'll send some to you, but lots of them I don't...because, you know, you can feel it in your body, if you believe in it. Like I say, you be the judge on that.

GG Where do you feel the most close to Creator?

VM When I'm by myself, and I go up the side hills and the mountain sides, by myself

GG Me too. That's my church, I call it The Church of the Great Outdoors.

VM And I believe that I can get really close, and I can feel it. So that's what I do, when I'm by myself, lonely, I ask for help, and sure enough it sometimes, it's just natural.

GG I guess a part of me believes that a God, Creator, this earth, the river, the fish, it's a gift to us and we will be helped to heal it. And that the earth can heal us, like with the medicines you make.

VM Yeah, I make a lot of medicines.

GG Because before my people got off the boat and brought the Bible you guys were doing okay...

VM Well the Bible was... there were no books or Bibles, years ago here. But they say "*Simoget.....*" their own words, "Our Father in Heaven", they say

GG Chief of the Sky.

VM And they did go like this, a few years back, our people (holding arms out and stretched upward). I remember they used to go to the long house down here, years ago, and they don't just, when they start serving soup or anything, burned fish, they bless it (speaks in Gitxsan), "Bless this food for us today, give us strength."

GG That's a good prayer.

VM And today's world is so different. As soon as anything you serve today now...a few of them will say a prayer, when I go to a banquet or anything, and if you don't bless the food. I say it my own way and my wife's way, and my grandchildren, the same thing... when they come and I'm sitting and I bless the food already for me to eat. But when my grandsons come in here they make their own dish and they sit down and right away they bless what they're going to eat. That's a good sign for them.

GG Wel,I that sounds pretty positive, you're doing all you can.

VM Well, that is why I say, I have my life, I could go anytime. But He's keeping me alive for some reason.

GG *(laughing)* You're not finished!

VM Yeah....

GG What is the most important thing to know about fish? What is fish to the Gitxsan?

VM It's survival, and I thank the Creator for putting it on the earth, same way with the animals, the deer and the moose, rabbits, grouse, to survive on, that's the big thing. Now it's all sport, most of it, play with it...and that's the advice the old people say. "Never play with your food". Even when you're eating at the table you don't do it. You see it in some places, the kids will throw something over of what they eat, over to you. We don't allow it on our table. We don't allow it on our table. Never play with your food.

GG It would be lack of respect.

VM It is.

GG Seems like most of the older stories I've heard are about not respecting nature, the Medeek, and the mountain coming down.

VM No, there is no respect at all anymore.

GG Why is that?

VM Well, they got too much new things coming in, the jet boats. And four wheelers, they cats and the skidders. We used to go over here and we get herbal medicine my mum and I, in the winter we used to just go over the other side of the hill. There's a little lake up there.

GG Not Hospital Lake?

VM No, no, just across the river there. And we used to camp there, my Mum and I. When Dad had TB. My Dad had TB when he was very young, and I was a little guy, and they told my Mum, the old people come down and talk to my Mum, and so she pack our little blankets and our tent and lean-to and we went out. Her and I walked. We gathered the devil's club, spruce bark, balsam, lily root. That's what I got there, that's my stash there, the devil's club, lily root.

GG I remember you gave me a drink of your tonic one time. It was devil's club, lily root...

VM Balsam and spruce bark.

GG So when you say balsam, do you mean cottonwood, like the bud?

VM No, not the bud. Balsam. Balsam trees, they got that little nipples on them. With that oil in there. Now is the time to start to go out and get them. I got a lot of devil's club. I need more.

BREAK

(Discussion of lack of fish)

VM But all over too.

GG Is that from overfishing?

VM Ninety-nine percent is from the sports fishing. Ninety-nine percent of it.

GG Do you think sports fishing was the first problem, or the big commercial...

VM No, no, no, I never remember any sports fishing in the Skeena River when I was young. There might be a very, very, odd one...maybe one.

GG There probably weren't more until the 1980s?

VM Oh no, no...it be in the 50s, early.

GG I mean when they really started to come more.

VM Yeah, it would be in the 80s, but during the 50s and 40s there was very very...and whatever the sports fisherman would get those days they would even share with the old people, and the old people told them not to throw anything back. Whatever you catch you take it.

GG When did they start doing catch and release?

VM It was in the 80s, I think. Maybe after that. It's hurting. I am, I am, but what can we do about it?

BREAK

(Discussion of spirituality, religion, bad feelings and drinking, families and children)

VM ...I never tell my kids that they're good. I just say, "You're doing okay, just keep trying harder". Just only one that is drinking alcohol now, and I told him, I was an alcoholic, and I quit 'cause I can't get rich on it.

GG (*laughing*) I know. There's no money in it!

VM So I tell them that, and there's three or four of them that's the same way, they quit. What they learn outside of this house, well, when they go somewhere, they try to follow whoever... and then after they know it's wrong and then they come back and they tell me, "I done wrong" and I says, "I told you before."

GG Well, people have to find out...especially kids.

VM Well, they have to.

GG As you said, people know when you are speaking truth from the heart, and your children know. They're not so wounded that they can't tell the difference.

BREAK

VM Because in today's world we need paper to get a job. In my world, when I was young fella, it's how hard you work, before you're hired. That's where the difference is, is how hard you work. And I'm still working today.

GG Yes, there are different kinds of work. So are any of your family working with fish and the river in any way?

VM Ah....not really, no. Oh my nephews, they work in Rupert, out of Rupert. Some of them are with fish.

GG Well, it's all changed. The whole thing.

VM It is, it is changed. When you go to Prince Rupert now, it's changed. There's hardly... there's some coast people there. I remember, about this time of year, years ago, the Skeena River people used to be down there.

GG Well, there were all the canneries. There were the people in the net lofts.

VM And we'd all work, fisheries, canneries workers.

GG So did that start in the '30s, '40s?

VM Yeah, in the 30s...and then during the war, that was...another one, yeah...

GG Well, who would be another good person to talk to?

VM A person that would survive and see what's happening.

BREAK

(Discussion of school, Victor says he went to the Indian Day School in Hazelton)

GG You were saying you went to school for three days, and they wouldn't let you speak your language and they kicked you out.

VM They kicked me out!

GG Well, you're better off!

VM So they, my Dad said, "Well, since you get kicked out of school, kicked out of school here, you're not learning nothing, you better work." And I wasn't that old too, so...

GG So what did you say, you were about thirteen when you started working?

VM Yeah.

GG So did you ever go back to school, or did you just sort of figure it out along the way?

VM Yeah, my kids, Lucille is the one. She never leaves her mum alone, reading, reading. And she come ask me too, and I kind of figure out too, and I, you know, pronouncing...

GG Well, we learn from our children.

VM And I kept doing it and doing it, reading, and next thing you know I was, but I couldn't write nothing. So I just, you know, reading. I started carving, and then I got my papers for teaching carving. So I went in the high school for a good many years. In the high school, especially, the high school.

And then they called me to Rupert, they called me to Terrace, and South Town, New Town and Prince George. And I just keep driving around. And I explain to the principal that I can't write. I said, "I went to grade three and that's all my school." He says, "With your art

work"...I even went to Alberta, to, in a high school there. I instruct some kids to carve a pole. And I got my name too on that pole standing outside the high school. So then this May coming, we got to go to the Vancouver Airport, for my granddaughter, I think her picture here somewhere. That's Michelle; she's a natural. I call her Miss Bill Reid!

GG Yes, her paintings. What's she doing at the airport?

VM Yes, she's a natural. She's got a couple of pieces that she carved...I mean you've got to be good to go in there.

GG You mean like display pieces?

VM Yeah, two pieces to display, so if you ever go in after May you can see it.

GG Well I'll book a flight just for that, if nothing else!

VM She's got beautiful work. She's a natural carver.

END



Elders, Oldtimers & Salmon

Arthur Sampson Glen Vowell or Sik E Dakh Village, May 5, 2010

GG So this is just testing. It's May 5 and I'm sitting by the Kispiox River.

AS Skeena River.

GG Silly me. We're sitting by the Skeena River, and I'm sitting here with Art. Art, talk to me. Say a few words.

AS It's a little bit chilly out, but it's good enough to sit here.

GG So...sitting by the river with Arthur Sampson, asking him to reflect on the river and the fish, what it means to his family, to himself, and to his people. Over to you Arthur.

AS Okay, it's... I guess for me, it's pretty much second nature. It's just **there** as far as the way I see it, and the way I feel about it, it's always been, fishing. I can remember when I was much, much younger, on the road where we took to get here (along river in front of houses curving down into trees then out to the rocky riverbed) I remember helping with moving the fish, all of us. There was myself and my older brothers; Les, Dale, Marilyn, and I think there might have been other kids, that were helping us. And this was right around the time when the Department of Fisheries, they tried to regulate us, like force, force us not to fish. But we fished anyway.

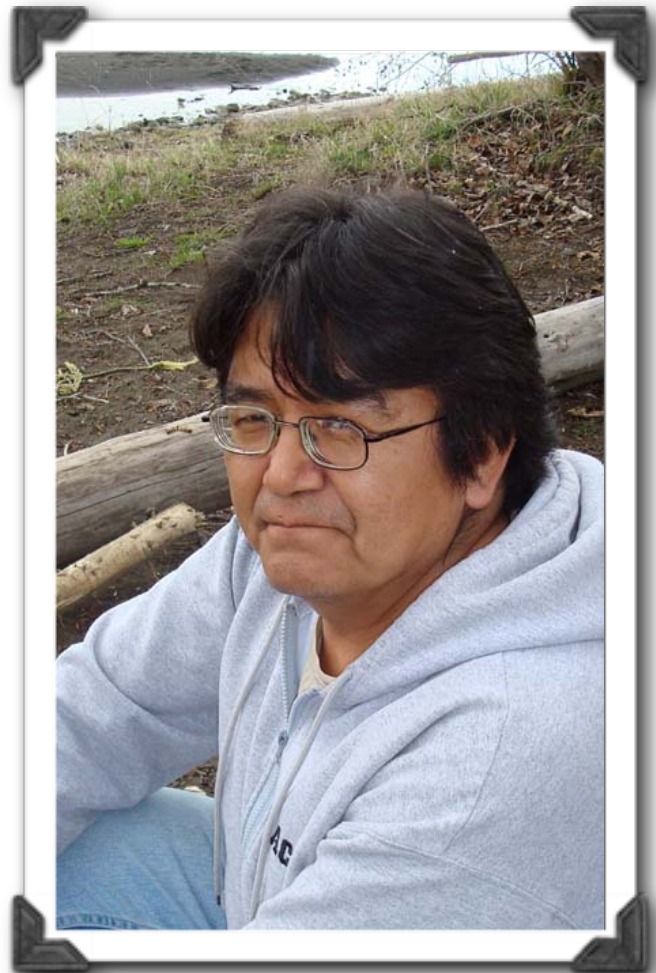
And I remember one day, when we were all marching back down this road here, towards the house. It was a log cabin and we all had fish, and I think I had maybe one or two. And we hear a plane coming, low flying, plane was, and when we heard it coming, everybody would just go off to the side, and hide.

GG Holding the fish!

AS Holding the fish, because it's the Department of Fisheries.

GG Wow.

AS Yeah. So there was a time when that happened.



GG Was that the sixties?

AS Yes, I think it was the late sixties, early seventies.

GG How old are you?

AS I'm forty-seven. I was born in '62. But fish, fish has always been part of my life. I just saw my Dad fish, the older brothers fish. We'd go to the canneries, it's part of an income for us every summer. And yeah, it's just, it's just been there.

GG So, some of you guys would go down (to) the coast?

AS Yes.

GG And work in the canneries?

AS Well, fish with my Dad, and my Mum worked in the cannery.

GG A lot of people did that. But your family is lucky, in the sense that your fishing area is right near your home. You don't have to go far.

AS Um hmm. My drifting nets, well, actually we had a set net, just down river from where we live. We've had that for ages. And used to have a set net, just near Roy Vickers place (a little ways up river from the village). But I think about eight years ago we were told to move it.

GG Who told you?

AS Someone from Kispiox came, and they said it was their fishing hole. I remember them coming to the door and talking to Marvin (older brother, deceased spring 2006, main family fisherman), and so Marvin agreed. So we pulled the net and we never used it again...and that fishing hole was never used!

For a long, long time, which I couldn't understand. This happen sometimes, not just with this one but with other situations where I've heard people ask someone to move their net because it's theirs, and once that net is moved or taken out, it just sits there. It doesn't add up. It doesn't make sense.

GG They just wanted to make their statement, I guess.

AS Yeah, yeah it just it bothers me when I hear that happening, and it happened to us. But, I'm not sure what year we started drifting.

GG Drifting is drift netting?

AS Yes.

GG How does that work?

AS Well, you go... you need a powerful outboard motor because the river is so swift and then they need a fairly long net, at least thirty fathoms. And what you do in drifting is you, you wrap the net in the boat so when you throw it in the river, so it doesn't get tangled. You go... there are certain parts of the river where you throw the net in, and you have the boat in reverse, so you stay in one spot, and the fish will take the net straight out.

And once the net's completely in the river, the motor is... you turn the motor off, and you drift, maybe three minutes, five minutes at the longest and we just watch the fish hit the net.

GG And then you can see...

AS Yeah, you can see... you can watch the net. Once it starts to curve at the other end then you pull it, and we've been doing that at least twenty years. At least twenty. Twenty years now, and it starts, we start in June, and then sometimes we fish until September.

GG Wow, right on through.

AS Yes, and we pretty much take care of our own family, and then extended family and other people who need fish in Glen Vowell, and then the surrounding area. And we have people that come in and bring food, for trade, and the hunters come in and take fish and they'll bring us back moose meat, a front quarter or a hind quarter, in the fall. So that's some of the trading that we do from fishing. Because we don't hunt.

GG Yeah, right, so that works out.

BREAK

GG Okay, we're back. We had to get out of the rain, so we're sitting in the car. Art's talking about how his family would fish and trade. Trade for moose...

AS Yeah, we just... what has been happening in the past ten years, pretty much what I'd seen when I was younger and just being around it, it's helping me now. Now, just do what my Dad used to do, do what Marvin used to do... because, because I've been a part of it, and seeing it, watching my Mum and Dad, and watching Marvin interact with people that were getting fish from us. It helps me. It's helping me and my other brothers right now.

GG It helps you to go on, and do what they were doing.

AS Yes, yes.

GG So you're still fishing?

AS Yes.

GG You just stepped into the, the empty shoes.

AS But I tell you, it was really scary. Change is always, change is always scary. But it is, once we get into it, it gets better. For a lot of people, when, when there is a big change, like when Marvin suddenly passed away, I'm sure some people would just have left, left that and not dealt with it.

GG Just given up and stopped.

AS Yes. But we continued. It was difficult at first, but we, it's back to the way it used to be, people coming and getting what they need.

GG Who does the smokehouse and all that?

AS My brother-in-law, Mel, is very good at it. I'm just learning, I know how to do

`chull, you know, half dried, but I haven't I haven't mastered or even, I have tried once or twice to make the *huxws*, the strips?

GG The really dried ones?

AS And the skins, the smoked, the fully smoked fish, smoked dried. I haven't tried those.

GG Maybe this year.

AS Maybe. And the other thing too, is we have Ron's wife come out and be in the smokehouse a few times and we have other ladies from Gitanmaax, where we bring fish to them and then they give us...

GG And you get some of it back. That's a good way.

AS Yeah, but I would love to use our own smokehouse.

GG I remember that. So are there any younger people that are learning?

AS Um hm. Dale's boys have been. They've stepped right into it. And it's just great, I just love it. I wish more of the nephews and nieces would be a part of it. All of Dale's boys would come with him, right from when they could walk. Over the years and now, they're right into it. It's pretty much the same as if, but with my Gitxsanimx (Gitxsan language), I was around my Mum and Dad, and they spoke it, spoke it, spoke it...

GG The language.

AS Yes, and it's just second nature. Same thing with the fishing. Dale's boys have been there from when they were toddlers, right up to now, and now it's just a part of their lives.

GG Well, it's good that they know and maybe they'll teach some of their peer group when the time comes, and then they'll have children and they'll pass it on so the chain is not being broken.

AS Yeah, fishing has just been a part of my life, and my family's.

GG What's the most important thing you'd want to tell the great great grandchildren about the fish, about knowing and understanding them?

AS Just be thankful. Thankful that it's there, and respect it, and, you know, thank our Creator. Just be grateful for it and share it. Take care of who you need to take care of. You know, it's...it's something that I'm really thankful for, that I have that. That we have it, and I remember in August, when we'd have a meal, there's nothing store bought.

GG Um hmm.

AS It's potatoes and onions from the garden, lettuce, and smoked fish from the smokehouse, and that's what we'd have. And we'd have a house full. It brings everybody together. That's another thing I'd want to tell the grandchildren.

GG To share the food.

AS And just enjoy it, you know, it's family. It's just family, the fishing.

BREAK

GG What about changes in the amount of fish? What have you seen, in your lifetime?

AS Well lately, in the past few years, it has gone down. For the amount of fish that we need, we have to deal a lot more gas, for the outboard motor. But we always manage get the fish we need.

GG But does it take longer?

AS Yes, yes. It takes longer.

GG What do you think that's about?

AS Climate. Department of Fisheries. Um, I don't know how you say it.

GG Their management, their non-management?

AS They are off in their forecast. They say there's a surplus of fish, and then there isn't. And when I watch the news, there's those trollers way out in the ocean that snatch up the fish before they can come back in. That's another reason that I'm hearing that there's a depletion in salmon.

GG And the (commercial) fishery was so big for so many years. So many people fished like crazy. Everybody fished and everybody made lots of money and then they just kept doing it. And then they didn't start cutting it back for a long time.

AS The Inland Fisheries is a hot topic.

GG Describe an Inland Fishery.

AS Inland Fishery is, is an idea... I'm not sure where the idea came from but it was said that whenever there's a surplus of fish, when they swim... when they go up to the Babine, they get wasted.

GG Because there's too many?

AS I think the idea behind the Inland Fisheries is to catch the fish that are surplus.

GG The surplus that are (not) needed to spawn. (Excess to spawn allotment)

AS Yes, and it's uneconomic.

GG So the people that catch it could sell it? I mean, they could use it but they could also sell it.

AS Yeah, so Inland Fishery is a form of employment. When it first happened, I got into it.

GG It was in the nineties, right?

AS Yeah.

GG How did it go?

AS It went... for me, it went well. But then it got to be... controversial, I guess some people didn't like it.

GG It did seem to bring up a lot of conflicts.

AS Yes. Because people were fishing to make money, and they weren't taking care of their families or...

GG They weren't sharing or distributing.

AS They weren't sharing and there was fighting over fishing holes because of the money that was to be made. So I think I went out twice for Inland Fisheries and it just wasn't good.

GG No. It seemed to be more trouble than it was worth. They haven't done it for a while, have they?

AS No, simply because there's no fish there.

GG Well, there you go.

BREAK

GG What do you see for the future? It's encouraging that some of your nephews have learned, and are taking on the responsibilities and having the skills

AS I'm hoping that more of my family will get into it, like Mike and Jake are, Dale's boys, and there's a couple other boys in the village that just jump right in and help out and got in the boat with us, and they spent the day with us, fishing. And that was pretty neat. I wish for more of that to happen. And when I go on, whether it be in Ontario to work, or... that this will still continue...but I can't, it would be just heart breaking for me if it just stopped. Yeah, I'd love for it to carry on.

GG I think that it will. Let's pray that it does.

END



Elders, Oldtimers & Salmon

Bob Clay Kispiox Valley, April 7, 2010

GG Okay, this is Gretel, talking to Bob Clay, on April 6, or is it the 7th?

BC Seventh, I think.

GG The seventh, in the Kispiox Valley...okay, here we go again. Bob, tell me everything you'd like to put on the record about the river and fish.

BC That's a big subject...okay, talk into the microphone?

GG Yeah, talk into the microphone, Bob...

BC Okay...I got first interested in fishing actually when I was a little kid., I was always going down catching frogs and tadpoles and you know, minnows and everything else so I was kind of fascinated with fish, and I had aquariums as a boy, growing up in Calgary. And then I got interested in fishing, and I was working at one of my first jobs was at, working in a department store. I got to be friendly with the guy who ran the fishing department there; so every Monday we went out fishing.

GG Where was that?

BC On the Bow River, in Calgary (Alberta).

GG Well, what did you catch?

BC We caught trout, rainbow trout. Trout was in that river, rainbow trout...

GG So that got you excited?

BC Um hm, so I fished around there for a number of years with him and then we came out here on a visit, fished steelhead in about 1971, and that was my first trip out here. And then eventually I moved out here in 1977, because of the fish.

GG What about the fish?

BC Well I enjoyed sport fishing.

GG Why?

BC *(With intense emphasis)* It's FUN. It's, you know, one of man's oldest pursuits, is basically catching and harvesting and that pursuit, so I think it's kind of inbred into people to hunt and fish. So I really enjoyed the fishing part of it, being outside. On the river, enjoying all the things that were around the river, the animals and the birds and the fish and the water. It's quite a meditative place.

GG And you made a living at this?



BC Yeah, so I've turned my "hobby" or "love" into a living. I was first a fishing guide in the eighties, and then after I sold my business I got into making fishing rods. So I'm kind of pursuing, always fish.

GG So when you say "sports fishing", it's...do you eat any of the fish? Or is it all catch and release?

BC We eat, we eat some of the fish, but I would say mostly its catch and release. And why that's a problem, or why we do that as sports fishermen is because, basically, there's too many people on the planet.

And if we all take wild things then there's not going to be any left for the birds and the, for the system, the ecological system, for the birds and the fish and the bears that eat the fish as well. So we've got to forgo our share to make sure it's healthy otherwise, or get rid of a few billion people, but you can't feed the world on wild things anymore.

You know man only got up to a certain point, and then he switched to an agrarian society where he had a farm. So if you go into the store today you'll see that everything that's sold in there, except fish, some fish, is that man has farmed...and that's the trouble today of course, is farming.

GG Which form of farming?

BC Oh, I shouldn't say the farming...

GG Fish farming or?

BC Fish farming is a problem because it's done improperly. I didn't really mean that farming is a problem. I meant that the harvest of wild fish is a problem. So I kind of believe that you shouldn't harvest any more wild fish, basically. Anymore. Like commercial fishery is an oxymoron, like I don't think you can have a commercial fishery any more. You can't feed the people of the world.

The Gitksan could feed themselves, here, and they're part of the system, and when there was a few thousand or ten thousand of them, but now we're trying to feed six billion on the sockeye of the Skeena River. I don't think you can do it.

GG Has it just been overfished? Because there used to be more fish. People talk about how many canneries there were. Was it just overdone?

BC Absolutely. The canneries, you know. You talk to a lot of native people around here and they remember those days as the glory days. Everybody had a job, they were out fishing, but you know what? They got them all. And all up and down the coast of BC there was canneries, and they overfished the whole coast. And all the canneries closed down because there was no more fish.

And logging, you know they were logging then and doing a certain amount of damage then, but there was nothing like as compared to today, as how, you know the logging was very small. As compared to today. But basically they caught a lot of the fish.

If you go down to Bella Coola, near an ancient Nuxalmc village, at the mouth of the Dean River, they had a couple of canneries there; there's no canneries there...there's just a faint, faint shadow of the fish that there used to be. And you look at the system, it's pristine! They just caught 'em! (*laughing*)

GG So when you say "they" you're talking about the big...

BC Commercial fishermen!

GG But they were mostly Canadian? American?

BC It didn't matter who "they" were. They...if you look at some of the old pictures they had these boats and they towed these guys out in these little sail boats, right, and these guys, you know, they used their nets and they caught their fish and they got picked back up again. But you know as technology got better and better and better and they caught more and more fish, and they got radar, they got this and that and everything and also, basically, what is going on is that they're harvesting fish at the mouth of the river, where they're returning, and they have no idea about how many fish are going up the river, to what rivers they're going to. So they lower their nets and they just wipe out run after run after run...and you can only do that for say, a couple of cycles and all of a sudden there's no more fish there anymore.

Because you cannot manage a wild animal. You have no idea how many are coming back, to spawn. If you had a farm and you had your cows, you wouldn't kill all your breeders! You harvest what you need, and then you harvest your animals, send them off to get butchered and into the system, and then you keep your breeders, knowing that you're going to have so many babies next year.

So what you do with these salmon is, they're coming back and you just say, "Well, I think there's going to be this many, so I'll take this many," but if there's not, and you've taken way too many and then the stock continually starts to go down...if they keep on harvesting at the level that they've been harvesting at and pretty soon there's no more fish!

GG Well, isn't that what Forestry, I mean Fisheries, is supposed to be doing when they count the fish and they'll have a fishery that they say is "excess to..."

BC They can't count; it's not like going to a farm and counting chickens!

GG Well I know that, but, is that hypothetically not what they do?

BC Well, they've got this "salmon crisis" down in the Fraser River, and they're going to have a Royal Commission, and they're already saying now that they probably won't come up with the answers, because **they don't know**. What happens in the ocean? They don't know. So how can you manage something you don't know anything about? And they're very antiquated in the system. If me, the layman, knows what is going on, and they're the experts, why have they managed the fishery into such a decline? You know, because they listen to the commercial interests. And the commercial interests wants more, more, more, they always want more. So they shouldn't be having a commercial fishery at the coast. If

they're going to have a commercial fishery, it should be a terminal fishery, where they can say, "Right, we have X number of fish coming back, we'll take half of that amount" or a quarter of that amount or whatever they deem necessary to have the rest of them spawn. But when you have a net at the mouth, you don't know which fish you're catching.

And this has only beenwhat's really happened around here is the Babine. I don't know if you're aware of what's been happening in the Babine. Well, the Babine, they built two spawning channels and they got millions and millions of sockeye. Now wouldn't it make sense just to harvest them when they return there so you could say, "Yeah, we caught the surplus of fish that we made"? No. They say, "We're going to catch them all, we're going to catch them all at the mouth of the river!"

So all the Kitwanga fish come up and "**Boom**" the net goes down and they get them all, and the Morice Lake fish come and "**Boom**" they come down and get them all and they still can't catch all the Babine fish! But they're managing to wipe out just about every other stock in the Skeena system by trying to fish for the Babine fish. So it would make a lot more sense if they harvested them where, that's what you call a "terminal fishery".

GG So where would that be in the Skeena? Or the Kispiox?

BC Where would it be, "terminal"? Where they end up. So if you're going to fish for the Babine sockeye, you fish for them in the Fulton and Pinket creeks, which flow into Babine Lake.

GG Which is where they've come back, where they've come to spawn.

BC That's right. They go right back to the same spot. So then you'd know you have a surplus there. Just like if you're a farmer, you know you're going to have a surplus. So they can't manage a commercial fishery. There's been no commercial fishery in the world that has been managed properly. They've just done it on the east coast, you know they've still because after twenty years of not fishing, the cod fish are still not back because they took them down to such a low number that they've reached a crisis point. They can't get them back up over that peak again. Plus, they're also still fishing, the other boats are still fishing out there.

GG Because are there still not, big huge, deep sea...

BC Yeah, there's still stuff going on and now they're targeting the fish that the cod fish ate like the capelet, and so you know man has an insatiable appetite. So in reality the only fish we should be eating is farmed fish.

GG Open or closed (pens in sea or on land)?

BC Oh, they gotta be on land and everybody knows that. The government knows that because they've got such a problem with disease and migration of smolts and such. The lethal load on a smolt is not very much, of sea lice, just two or three, of the little guys, going down the sea to the ocean. They get two or three sea lice, they're toast. Whereas a big fish can get two or three, he's fine. But there's such a concentration of these sea lice

around these pens that there's and in some places, like the Broughton Archipelago they have to get through so many. So basically they have to get through all of those. But it's all about money. You know.

In Norway they've had to poison some rivers because there have been other parasites that have come from the fish farm that have got into the rivers and they've had to kill the whole river. Everything!

GG Those were open net?

BC Yeah, open net, or pen...

GG Okay, so what about sports fishing. Someone I spoke to had some real strong feelings about treating the fish that way. Says it makes them mad and then they're just going to keep biting anything; so then they're damaged and they're subject to infection.

BC Right. There's been tests and studies on it and on this river (Kispiox) we've had catch and release for steelhead since basically 1976 and the steelhead, and people are coming here from all over the world, and fish get caught on this river, but it still does not add up to the mortality of pre- when they harvested, or one guy was allowed to get one fish or three fish a day, a three day limit. They could take home nine giant steelhead. The river went downhill. There's not that many steelhead to begin with. They're not as gregarious as Pacific salmon...right? So we're fishing for steelhead, which are a different fish.

GG So they're not at, they don't procreate as much?

BC No, like in this river you might have three thousand steelhead, maybe, at the max, where there's just like up on the Babine there's millions, like a million or a couple million sockeye. All right, so they're not a commercial fish, but they do get caught in the by-catch of the commercial fishery, so catch and release, it's proven; it does work! There is some mortality involved but we've gone to barbless hooks and no bait, right? And it doesn't make them mad. As a matter of fact, when you catch a fish he tends, he's used some of his energy up, he tends to sulk and regain his energy, and he doesn't become catchable for a little while again. Ok, so there is some mortality, but it is **nothing** compared to the mortality of knocking them on the head.

GG Who knocks them on the head?

BC Well, before, when we used to have a limit, and we'd bang them on the head and take them home and eat. Those fish are dead. Every one of them. So you can't tell me that catch and release doesn't work. It works. Now, a lot of native people don't like catch and release because they say you're "playing with your food" which means you go out, you catch a fish, you treat it respectfully, you knock it on the head, you take it home, eat it. Right? Great. That worked when there was a few Gitksan here. It doesn't work anymore. We can't all go kill fish out of the river here.

GG And enough people want to come from all over the world, to do this catch and release, because it's such a pleasant experience.

BC It's a changing economy. Like you don't see Gitksan people walking up and down the road. No, they're driving pick-up trucks, four wheel drives, they're wearing clothes from China. It is a different world out here, like you have to say that some things are gonna change. You can't just live in the past. They don't live in the past. They've got every convenience going. Every DVD player, everything. You can't live in the past, so things evolve and change and if there was just a small number of people here then we could go on and harvest, keep on harvesting the way that we're harvesting. But it doesn't work.

Look at the logging industry, for example. We want to build all the houses in the United States out of wood from here. Well, eventually it's going to be gone. Until it replenishes itself. But the fish stocks may never come back. So my plan is you get totally rid of the commercial fishery, you raise your fish on farms, on land, but you don't use carnivorous fish to eat, right? Salmon are carnivorous fish. They eat meat. What other carnivores do we eat? Pigs or cows or chickens? Are they carnivorous? No; right? So we get a better conversion. So there's fish that are vegetable eaters. They're not all meat eaters...

GG Well what are the vegetarian fish? What kind?

BC There's quite a few different kinds that they raise commercially. Tape, t a p e l, I don't know how to pronounce it, quite. There's milkfish, a bunch of carp. Carp is a big one.

GG Are they native to the Pacific Ocean?

BC No, they're native to other places, you know, to wherever they would grow, maybe in tropical countries. You know, look at when they grow rice in China. They have to grow fish in there and when they drain the ponds they take all the fish out and eat them, right? They help control the bugs and everything and they got water in there, and on the prairies they have dug- outs full of trout, that eat insects and stuff like that, right? So you know, you can grow fish to eat, and you can do it commercially, just like we grow tomatoes and we can develop new strains of fish and do whatever. Like look at how a cow, a Holstein cow, can give eleven gallons of milk a day. That wasn't like that in the wild!

Now we've developed those, and we can develop the fish the same kind of way, to feed the masses. You think of all the people on the earth. We've got to figure out how to feed them. And you can't feed them with wild things. Because those orcas need them, right, those grizzly bears need them, those eagles need them, there are all these wild animals that need these wild fish, and then we could have a sports fishery, which you could charge a lot for, and then you could actually have a limited catch. Because guys with rod and reel really couldn't catch all the salmon that are out there, and kill them all so you could allow some kind of limited sports catch as well. So if you caught them yourself, then you could eat them.

But if you allow someone with a big net to catch them, like there are million dollar sets, where they catch a million dollars worth of fish in one set...they got radar, they got everything, (such as) sonar. So you've got to get rid of your commercial fishery. It's gotta

change. That's finished. The average age of the commercial fisherman in Prince Rupert is like fifty five years old. They're making money for UIC (Unemployment Insurance Corporation) stamps. They're working two or three weeks a year. We're spending more money on the DFO than the fishery brings in! Like what kind of sense is that? But they keep doing it. That's what's unbelievable, they keep doing it.

GG Do you see any progress? Do you see any hope?

BC Well yeah, well eventually either they're going to run out of fish first, right, and then you change, and that's a slow rebuilding process like you do on the East coast, eh? Yeah, there's some change, like you got Alexandra Morton (*of the Raincoast Research Society*) is doing a fabulous job on the you know... we've stopped the fish farms from coming up here, from the mid-coast up, so there's some progress.

GG What can we do around here? What difference can we make?

BC I think we've gotta demand the end of commercial fishing.

GG Which is, is it a Canadian industry at this time? Still, or is it more international? Is it American ships? I don't know.

BC Well a lot of Norwegians own most of the fish farms, right. They're the big fish farm guys. They're in Chile, they're everywhere and the commercial fishery here is getting to be bigger and bigger, in smaller hands. Jimmy Pattison has a lot of the boats, a lot of the seine boats out there, their licenses and this and that.

GG But is it mostly technically Canadian? Is the crew Canadian too?

BC Yes, but it's not making anybody any money!

GG Except the owners.

BC Yeah, except the owners.

GG So where is that fish ending up? In the cans we can buy down at the store?

BC Yeah I guess. It goes down, it goes all over the world I guess...down to Vancouver. You can buy it in the store, I guess. In the cans and in the fresh fish markets...that's all commercial.

GG So where is it being processed?

BC Oh mostly in Vancouver I imagine, there might be one left in Prince Rupert, I'm not sure but it all goes to...so like you know it's just **not working** if you look at the history of it, it's a big long demise. It's just slowly going downhill until there's just less and less and less and not much left.

GG Just like most resource extraction.

BC Exactly.

GG But Bob, I'm wondering how since I'm hearing really different views from old time Indian fishermen and from sports fishermen, all two of you so far, but how can those of us

who are choosing to stay here and live here and the Indians aren't going anywhere....how can we find a better understanding?

BC Well, the fish always fed the Gitksan here, and they still do a food fishery here, right, and they're going to do that, right? Anyway and the other day on the radio it said that fifty percent of the Indians living in Canada are urban Indians, right, so these places here because there is no employment here, population is going to go down because you can't keep these young kids here forever, they're going to go. And some of them don't even like fish anymore. Like "Oh, I smell Grandma's fish and it smells horrible." So you know, they'd rather listen to American black hip hop than you know and do cool things and watch TV...it's changing whether we do anything or not. They're going to lose their connection to the fish because their culture is disappearing into the melting pot, which it should, of Canada.

If you go to the city now, you see it's a different melting pot. Like I say fifty per cent of all Native people are urban Indians. And that's where the opportunity is in our country right now, urbanization. I don't agree with it but it keeps happening every day. More and more people are moving to the city. One million people a day move to the city in the world. Happening in China, big time. People are moving to the city, getting farther and farther from the land.

GG Well people always have. People have always left the countryside. But again, I'm thinking about those of us that are here, that choose to stay here, and some of the Gitksan are not going. A lot are not going, and the whole...

BC If they want to have any fish left they have to get rid of the commercial fishery. And then you know the next step if you're going to have any kind of commercial fishery, it's got to be a terminal fishery. Right now on the Skeena here they have a selective fishery, where they're allowed to go out with seine nets and they select out the sockeye and let the steelhead go, the coho, whatever they want to go. It's not as selective as it could be, because they're still fishing it out of the main stem, and they don't know where those sockeye are going. Right? Like if they catch them around here, Kispiox, they don't know if they're going up Morrison Arm of the Babine where there are hardly any left, or they're going to the Fulton or Pinket where there are enhanced spawning channels. They have no idea where they're going. So you've gotta go to the source. That's where the commercial fishery is going to happen.

Those Gitksan, the people that stay here, will always be catching their salmon, we hope, as long as there are salmon to catch, they'll be doing the same thing. That's what people tend to do, they tend to do the same thing. One day those fish may not be coming up anymore and then they won't have anything to catch, okay, if they don't do anything about it.

GG What can they do? Besides stop the sports fishery?

BC They've got to stop the commercial fishery. What sports fishery? We don't take any! We let them go! If they want to blame the sports fishermen they really need to think about it again.

GG Okay Bob. *(both laughing)*

BREAK

GG The whole fisheries thing, you're saying...

BC The whole fisheries has to be re-addressed and re-managed, but DFO has not got the will to do it, because they like their jobs They like sitting in their little places in Rupert- look at them here, for Christ sakes! They got the big building here in Hazelton and these guys running around with guns on their hips, like _____ and what's his name, nice people and everything, but really what are they doing?

GG Well I'm hoping to find...

BC That's a lot of money being wasted for nothing!

GG Well I'm hoping to talk to _____.

BC Well basically what they're doing is, they're watching the decline of the fishery...such an antiquated....DFO has just got to think about it again. They don't know what they're doing. And I'm, like I say, I'm just a layman and I am just watching what is happening, and they're trained biologists. You know why? Because they get paid...and they like their job.

END



*Bob Clay building one of his sought after Bamboo Fly Rods in his home workshop.
Photo: Tim Pask*

Elders, Oldtimers & Salmon

Hattie Westle Kispiox Village, Monday, May 17, 2010

GG Let's just give this a little start here. This is..Monday, May 17. I'm sitting with Hattie. Can you say something, see how it picks up?

HW What's that? I'm hard of hearing.

GG Oh, just talk to the little black thing there. Just talk for a sec, okay?

HW What is that for, when you gather all that information, what is it for? And why?

(With the recorder off I explain to Hattie more about the Skeena Elder Stories project, the Skeena Watershed Conservation group, and their goals and activities, and assure her that this collection of peoples' stories is meant to belong to the people who were part of it. Everyone will receive a copy of the document and a CD of the interviews, and copies will be given to the local college, schools, and library.)

GG So I'm going to press that little button (on the recorder) and Hattie, you just say whatever you want to say.

HW Well, I'll just talk about the Skeena River and Kispiox River, for these are the rivers we traveled along. I grew up in the bush. I was eleven years old when I moved to Kispiox. It was 1934. In the summer time we lived in Kispiox and during the winter we lived in Kuldo. I remember going up and down the river. We spent half our year up in the bush, trapping. Then we move into Kispiox about May or June. Then we would plant the garden first, same as I'm doing now, here in Kispiox. Put all the veggies in and then, then we move up to Anabiisxw. That's where the farm was. Then I left Kispiox and returned after thirty-seven years to find four farms on Anabiisxw.

GG Oh, way up the valley?



HW No, four miles, Combs is one, and Howells is another. Those are our fishing ground, how did they get a hold of it? I asked one of the ladies and (she said), "Oh, my husband's a policeman and that is how we knew."

And my grandpa, in the 1930s, he said, "Don't let the whites come in. They're going to say that the area all theirs. They're greedy. They'll want to make fast money. They are not like us. We hunt in the winter. We live off the land. We fish in the summer, we garden, we live off the weeds of the woods. But when the whites come in, they want to make money. They'll want to...they'll call us lazy Indians. Don't let them in."

GG Your grandpa said that?

HW Yeah, 1930s.

GG And who was that? What was his name?

HW Abel Tait.

GG Abel Tait. Smart man.

HW And Lizzie Tait.

GG Yes, and they had a big ranch?

HW No, Anabiisxw. That was the fishing ground, that's the area where I had my own personal horse when I was young. And here in Kispiox we had barns in front. They had cattle and big gardens, and we make hay in the summer. We just kept working and I wonder why couldn't we just go easy? Grandpa would just go, go, go go go! And then we moved up to Anabiisxw to set up tents. The grand big smokehouse was there, great big storage containers on stilts. These is still some there.

Then they put nets out... one across and one this side of the Skeena River. I notice that when the great big smokehouse... when it was full they would lift the nets. There was fish everywhere, and Grandpa would say, "We're got to let them go and if you don't look after them, they're going to go down."

GG So you don't take too many?

HW They just fill up the storage containers.

GG Just take what you need.

HW And lift the nets. They could drop the nets and trade the fish, but no, they just lift the nets and then...

GG Just let them go.

HW Once the smokehouse was full then we would go back to the village during the fall. We would load the fish onto a wagon, like cords of wood to carry the fish back to Kispiox. When we reached Kispiox the dogs would start barking and the people would come forward to our home to trade for smoke fish. People would come with their packsacks.

One I remember, a tall lady, Reanne Skulsh. She was really tall, slender and beautiful. She came in with her packsack and bought two dollars worth of fish. It would fill that packsack. Then on our next trip from Anabiisxw she would come back and buy three or four more packsacks of fish for the winter. Reanne was a widow. She had a garden and she picked berries. She works like a slave all summer gathering berries and get the fish. The fish had to be fully dried and salt for there was no freezers or canners to preserve the fish.

GG And smoked?

HW We picked berries for two or three days. We picked leaves to put onto the ramps. We then squashed the berries and then put the berries onto ramps, and we built fire underneath the ramps to dry the berries.

GG Like a fruit leather?

HW Yeah, we pour the berries down and built fires underneath the ramps. In the fall you can smell whole village. I went up the river from here and found the salmon are lying dead. They're spawning. There's so many. I continued along the river till I came to the old Kispiox bridge and I look down to see dead fish everywhere. There was a whole slew of them. You could go to the Skeena River and see and smell the same thing, lots of fish.

GG So has that changed?

HW Yes. I remember my Grandpa, oh...then the frogs were everywhere, the owls would be "whoooting" at night, and the bluebirds would build their nests. And now you don't see the frogs, owls and bluebirds.

GG Not like it used to be.

HW No frogs. I have one in my garden, but I haven't seen it lately. I want to make sure she is safe, just one little one, that's all. Back then, when I go out with the wagon by the creeks and even over the bridge, you got to watch out for the frogs for you might step on one for there was so much frogs.

GG Oh yes, sometimes they'll be travelling and the whole road are covered with little tiny frogs!

HW These were big frogs. Back in those days they're big.

GG So they're smaller now?

HW Some are bigger and some are little. There were all kinds of frogs. Also, there were rabbits, grouse and squirrels running around. When I got married I left Kispiox but I returned after thirty-seven years. When I came back here in August 1988, I took a tour of the village and noticed a number of changes. And I asked Mum, Lottie Muldoe, "Do you know, Mum, it's fall now. I don't see any garden in the village any more or wood pile or nothing. What's going on?"

Mum says, "I don't know. No smokehouse, just a few around..." she said. I ask, "What's going on?" Mum said, "I don't know Hattie. Just wait till you go to church, it's empty too." I said, "Used to be full when I left." Mum said, "You wait till Sunday...it's empty." I said, "What's going on?" Mum said, "I don't know. It's just what happened."

Then we thought about it, and I talked to Mum and went up to Anabiisxw where the fishing grounds are and found the Combs and the others farms were there and I had another shock. I was so angry.

GG That would be hard.

HW I said, "What is the matter with my Uncle Albert?" I thought he listed this. He did, but something happened and they took the land away.

GG Albert Tait?

HW Yes. And so what they are doing is leasing the land for ninety-nine years.

GG Yeah, there are a lot of people saying they know what is going on and what people should do.

HW And you can't go to their meeting! They'll throw you out if you disagree with..."Get out, beat it!" And so I thought about that when you mentioned about the watershed, and about the fish.

In the 1930s, Grandpa and Grandma were worried about the fish. But there was so many of them, and I thought, "Whoosh," we didn't need to worry! They're just rotting on the banks of the two rivers. I was young then.

GG Seemed like there would always be enough, there were so many. That's what everyone says... there were so many fish.

HW They were just everywhere.

GG So that was a big change when you came back, too.

HW The rivers and there is no fish. There is fish in the river, but there is not much to see. I watch the Kispiox River and very seldom you see a fish going up. I remember before by the end of August 31, we use to go to Kuldo to fishing again. We pack up here and move up to Kuldo. We had a big smokehouse up there too. And I had my two canoes there. One is a double canoe, and I had mine to cross the Skeena. I used to think, "Ahh... fishing again." By that time the fish at Anabiisxw turning red, you know, getting' old. But up at Kuldo they're still eatable and still hard. And then we put out the nets again...across the river is for spring salmon and this side is for sockeye. And it's quite steep at Kuldo, you know, just like Anabiisxw. Up the hill I go again," Ahh" to fill that smokehouse!

GG A lot of work.

HW We had five dogs. We got to dry fish and meat for them.

GG For the winter, for the trapline.

HW Yes, 'cause when we went to the trapline we just took some sugar, maybe one slab of bacon, little bit of salt and pepper, and stuff like that, just the basics. And the rest of the food that we eat during the winter was up in the bush. So away we go to fill the smokehouse. First we had to go out into the bush and get the strips of cedar barks which we use for the ropes. The ropes were used to put the fish and meat way up this two storey smoke house.

GG And you make ropes out of that? For the fishing?

HW Yes, cedar bark. Used it to hang the fish up and fill the smokehouse again. Then we would average around five hours sleep. Till this day that's how long I sleep, I'm comfortable with this for that's how I grew up. Back then we go till we had enough. They were so smart, they know exactly how much they're going to use for the year!

See, Granny would say, "This (measuring with her hands) is for the dogs, and this is ours." And if we had visitors or someone stuck out there, they would have extra to give them. We always had Sunday off. Then Grandpa would say, "We're going up to the mountain tomorrow." I said, "How? We need something for bread," for we didn't take any butter in, or grease. We just brought flour in. "We're going up to get it." I said "Oh..." He said, "We're going to snare the bear." I said, "Oh"...I didn't argue, I just go along.

GG You were going to go snare a bear? Whoa! How old were you?

HW Yes, we were going to snare a bear. I was about ten or eleven years old then.

GG Wow, so did you snare a bear?

HW No, my grandfather did. I just helped. We walked up the mountain. It took us half a day to get up there. There were blackberries up there, huckleberries and blue berries and you name it. That was the place to get a bear. So Grandpa picked a place. There were logs stacked up there and that was where he put a snare. They could tell where the bears cross and just patted right down. So grandfather put the snare right there on that log and when the bear touched that string, that log will flip up, you know.

GG Did it get it like a noose around its neck?

HW It was set a certain way. We didn't go back up till the third day. Grandfather said, "We'll go up and check to see if we get one." It might get spoiled so we packed a lunch and left early in the morning and when we got there, Grandfather and I had our guns ready. When we got in the bush we don't talk, we just nodded and pointed.

GG Just signals.

HW Yeah, or whistles...so the animals will not hear us. And I take a peek and here was a medium-size bear, dead.

GG So it broke its neck, or it strangled?

HW It just choked him, you know, that big log, when he touched it, and it was just quick.

GG So you snared a bear.

HW No, grandfather snared the bear. I was trained how to meet the bear, when it's a grizzly. You are the one that's invading the territory, not him. You let him have it.

GG Do you back up?

HW Just go, beat it!

GG You don't want to argue with a grizzly.

HW No. I was trained to run down hill, because they can't catch you. If you run up hill they catch you. Their legs are shorter in the front and they can't run very fast going down, but they can run fast going up a hill.

GG They can run up. So what did you guys do with this bear, with the noose around its head?

HW Yeah, we butchered the bear and then packed half of it down. It's all downhill to our place. It was early in the morning so we could go back up and get what we left... could not pack the first time. Then we hung up the rest of the bear and the skin up in a tree. We preserve the skin. We scrape it and fixed it up, and that was our rug.

GG Oh nice, a black bear, nice fur.

HW Yeah, you can sit or sleep on it. When we got that bear down, we got to work for there was lots to do because that bear was fat.

GG And bear fat is good I hear, good for baking.

HW Then we dried the bear meat and then we boil the fat with water. We used a great big tank, which someone had to helicopter in. It was a kettle, I remember. I guess he stole them. This kettle had big legs... so big that we could build a fire under it.

GG So you can put the fire underneath it.

HW You build the fire underneath. I've never seen any since then. So we boiled half fat and the rest water and it just "hsssss" all day and night. In the morning we took the fat off the top and put it in the clean barrel and it would be just about full. That would be enough for the winter. That was our butter, for cooking, for frying.

GG What did you put it in?

HW In a barrel, a wooden barrel.

GG Like in a box?

HW No, a wooden barrel. We put water in it first to expand and then we could hold grease in it after.

GG Oh nice.

HW Yes, and then we didn't have to pack butter for the winter, no cooking oil or anything. Bear fat is never really hard, when it's ready. It doesn't matter how cold it gets, it's the same, you can spread it. In the summer it holds too, 'cause I go out and cut a block off and go in.

GG Perfect, perfect food. Probably good for you too.

HW We didn't have to pack lard, butter or grease in, for it was all done out there.

GG So what were you trapping out there?

HW Mink, squirrels, weasels and fishers, everything. There was lots of things out there. There's none out there anymore, I've been out there. Hardly any left.

GG How about lynx, or fox, or was it mostly little things?

HW Yeah. When I helped the Rediscovery (Culture Camp in Kuldo), that was when I realized the animals were gone for when the children and staff were sleeping, I would get up at four in the morning and I walk in the bush.

GG And you just don't see them anymore?

HW They still have the Rediscovery camp going in the summer. When I cooked out there, I used open fire. Now they have a kitchen. I hear it's really nice now.

GG They got a kitchen and all?

HW Yes.

GG It's still good for them to get out of town. Better than nothing.

HW Yeah, it's okay...and like I had it... like what I was telling you in Anabiisxw, we use tents when we fishing and I remember my grandparents, we get the kitchen away from our tent and the big smokehouse because the food attracts the bears.

GG Yeah, you don't want to be sleeping in the refrigerator!

HW So they had tables. They build it real quick, and an eating area, way back, and then the sleeping quarters over there, and the smokehouse. They have a dog by the kitchen and it run and warns us if there is any bears.

GG A bear alarm.

HW That is where I learned you never...When I go out to pick berries now, I told my daughter, you never go out when you have your monthly period, to pick berries, because the bear will smell you miles and miles away.

GG I've heard that.

HW Especially grizzly. They just....you just stay out of the bush until you are finished and then you can go out.

GG Yeah, you don't want to invite the grizzlies.

HW So I never fried bacon or anything like that. Also we never took chocolates or any sweets out trapping with us for the smell attracts the bears.

GG No strong smells. They're a lot like us!

HW And so back about the fishing and the....so I handle fish all summer and in the winter, one moose, one deer, one bear. And there's rabbits everywhere! Gosh, if we want rabbits, Grandpa just knock a few trees over and put snares on the limbs and go back out and get two or three rabbits a day, they were that many.

GG There are not a lot anymore? Not anymore. No, you never see a rabbit.

HW No, not anymore and then we hung them up in the smoke house, and they froze. By then it's cold. And the grouse. We go out, and if we want chicken dinner we go out and get grouse, 'cause they're just everywhere too!

GG Why do you think it's changed so much?

HW It's, the forestry pushed the roads in and there is more people around to hunt.

GG So more hunting, and not so many trees?

HW Yeah. It takes us two days to walk in when I was out there.

GG And now you can just drive.

GG As soon as there is a road, it's everybody's!

HW And I sat there, I think sick. I never seen any of your Granny when I was out there. They were there, but before my time. And my Grandpa said, "The three ladies from the village they got no work, no food." So he allowed them the strips (of territory), you know, to hunt. Now their children and relations claim the territory and they built cabins on the territory.

GG On these pieces of land?

HW Maybe the 1920s their great grandparents were there...and now there are the descendents. They got two or three houses there now I hear. And they...Rediscovery, they wanted me to take them in to second Kuldo, and I said no. I can get into it, but they're trying to get into it. They will, someday. They're going to find a way.

GG Yes, when people want to get in, they will. Why do you think there aren't so many fish?

HW 'Cause they so many fish, cause this... the way back, the people, they look after it...they're not greedy. We're not lazy, we're greedy. You only take out what you need. And we trade by some, get the oolican grease, or sea weed. We trade. Now money is involved, now. Big fancy trucks and everything.

GG Well, and the big fishing out on the ocean, too. That catches a lot of fish that would be coming back.

HW The seiners, and in the olden days we used canoes. I helped to build a canoe! After we got a big cottonwood, then we filled with water, build a big fire and drop the hot stone in it and shape it.

GG A cottonwood?

HW And cedar, we used cedar....

GG I've heard of that. Nobody does that anymore. Was that with your grandpa?

HW Yes. We built a medium size canoe, and we can use it for checking the nets. We build big ones for two, you know.

GG So would you have, how big would a canoe be? How many people at the most?

HW Two or three to hold the big one.

GG But you also had some that were just for one?

HW Yes, to check the net. Check the net, that's the smaller size and then...

GG What kind of net? What did you use for the net?

HW Nets, we bought them from the Whites, I guess that lasted. But in them days they used cedar. In olden days you can use cedar for room divider or....

GG Everything..

HW Made a bowl, a little cup, use cedar lots of time. Then we go up in the mountain to get the goats for food.

GG Right, in the fall?

HW In the fall, cause we had binoculars and Grandpa says, "See if you can spot a white thing, movement." And I said I seen one or two. If we have time with all of the preserving and getting things ready, we climb, take us a day and a half. We camp out, we cross the river, the Kuldo and we walk up and Granny stays behind with the dogs for protection. And we'll get a goat, just for a treat, not very often. White...

GG Beautiful...

BREAK

HW We have to look after what's on our planet, we have to educate our young ones.

GG So you live right here, on the Skeena. You can see the Skeena out the window.

HW Yes, they are.

GG And it meets the Kispiox, right over there.

HW Do you ever think that, when the fish come up around June, some fish takes the Skeena and some fish takes the Kispiox?

GG They must know somehow! To go right or left?

HW I guess, that's nature. Fish know where they came from.

GG Where they started, they must just sense it.

HW They are...like especially when it is high river, it just roars, you know, and then they meet and they mix together and decide. Oh maybe sometimes they argue, with Skeena saying, "I'm bigger!" and the Kispiox says, "Oh, maybe I'm smaller, but I'm cleaner!"

GG Having a discussion about it!

HW "Oh well, we might as well get together here, let's go..."

GG "Let's go to the ocean!"

HW And then they hit the Bulkley River, and they have another talk, you know, and a discussion and they're getting bigger and more water and then they carry on.

GG So that's what they're doing when they swirl around, they're having a discussion! I like that.

HW Then the Thompson runs into the river here...way up across there.

GG Lots of rivers here.

HW Yes, lots of rivers here, so it's quite a discussion about the rivers, and we had a flood here two or three years ago.

GG Right, I was away, but people sent me pictures. That was crazy!

HW Yeah they (it came) just about to my house, and it stopped.

GG Were you nervous?

HW Yes, they made me move. Up to Audreylyn's, and move everything upstairs here. What a mess! And then they put sand bags around my house and try and keep it. And they...like knock on my door at 11:30 at night and I say, "I refuse to move" and there are two or three men and they say, "You gotta move, Hattie...it's just about here, you gotta get out now..."

I said "I can get out up in the back" They say, "No, you got to come now." I said, "I don't think it will reach my house." They say, "But we don't know that. You better go now. " And they're not leaving either...they're just staying outside (*laughing*)...

GG You weren't going to talk them out of it! (*laughing*)

HW So I went up and slept at Audreylyn's. And in the morning we came down the hill, you couldn't drive in cause of the water, and we couldn't drive in. The totem poles were standing in the water. Then it stopped. The second day and then on the third day, it's starting to go back down.

GG Thank goodness. It was a mess down by Terrace...well do you remember the flood in the 1930s?

HW Yeah, used to be a village in the front here.

G Everything got washed away.

HW Everyone except one. You can see them going down....

GG Somebody told me their Grandpa remembered seeing, a house would come and then it would go into this whirlpool and it would just come up lumber. House go in, lumber comes out. And one person...I read this in some interviews that were done in the '80s, this lady said her Dad went out and tied their house to a post, in a canoe, and then he went out and tied some other houses, 'cause the houses didn't have foundations so they just...well, I'm glad you're safe.

HW The last flood wasn't as big.

GG No, and nobody's that close (to the river) any more. And you're one of the closest ones, aren't you? You're one of the closest houses.

HW No, they don't. The flood we had in 1936, was bigger. We had a log house here and the water came right up to it.

GG Was there lots and lots of snow and then lots and lots of rain?

HW Snow and water combined. Up on the mountain. They already measured the snow and there will be high water but there won't be a flood. Anyway, I remember where the Pentecostal church is, we got tents and move our stuff up there. Everybody got together in our tents and make shelters, and they just got the people moved up before their houses... whoosh, gone! No, the river, it's so unpredictable. We're going to be short of water.

GG It feels that way, doesn't it? The river is low.

HW The time changes...

GG So, if you could speak and you are, if you want to put a message to Audreylyn's daughter's children, to the great great grandchildren, what would you like them to know, to remember that's important?

HW I'm going to write my history, as soon as I put my garden in. I'll start, I can write two or three books.

GG Good. So are you going to start writing it down?

HW And well, it's, their (children) upbringing, I'm not worried about them because they were brought up to garden, hay, and raising animals and stuff like that. They've been through that and they were trained.

GG Do they know how to do the fish?

HW Yes and they know how much to take, and right now Audreylyn is not very happy, 'cause we heard some of them are selling moose meat in Edmonton. And some of the people here are not getting their meat. Instead of giving to the elders, they're selling them. They're hauling them away.

GG I've heard of that. That's not right.

HW We're quite aware. I had to buy my fish last summer.

GG No! Here, in the village?

HW Yeah, I have been, four or five years now. We don't get our fish for nothing. I think _____ has something to do with it. She dropped me off a few chums and I wrote them a cheque for gas, 'cause it's quite a ways from Hazelton.

GG And gas is getting very costly.

HW Twenty-five and, a lot of money now to run, and sort of discourage some of them. Some of the elders they get cheques every month. But I work when I was young so I get Canada pension.

GG You shouldn't have to pay for fish though. That's not right.

HW Yeah, we do. Cost close to two hundred last summer. Canned, and I got some for my daughters and I sent some to my other daughter and my own supply. And of course donation, you know. The people that might need it. That's why I put the garden in. I don't really need a garden, just to keep me busy.



GG You just don't know how to stop.

HW Yeah, and it's donation. Donate to elders and the people that needs it, and the church. They have elders' dinners.

BREAK

HW What else would you like to hear, then?

GG Well....just for all the kids, like for the school. Like, "This is what Hattie says important for you to know about the fish."

HW Well that we have to look after what's on our planet, we have to educate our young ones.

END

Elders, Oldtimers & Salmon

Jackie Reynolds Williams Kispiox Village, May 5, 2010

GG So, it's May 5, talking to Jackie here, up in Kispiox Village. He's been fishing here for a long time, so I'm going to ask him what he thinks.

JW Yeah, well I started fishing in 1958, when I came back from Edmonton (Alberta).

GG Oh yeah?

JW Yeah, I just wanted to look after the family here...my family here. I'm still doing it and I'm seventy years old.

GG You're still fishing and looking after the family.

JW Yeah, 'cause I'm a head chief and that's my job.

GG That's right. What is your chief name?

JW My chief name?
Xantxw ("Ant whew")

GG Xantxw. "Ant whew."

JW Yeah.

GG And what clan are you?

JW I'm a Fireweed,
Killer Whale. I'm really... we're White Sea Bear.

GG Ah, the White Sea Bear.

JW That's our crest.

GG So, you've been fishing in this river?

JW Yeah, since 1958. That's when I came back from Edmonton.

GG What were you doing in Edmonton?

JW Residential school.



GG Ah, so you got out of there and you came back and fished.

JW That's why I don't have that much education. I really don't, so you're going to have to help me along the way if you have to.

GG Oh, you know more about fish than I do! You just tell me about that. Like what kind of boats, what kind of net, how did you do it?

JW Well, I got the coho net, sockeye, nylon and...Monofilament nets. I got them. Cost quite a bit of money, two or three years ago. Just a little over six thousand dollars worth of it for nets.

GG Wow! So you go out in that small boat, and you fish by yourself?

JW Oh, there's two of us in there sometimes.

GG Because, to handle the nets...and what are you fishing for?

JW Yeah. Sockeye, mostly sockeye, but we catch maybe two or three springs, if we're lucky.

GG Two or three springs if you're lucky.

JW Actually, they are steelhead.

GG So who taught you to fish?

JW Nobody. I taught myself.

GG You just figured it out?

JW I just... when I first started we had an old house out there, right out there. That's the first house and then we move here. And I never knew how to fix a net, but the family ...we didn't have no fish so that's how it started.

GG So you just found a net and you went for it?

JW No, I was working when I got back. I got a job right away with the Hazelton sawmill and then I bought a little cheap net, three hundred dollars. I had to buy a little iron and cork line.

GG So did you... did you just watch the other people?

JW No.

GG So, it sounds like you educated yourself about the fishing.

JW Yeah, I just I did lots of it, and I helped a lot of people out.

GG I know.

JW Yeah, a lot of people, and uh that's why I keep going. That's what makes me keep going, eh? I enjoy doing it.

GG What is it that you enjoy?

JW What's that?

GG What is the enjoyable part?

JW To see other people smile when they get a few fish to eat in winter!

GG That is a good feeling. Well, have you seen changes in how many fish there are, over the years?

JW Oh, there's lots of fish out there. There's lots of fish out there.

GG There's as many as there used to be?

JW Oh yeah...I know. It's these guys. They're trying to just to give up fishing, so some reason or another.

GG Which guys?

JW The GTOs (Gitxsan Treaty Office), and some other people.

GG They're just giving up?

JW Yeah, there's like they closed the, uh, Inland Fishery.

GG Yeah. I don't think they've had that for a while.

JW Oh I know. They've been doing it themselves, the people from the Hazelton office. They've been doing it up the Babine.

GG But that's an enhanced run. That's....they made there be more of those fish so there are more of those fish.

JW All the coast fish just come through here anyways!

GG Yeah. Well, what about the big commercial fishing? Don't think that's made a difference?

JW No, it don't really make that much difference, I don't think. It's the States, with those big, those big boats. Russians, and all those other Scandinavian countries. They're the ones that are raking up, not just the fish, but taking everything.

GG Like taking it off the bottom of the sea.

JW Yeah, off the bottom of the sea.

GG Well, don't they catch a lot at the mouth of the river? To catch the ones that should come back?

JW Down here?

GG Yeah.

JW I believe that they do, because the mostly fish that we get here is from Alaska. I'm not too sure what part of the ocean they originally came from.

GG But they started here, and if they're lucky they end up here.

JW Yeah.

GG So what would you tell your great great grandchildren? The most important thing to know about fish?

JW To tell them, my great grandchildren, I'd tell them to not to abuse fishing.

GG Not to abuse fishing.

JW Yeah. To keep it, a certain amount for themselves. Like, I feed my family first, eh? Then I phone around and see who wants fish.

GG So not to be greedy with it.

JW Yeah.

GG Take what you need and then share.

JW Yeah. Like now, like last year I found out that a few people that I'd been helping were selling fish.

GG Oh...oh! (*both laughing*) I guess you won't help them this year!

JW Oh no, that's not going to stop me. I'm just going to...

GG If that's what they need to do.

JW Yes. But they probably need...I mean, I could have sold a lot of fish myself. But it wasn't in me to do that.

GG No, it's not your way.

JW No. Like I said before, when we first started, it makes me have a big smile on my face, knowing that that guy is not going to go hungry.

GG Well, you look pretty happy!

JW Yeah, I'm always happy (*chuckles*). Yeah...after what has happened, I got a stroke.

GG You had a stroke?

JW Oh, I had a stroke about ten years ago! I wasn't even supposed to be talking to you. I wasn't even supposed to be fishing, hey? I was supposed to just be..supposed to be Jell-O!

GG Just Jell-O? Well you look like you're doing all right.

JW Oh, I was walking. I was...the doctor was surprised to see, to see me walk out of the hospital. That's why, you see how my eyes are? Nobody help me. I fall down when I'm working on my nets when I wasn't supposed to do it.

GG But you did it anyway.

JW I did, and I wasn't even supposed to be in the boat.

GG It's hard to stop a guy that wants to fish, eh?

JW Yeah. I could have stopped if I wanted to, but like I say, I watch so many people go without, eh? And I know what it's like to go hungry. I was hungry in school, always hungry.

GG That was a hard time...

JW Yes, from 1949 to 1958.

GG That's a long time.

JW Yep. That's why I say I've helped a lot of people. Some of those people don't
(inaudible) I wouldn't, I wouldn't want to say their names. They say, "Oh the fish you gave us, it was stink." But it was good. It was half dried fish.

GG (laughing) So you just can't please some people.

JW I'm thinking about this, you know. I've been thinking about this quite some time.

GG What do you think? What is it you think about?

JW Well, you see, to stop fishing. Just to fish for my family from here on in. I mean, at my age...I can't go too far any more.

GG Well, have you got any younger people that can take over for you?

JW They're all out working. They're all... all my grandsons are working in Terrace. Got about four grandsons, one that's working in wholesale, one that's working in Canadian Tire, and one, I forgot what's that other store.

GG Well it's good they're working and not just lying around. But they're not fishing either.

JW One of my grandsons, he really misses fishing. Conroy, he wants to take the summer off. I told him, "Just stay where you're at." That's what one grandson did..

GG He took some time to be with you?

JW I appreciate it but I told him, "You shouldn't have did it"...to, you know...

GG Yeah, but it's a hard choice for them to have to make.

JW Yeah, but well... I keep pushing them to stay with what they're doing, eh? Another thing though, you guys should be picking up, about these fish floating down. I don't know whether there's people fishing up there. In the summer lot of fish in the summer come floating down (by) my place, drifting, in my fishing places, in the back eddy.

GG Okay, so you're seeing the fish or the nets?

JW No net marks on them. They're just coming down.

GG Oh, so these fish are just coming, they're floating down, and they're not alive?

JW No.

GG That's weird.

JW Yeah. They're dead.

GG Do they look sick?

JW Some of them were swollen up.

GG Were what-in up?

JW They were just swollen up. I don't know.

GG Oh, swollen up. Well that's weird.

JW Well, I hear, from what I hear, they got a few drillings up there.

GG It could be. It could be some poison in the river. That would be too bad.

JW And that's, you know, kinda scary.

GG It is scary, 'cause if people poison the river then they poison the fish. They're going to poison all of us.

JW Well, look at the news. I just turned off... all those fish just floating around, from that oil rig and....

GG Yeah, that's pretty awful.

JW That's turtles, seals...that's going to happen here, too.

GG Well, if we're not careful.

JW Well, it's happening already, 'cause like I said I told those people down there, the Fishery, nobody seems to do anything about it.

GG What did you tell them?

JW I tell them about what's happening.

GG That you're seeing these sick, these dead fish?

JW Oh, they're seeing them. But I told _____, but nobody say nothing.

GG Well, at least you know, and I'm sure somebody is writing it down somewhere. What do you think we can do?

JW There is nothing you and I can do.

GG Nothing?

JW Because every time we try to do something, we get overruled, here. Like I brought this up in a meeting one time with the GTO and... well they hired the...they call the cop and then I was thrown out!

GG Yeah, they don't like to hear about that. But I think you haven't given up. You don't sound like you've given up, and that's the thing. This Skeena Watershed (Conservation Coalition) group I'm doing this thing for, they're the kind of people that are saying NO to the big oil companies. Did you know about that young woman that swam the whole length of the river?

JW Yeah.

GG That's... she was working with these guys.

JW Yeah, they were up here.

GG Yeah, they stopped in every village. So there are some younger people with energy and strong beliefs who know how to get the message out. I think they're going to. They'll fight the fight for us.

JW That's the way it should be, instead of going against the elders, eh? Like I watch, I've heard some White people say to myself, "These guys should be happy. They've got nets out and they should be happy." I mean, nothing wrong with that....like myself, I feed a lot of White people too. And the Fisheries know it but they didn't say anything.

GG I think they'll probably leave you alone.

JW It's something that, instead of....we should be working together.

GG That's what I'm wanting to do with this project, is to get everybody's ideas together, so we can understand each other better. Because anybody that's got anything to do with the river has some wisdom.

JW Yeah, we've got to understand each other better. You take some of the people in the valley. They come and get fish from me but then they turn around and they lie and say they buy fish here and they buy fish there...and I...come and accuse them.

GG That's too bad. And you just give it away.

JW Yeah.

GG Well, you're an honest man, Jackie.

JW Yeah.

GG Let's take your picture!

END



About the Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition

Mission - Cultivate a sustainable future from a sustainable environment rooted in culture and a wild salmon ecosystem.

The Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition was founded in 2004 by a diverse group of people living and working in the Skeena river watershed. Our board of directors and membership reflects the broad interests of the people in this region. We are united in understanding that short term industrial development plans, even 50 year plans, will not benefit our region in the long run if they undermine the social and environmental fabric that holds the watershed and its communities together. Our range of activities all reflect this vision. They include:

- Informing our membership on proposed development plans that may compromise our vision of a sustainable regional economy.
- Working to develop long-term stewardship plans for the Skeena watershed
- Organizing information meetings between regional/provincial governments, corporate developers and local communities
- Contributing to baseline research of wildlife, water quality, and cultural heritage resources in the Upper Skeena Watershed
- Developing sustainable employment opportunities that are compatible with the globally significant values of the region
- Providing educational programs for the region's children and youth (school programs and a summer conservation camp) to learn about the values within the Skeena watershed
- Sponsoring gatherings for stories, music, and art celebrating the Skeena watershed

Other SWCC projects include:

10,000 Salmon
Spirit of the Skeena Swim
Youth on Water
Skeena Bike Service
Sacred Headwaters Campaign
Skeena Awareness Project



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