STRENGTH AND RESILIENCY IN

THE NARRATIVES OF MARGARET GAGNON

By

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ABSTRACT

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Something stirred in me the first moment I heard Margaret Gagnon speak in a Carrier culture class at the University Of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). She told, among many others, a powerful narrative about fifteen children who died from drinking contaminated water. Her narrative was both deeply moving and shocking, especially as the incident, I found, is not recorded as part of the local history. The transcribed narratives are original material from already video and audio taped presentations by Margaret at UNBC and in her home. These narratives provided the impetus for me to investigate what this tragedy reveals. This work looks critically at the colonizers through historical, environmental, and genocidal ethical lenses. In the true spirit of stories, however, these stories have continued unfolding their deep wisdom to me. This body of stories has taken a surprising turn to reveal yet another strand of enduring resiliency and strength woven through the fabric of Margaret words. What I found is that the absence of First Nations narrative in Prince George history, suggests a lack of honouring First Nations people. This is only one aspect of colonization that prevents inclusion into every level of society. Without this acknowledgement of oral histories there is little opportunity to recognize the devastation caused by the consequent silencing of a culture, or the strength of the survivors.

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CHAPTER ONE: *INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY*

Margaret Gagnon is a 91 year old Lheit-Lit'en Elder, fluent in her Carrier language and a powerful storyteller. I have chosen to discuss her work because I was extremely fascinated by her storytelling skill and her ability to capture an audience and put them under a deep spell. It has however, taken me a long time to appreciate that one story leads us into another one, forming a circle, and if one story were to be lifted out and scrutinized separately, we might lose the opportunity to participate in the magic of her narrative. Her stories slide from one to the next, and as skillfully as her forefathers and foremothers with their fishing hooks and nets at the river, she draws us in. Soon we find ourselves flying like birds, dipping and gliding back and forth immersed in the importance of story, suddenly realizing that we, too, have become part of the circle, enclosed within it in a place of true understanding.

One of the powerful narratives told by Margaret Gagnon is about fifteen children poisoned by contaminated drinking water. Mrs. Mackenzie, a local rancher, blocked a creek to create a reservoir and then put creosote in the water to dip her cattle. Subsequently, downstream, when the contaminated

water was consumed by both adults and children of the Lheit-Lit'en community, it caused death, blindness, and a host of other serious medical problems including far-reaching psychological trauma. Three of the children who died were Margaret's. She also lost the baby she was carrying.

Margaret Gagnon was born in Prince George at the confluence of the mighty Nechako and the Fraser Rivers. The Carrier Necha Nee Incha Koh translates as "river with a strong undercurrent;" the Fraser River is Ltha Koh, "the big mouth river." Margaret is a Lheidli t'en. Translated into English this means "people from where the rivers flow together or confluence." Margaret's stories represent the confluence of traditional storytelling, colonized, and postmodern Carrier realities.

Let me give you a little more history of Margaret Gagnon. Margaret was born in September 1914, one of four children, to Edward Lafernier and Veronica Quaw. She attended Lejac Residential School at Frazer Lake in Central British Columbia for only six months. She was sent there December 29, 1929 a week after her mother died. She remained there to the end of June 1930 (Gagnon, 2004). She was married in 1930 to her first husband Colin Fraser. Although Margaret rarely has spoken publicly about her personal life with her husbands, she did mention that her first marriage was an arranged union. She had

20 children and worked hard, as did her successive spouses, to try to make ends meet. Margaret is now 91 years old; she has lived a long life and witnessed the early history of Prince George. She remembers when the Canadian government appropriated the Lheidli traditional territory at Fort George Park and the subsequent displacement of her community to the Shelly Reserve.

The focus of this study is to transcribe and examine the corpus of Margaret's narratives, and to hone in on *The Poison Water* story. Originally, I wanted to address the conspicuous absence of *The Poison Water* incident from recorded local history. I thought this absence needed to be studied to understand the cause. Could the absence be viewed as an indication of the insignificance with which the dominant society viewed First Nations people at that time? This situation presents invaluable evidence for an investigation of the prevailing hegemony and mind-set towards First Nations people in the year of the poisoning, namely 1937. To answer this question I began to see *The Poison Water* story in the larger context of Margaret Gagnon's narratives. This has been a long journey.

I first heard Margaret Gagnon tell her story to a class at the University of Northern British Columbia in 1995. Margaret's storytelling moved me very deeply and spoke to me

of bygone years and the hard realities of not only being a First Nations woman oppressed by the dominant society, but also a mother coping alone. Although married, Margaret was by herself most of the time, single-handedly struggling to feed her children. Margaret's words gave me courage and strength as she addressed archetypical concerns that have besieged women over the centuries. This common ground hooked me into Margaret's wonderful cycle of narrative. Listening to Margaret seemed to put my own life into perspective, giving me much cause to contemplate my place in the universe.

As a single mother of three children I returned to education to improve my children's chances of having a fuller life. I began my studies at the College of New Caledonia where I heard Bridget Moran present her work, *Stoney Creek Woman* (1988). I listened to her explain the long process of co-writing with Mary John and the intimacies and intricacies of Mary John's well-lived life story that they had shared together over cups of hot tea. But what really hooked me into examining the injustices done to First Nations people in Canada was the stunning revelation that in the year I was born, children were dying on the Stoney Creek (Saik'uz) Reserve of pneumonia. This was shocking information, and it was the first time that I had ever given a thought to the disparities and injustices of our society. This was to be the

birth of my journey into First Nations Studies. Understanding First Nations perspectives became a passion, further fuelled by hearing Margaret's stories. I could not get over the vivid images she painted of her life and her clever use of humour. During her storytelling, I experienced the full spectrum of emotions. I was mesmerized while she was telling the story of her dad's disappearance and the subsequent discovery of his whereabouts. The hair on my head rose; I was there on the riverbank observing with the mysterious dark ravens.

Several weeks after listening to her stories -- *The Dog That Talked, Five Dollars is a Lot of Money,* and *The Poison Water,* I was assigned the task of writing the stories the way I thought I had heard them from Margaret. I have thought about this exercise a lot over the years and about the stories I produced from my memory several weeks after hearing them. It seems as if I filled up the silent spaces of implied meaning with my own words. I had put words and meanings into Margaret's mouth. I remember feeling so chagrinned when I read the stories with Margaret in 1997. When I read the stories back to her, she laughed and complemented me on what I had written. She said it was good to hear another version, although my version was nothing like hers.

As time passed, I began to transcribe the stories and, although I heard her tell them many times, I continued to

remain as fascinated with the stories as I was the first time I heard them. Always another layer of meaning emerged, illuminating yet another gem of wisdom. It fascinated me how her wisdom kept revealing itself to me. This gentle unveiling prompted my desire to study her work more deeply in the form of a Masters of Arts Degree in First Nations Studies.

I am a person born of, and steeped in, Western traditions as well as a student of First Nations Studies. This combination alone has presented unusual circumstances fraught with both racism and reverse racism, all instances fuelled by ignorance. It is, therefore, my intent to situate myself carefully within this work as respectfully and as receptively as possible. As a student of the discipline, I feel a strong imperative to address the issues of responsibility towards vital cultural knowledge.

Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna (1989) believe that the responsibility for information about First Nations peoples, or topics that concern them, is two-fold. This makes it imperative that the researcher be aware of not only ethical issues but also the fact that First Nations communities have been marginzlized. In focusing on "marginalization" I am concentrating on, as Kirby and McKenna explain, "Those who have suffered injustices, inequality and exploitation in their lives." (1998, 7) People who live on the margin find

themselves marginalized not only in terms of resources, but also in terms of public knowledge and public opinion. It must be recognized that in the organization of knowledge, the opinions of a small group of people are excluded from taking part as either producers or participants in the generation of knowledge. Maria Mies (1982, 123, quoted in Kirby and McKenna, 1989, 15) reflects on

> [r]esearch which so far, has been largely the instrument of dominance and legitimating of power elites, must be brought to serve the interests of dominated, exploited and oppressed groups.

I want to be able to conduct research in a way that would better serve the interests of both of these groups, the oppressed and the oppressor. Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson (1995, 2) feel that developing an oral testimony gives the listening process a particular relevance and differentiates it from a purely academic study.

The function of research is not only gathering and making sense of information but also acting responsibly with that information. The emphasis on responsibility for and treatment of information is doubly important when working in First Nations communities (Clarkson, Morrissette, and Regallet, 1992, 308). They note that indigenous people are the poorest of the poor, but at the same time, are the holders of the key to the future survival of humanity.

It has been my experience that the very nature of First Nations Studies is laden with a multitude of subtle and palpable tensions, imbued from intolerance and erroneous beliefs existing within and between worldviews. These tensions reverberated in my initial attempts to explore Margaret's narratives from a cross-cultural perspective, yet propelled me to make this journey.

Renato Rosaldo (1993, 49) views some of these tensions as a gap separating description and conclusion, initially originating from unresolved methods of whether to "describe cultures as loosely tied bundles of informal practices, or as a well-formed system regulated by control mechanisms, or as the interplay of both."

Kenneth Lincoln (1983, 4), however, ideally perceives Native American Studies as

> ...holistic art—imagining indigenous tribes (contiguous) with their environments, grounded in their traditions, enacting their histories. Its methods should be interdisciplinary and exploratory. Its research questions assumptions in order to learn, rather than assert.

A deeper contemplation of the phrase "in order to learn rather than assert" keeps me ever mindful of my position as a non-Native learner and reinforces my role as a pupil of First Nations Studies. Comprehending these tensions and theories in the journey to illustrate and develop the wisdom Margaret communicates to her audiences has been for me the most

frustrating, albeit, pivotal and rewarding part of this study. Mario J. Valdes (1992, 6-7) believes that "[u]nderstanding does not remain static if it undergoes explanation. There is a creative gain in the process." Nevertheless, how does one exactly assess "creative gain?"

Undeniably, the creative gain in examining Margaret's words has been a personal unearthing of how deeply creativity and culture entwine. As I explore Margaret's narrative, it becomes clear to me that Margaret Gagnon possesses a creative genius, poised somewhere between traditional and contemporary worlds. Just when you think Margaret's narratives are as colonized as they can be, the traditional nuances rise up like morning mist on a meadow carrying with them the essence of renewal. Her mastery of storytelling is grounded in the past. Her nuances and suspense, and her telling from several levels of understanding is remarkable. For example, Margaret acts as if she does not know Mrs. Carmen's profession--that in fact the house she was hired to clean was used as a brothel. This adds the double element of Margaret's initial innocence and current awareness. She plays the same trick in the story of her father's disappearance and return. Margaret has a quick mind, a sharp sense of humour, and a keen sense of timing and/or place.

The Carrier people are the original inhabitants of the north-central region of British Columbia. Carrier territory is a vast expanse spreading westward from the Rocky Mountains five hundred kilometers.

According to Margaret's ancestors, over 15,000 years ago they moved from their original home in the Blackwater area, about 60 kilometers southwest of Prince George. This move was initiated by a population explosion. (Lheit-Lite'en Nation, 1992, 2) The Lheidli t'en say:

> According to our history as told to us by our Elders, long, long ago a large group of our people were led by the traditional Chiefs and Medicine People to the convergence of these two rivers. According to our Elders, originally these people - our ancestors - had traveled from the Blackwater area, about 80 kilometers southwest of here. It is said that this may have happened as long as 15,000 years ago, or more. As it is, anthropologists have found evidence of our people's settlement dating back nine thousand years in this area. (Ibid.)

Elizabeth Furniss points out that Carrier people were at one time a migratory people in step with the season's rhythms. Their traditional territories possess a varied terrain

> …from the low rolling hills along the Blackwater River in the south to the mountainous regions that border Carrier country to the west, north, and east. The area is dotted with numerous lakes, rivers and swamps and thick spruce, pine and fir forests cover much of the land. (Furniss, 1993, 1)

The Carrier people resourcefully developed a mobile hunting and fishing economy that utilized the abundance of

fish, animals, plants, and materials on their territory. By seasonally travelling through their territories, they were able to live naturally and in harmony with the environment for many generations. The ancestors would work in family groups hunting and gathering throughout their territories. There were a few established settlements such as those we are familiar with today. However, seasonal occupation of lakeshore and riverside sites is known to have taken place for centuries. Modern day villages now occupy these sites. Lheidli was one of these villages.

Although the Carrier of British Columbia are scattered over a vast area, they share many connections in both languages and culture. As Furniss points out,

> [t]he Carrier language is part of the Northern Athapaskan language family. Northern Athapaskan languages are spoken throughout the subarctic region of northern and western Canada. Other northern Athapaskan languages include Chilcotin, Sekani, Tahltan, Kaska, Slave, and Beaver. (1993, 1)

Interestingly, the Navaho and Western Apache of the American Southwest also speak Athapaskan languages. Linguists regard these people, the Southern Athapaskans, as distant relatives of the Northern Athapaskans in Canada.

Laura Boyd (2003), a Carrier speaker, visited the Navaho and Western Apache of the American Southwest. She confirmed that with some effort by both parties it was possible, in most

instances, to understand what was spoken in the other Athapaskan language.

Both the Northern and Southern Athapaskans have stories of the latter taking off from the North; and of the North copying the South long ago. The Carrier call themselves *dakelh:*

> This is a shortened version of the phrase *'uda ukelh,* which translates as "people who travel by boat on water in the morning" ('uda=morning, ukelh=traveling by boat). (Furniss, 1993, 3)

Some 19th century fur traders misheard the word *dakelh* and wrote it in their journals as "Takully." Today *dakelh* is used as a generic term to refer to most Carrier people. The name Carrier only became widely used after Europeans arrived. As Margaret Tobey indicates the Sekani people to the northeast had referred to their neighbors as "the ones who pack," (Tobey 1981 quoted in Furniss, 1993, 3). The Europeans were responsible for translating this into the now commonplace name "Carrier."

When Margaret speaks of her own language, however, she never refers to it as Carrier but always as "Indian". "And we spoke nothing but Indian until we started school," she says frequently and not unlike many in her age group. As Gagnon (1993) begins her narratives, she establishes a vital connection with her past by introducing her audience to her

late grandmother, Granny Seymour was born Margaret Marie Boucher in Fort St James in 1863. She passed away in 1966. As Margaret retells:

> Well I was brought up by my Grandmother, late Granny Seymour. She took the oldest of each of her [grand] children to be with her and she kept us until we were school age and she taught us every little thing that [used] to be taught to an Indian in our way.

This connection with the past, as Big Tree (quoted in Ruoff Brown, 1990, 1) articulates so eloquently, is the important link the Elders use in keeping the past alive:

> They Carried dreams in their voices;
> They were the elders, the old ones
> They told us the old stories,
> And they sang the spirit songs.

Initially, my knowledge of Margaret was like that "wind across the buffalo grass." As it turned out, I was not on the same page as Margaret at all. Understandably, I wanted to view Margaret's memories of her life from my position, as a member of the dominant society. When I began this thesis, after listening to her stories for five years, I called Margaret to make an appointment with her so that I could interview her. I had high hopes of asking a million questions. I thought that very quickly I could dig out far more information than I had to work with from the already videotaped material. I am afraid my own socialization was very obvious in my intense need to

unearth the rest of the story that was not on the videos. I wanted Margaret's personal thoughts and feelings. I wanted to plumb the very depths of her life. I wanted to know how the tragic poisoning changed her and affected her existence. Margaret, however, had other plans for me. She told me that she had no intention of ever talking about *The Poison Water* story again. "Fair enough," I thought, "Margaret is in frail health, and she said that talking about *The Poison Water* was very hard for her as it was like reliving the tragedy again and again."

Nonetheless, my first reaction was one of dismay. I could not help feeling that Margaret had thwarted my whole project. Dejected and without focus, for a very long time I could not seem to navigate my way through this impasse.

In order to understand the full strength of Margaret's words, I felt I needed, on some level, to deconstruct or, at best, re-examine my own ethnocentric infrastructure and values. There are really no road maps for an excavation and scrutiny of one's ethnocentrism. Michael Dorris wrote:

> For most people serious learning about Native American culture and history is different from acquiring knowledge in other fields, for it requires an initial, abrupt, and wrenching demythologizing. (quoted in Morrison, 1997, 13)

Claude Denis (1997, 13) uses the term "whitestream" to indicate the Canadian society. Denis derives this term from

the feminist notion of "malestream," which was initially Mary O'Brien's (1981, quoted in Denis) concept and later gained wide circulation. Denis's notion is predominantly based on the European "white" experience; this concept goes far beyond simply being "white." The "white" root structure encompasses socio-demographic, economic, and cultural presumptions.

When the excavation of my own conceptual baggage began, there were several points I needed to address in order to move beyond my own "Whitestream" heritage. What had possessed me in the first place to study another culture? Am I, too, in an arrogant way, just perpetuating the colonizers' agenda by further exploiting First Nations people? These are reoccurring questions that seemed to keep surfacing. The desire to develop the ability to see past my own ethnocentric views became a long and complex journey. I found that Judith Golec (in Blackstock, 2001) raises the issues of conceptual baggage in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. There she addresses personal experience and preliminary understandings. Golec explores the self-interviews that she calls conceptual baggage and defines as:

> …Information about the researcher that places her/him in relation to the research question and research process in an immediate and central way. By undoing conceptual baggage, not only at the beginning of the whole research enterprise but in an ongoing way throughout the research, researchers enable their personal experiences, thoughts and feelings to enter the research information on the

> same level as those of subsequent participants. (Golec, 1967: quoted in Blackstock, 2001, 21)

Graham Hingangaroa Smith addresses the unique struggles of indigenous people that challenge them to use a different approach to "the new formations of colonization." This challenge, however, is particularly meaningful to me as it also portrays the essential elements of basic cross-cultural interaction as

> …to engage in positive, proactive initiatives rather than resorting to reactive modes of action. This proactive type of action can be illustrated in the tensions within the following dichotomies: the difference between having a fence at the top of the cliff and an ambulance at the bottom; the difference between prevention and cure: the difference between seeing oneself as responsible for indigenous problems as opposed to understanding the wider societal structures; the difference between biological explanations and sociological explanations with respect to social and cultural differences. (Graham Hingangaroa Smith, 2002, 210)

In the beginning, I thought this thesis would be a straight forward open and shut case - the "shortest route home" if you will. Michael Blackstock uses this metaphor by recounting a story Nick Prince (a writer and late Carrier Elder) shared with him. Prince said:

> Jimmy Burton and I went up north there, and it was cold. We snow shoed all day. We want to get to this cabin. And go around this big swamp about four or five miles long, in the pine valley it was a swamp, all of it. There was a space in between and we crossed that, and the cabin is way down that end. Geez, I wondered if we could cross there? There's a place where there was a hole there [in

> the ice], it was melted you know. We go far enough around, he was doing all right ahead of me you know. I was walking four feet from his trail God damned! I went right went down [through the ice] Geez son-of-a-bitch anyway. I was packing heavy too you know. He came; I said "Don't get too close." I said "Just go get a pole." It was only a hundred yards from the bush. In the meantime I took my snowshoes off, I had to reach down and that stuff was warm. I untied my snowshoes and leave that there. He got me out. And we went in the bush and made a shelter, and camp there all night. I changed my clothes and it stink. "Well" he says, "we learned a lesson, we got to listen to the old people" [Nick laughs]. Yeah, they used to say 'the long way around is closer to home.' That's a saying of the old people, they used to say that you know. Yeah, there is a lot of things that we learn. Every day is a learning process. We didn't just go out there to trap, we went out there to learn. They were always teaching. (Blackstock, 2001, 3)

Initially, what I really wanted to do was investigate *The Poison Water* story by isolating it from the rest of Margaret's narratives, thereby placing the emphasis solely on it. Mabel McKay, Greg Sarris' mentor, made an observation that clarified the dilemma I had set up of trying to adapt Margaret's words to suit my agenda:

> I was born in Nice, Lake County, California. 1907, January 12. My mother, Daisy Hansen. My father Yanta Boone. Grandma raised me. Her name, Sarah Taylor. I followed everywhere with her. I marry once in Sulphur Bank. Second time I marry Charlie McKay. We weave baskets, and show them different places. Have son, Marshall. Now grandkids, too. My tribe Pomo. There, how's that? That's how I can tell my life for the white people's way. Is that what you want? It's more, my life. It's not only the one thing. It's many. You have to listen. You have to know me to know what I am talking about. (Sarris, 1994, 1)

Instead of really listening to Margaret's words, I had been trying to get Margaret to tell her life story in the white people's way. Therefore, I was still fixated on trying to isolate *The Poison Water* story from within the circle of narratives Margaret has created. She displays exquisite oration, but also casts her narratives like Matryoshka dolls, each one nesting inside the other.

Paula Gunn Allen states that

> [o]ne useful social function of traditional tribal literature is its tendency to distribute value evenly among various elements, providing a mode or pattern for egalitarian structuring of society as well as literature. However, egalitarian structures in either literature or society are not easily read by hierarchically inclined westerners. Still, the tendency to equal distribution of value among all elements in a field, whether the field is social, spiritual, or aesthetic (and the distinction is moot when tribal materials are under discussion), is an integral part of tribal consciousness and is reflected in tribal social and aesthetic systems all over the Americas. In this structural framework, no single element is foregrounded, leaving the others to supply "background." Thus, properly speaking, there are no heroes, no villains, no chorus, no setting (in the sense of inert ground against which dramas are played out). There are no minor characters, and foreground slips along from one focal point to another until all the pertinent elements in the conversation have had their say. In tribal literatures, the timing of the foregrounding of various elements is dependent on the purpose the narrative is intended to serve. Tribal art functions something like a forest in which all elements coexist, where each is integral to the being of the others… Traditional tales will make a number of points, and a number within the time the story teller has allotted to the story depending on the interests and needs of her audience at the time of the storytelling, each of these elements will receive its proper due. Traditional American Indian stories work dynamically among clusters

> of loosely interconnected circles. The focus of the action shifts from one character to another as the story unfolds. There is no "point of view" as the term is generally understood, unless the action itself, the purpose can be termed "point of view." But as the old tales are translated and rendered in English, the western notion of proper fictional form takes over the tribal narrative. Soon there appears to be heroes, point of view, conflict, crisis, and resolutions, and as western tastes in story crafting are imposed on the narrative structure of the ritual story, the result is a western story with Indian characters. Mournfully, archaic form by the very people whose tradition has been re-formed. (Allen, 1986, 240-241)

When Margaret thwarted my intentions, it made me realize that, for the most part, *The Poisoned Water* represents threads (albeit very tragic threads) in the rich and textured tapestry that is Margaret's life. With this in mind, numerous points and elements of this exploration have changed focus and perspectives. Along the way, my own horizons broadened and the circles of Margaret's wisdom began to unfold, taking on new dynamic shapes. In retrospect, this exploration has been the most valuable and personal learning experience that I could ever have imagined. Although I wanted the quick solution to the desired end, I have, like Blackstock (2001), gone the long way around. In the process, I have come at last full circle.

It is not a coincidence that *The Poison Water* is so emotionally charged that it turns audiences' hearts upside down, leaving them not only shaken, but also newly and immediately cognizant of the incongruities that exist within

the realm of the colonized. In examining how a history is presented or what is omitted, ultimately, the question that must be raised is why does Margaret tell this story? Margaret has the inexplicable ability to bait her narrative hook, or not, and cast it far; thus drawing her listeners in. If indeed *The Poison Water* story is the lure, it is very effective in capturing her audience. Margaret's accounts are candid and unequivocal; this is who she is, this is what she has lived through, and this is what she has accepted. Margaret's narrative has the power to transcend the colonial rationale, cutting deep into the heart of a community to expose an incomprehensible nightmare - losing a whole generation of children in one devastating draught of water. Not only did local history exclude the story; it also denies the true nature of this ravage.

Following Margaret's pedagogy, I, too, intend to use *The Poison Water* story as a pivotal hook on which to suspend this body of work. Throughout this whole exploration, I am ever aware of the fact that Margaret herself is a survivor of the attempts made by the Church and State to use Residential Schools as a contrivance by which to assimilate First Nations people, to turn them into non-Natives.

Margaret is fully aware that she and her descendants do not live in a pre-contact context and she understands that

colonization has affected First Nations' traditional life styles. Margaret's view on Residential School (1995a) however, is not one of negativity; for her Residential School was a tremendous opportunity for learning.

> I appreciate that Residential School. That was the best thing that ever happened to me after my mother died, I knew my language. I knew everything I had to do in the line of food and sewing. I learned all those things at home. And when I got to Residential School they taught me how to can food and cook different ways and from what we're used to. And then the sewing and [em]broidery work, crochet, knitting, fixin up clothes for the little ones… (Gagnon, 1995a)

This is not a quantitative study that seeks numbers to support its precepts; the opposite, in fact, is true. This study seeks to provoke thought and provide a deeper understanding of First Nations issues. I have used a phenomenological methodology derived from the interactive process and the impact of working with Margaret Gagnon's narratives in this qualitative study. This particular methodology has enabled me to experience intimately Margaret's life and vicariously through Margaret, the history of the Lheit-Lit'en nation. This body of work is based on video and audio tapes made from material that Margaret presented to Carrier Culture classes at the University of Northern British Columbia or to the UNBC classes that came into her home. There is no community involvement in the sense of work with the Lheit-Lit'en First Nation of which Margaret Gagnon is a

member. Because Margaret has a fierce and unique relationship with that community (and she has indicated to me that this is her story and her life), she feels that the Lheit-Lit'en community, as a whole, cannot restrain or dictate to her in any way.

Originally, I felt that the most serious drawback working from already taped video material would be the fact that it is impossible to ask any more questions. I learned first that Margaret's stories are amazingly consistent and concise throughout the material. Like the Matryoshka metaphor, Margaret's stories are not only circular, but they fit uniquely into each other -- a technique she has mastered so well that it makes it difficult to extract or separate the individual narratives as they are woven upon and into each other.

Being a First Nations Studies student, studying First Nations' philosophy and the wisdom of the Elders' ways of knowing, it seems meaningless to place this thesis within any other framework or perspective. It is as if the very act of doing so would fall short of appreciating fully First Nations' philosophy and ways of knowing. As a student of this discipline, I believe what First Nations people are saying about themselves, their origins, and their history. I have learned that they are the authority on their own experience

and beliefs. Secondly, I have come to understand that although Margaret tells her stories in English, she is following the traditional storytelling ethic in which a story is told, and it is not to be questioned by the people who hear it. Many, many times she mentions that as a child, she was not allowed to ask questions of her Grandmother. This is the very point where my western view kept balking.

Lee Maracle puts forward a First Nations practical view of philosophy:

> Theory: if it can't be shown it can't be understood. Theory is a proposition proven by demonstrable argument. Argument: evidence, proof. Evidence: demonstrable testimony, demonstration. We are already running into trouble. There are a number of words in the English language with no appreciable definition. Argument is defined as demonstrable evidence. None of these words exist outside their interconnectedness. Each is defined by the other. (Maracle, 1992, 86)

Lee Maracle also points out that European scholars have an odd concept that maintains that theory is estranged from story, and thus a separate set of words is prescribed to "prove" an idea as opposed to "show" one.

My personal philosophical objective has come to be, then, to creatively establish an ideology that consists of a theory converging to not only embrace story, but also utilize it to maximize the profound relationship between showing and telling.

This is what Arthur Ray does when he presents a Micmac folktale that confirms First Nations' beliefs:

> They came to a wigwam. It was a long wigwam with a door at each end. The man inside the wigwam said, "I have been here since the world began. I have my grandmother; she was here when the world was made…" (Ray, 1996, 87)

King (1993, 1) writes: "So in the beginning, there was nothing, just water." An origin myth, told by Angela Sidney, of Tagish and Tlingit ancestry begins: "A long time ago, all the world was water …Crow threw that sand around the ocean. 'Be world' he tells it. And it became the world." (Cruikshank, 1990, 43)

Ray notes that First Nations people have an affinity with the land wherein lies their identity and spirituality:

> Native groups have developed powerful metaphors, symbols, and narrative traditions to express their religious and philosophical views…. Some groups named the features of the landscape to recall important events in their individual and collective lives. In effect, the land was their history book. (Ray, 1996, 1)

There is a distinctive quality and wisdom entwined within traditional knowledge as Blackstock found when he asked Nick Prince to explain how he chose a style when he wrote his manuscript on the history of Carrier people. Nick said:

> There is always a story, it is the Indian way of telling things. They don't just say 'Oh, I met so and so over there,' they tell a story. It sticks with you that way. (Blackstock, 2001, 3)

Lee Maracle believes the unique qualities of oration display a richness that illustrates understanding in a way that reading does not. It emphasizes the spiritual connotation of oratory: "a place of prayer" clearly defines First Nations spiritual relationship with words.

> We regard words coming from original being - a sacred spiritual being. The orator is coming from a place of prayer and as such attempts to be persuasive. Words are objects not to be wasted. They represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, and the vision of an entire people or peoples. We believe the proof of a thing or idea is in the doing. Doing requires some form of social interaction and this story is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people. (Maracle, 1992, 87)

The concept that "words are objects not to be wasted" is perhaps the underlying impetus in Margaret's refusal to answer my questions about *The Poison Water* story.

First Nations people see themselves as the stewards of the earth because they have "lived here since the world began" (Ray, 1996, 1). They are the foremothers and forefathers of ecology. The very essence of *The Poison Water* narrative is one laced with environmental disaster; therefore, the obvious choice of the theory that comes closest to grasping the significance of my objective is one which will honor the earth as First Nations people do.

Blackstock defines and refers to his own perspective as "ego-edgism," a term he clarifies as "a personal perspective

or world view, in which one's ego is equal, but different, among others" (Blackstock, 1996, 6). He developed this model to ensure that he presented a balance between First Nations and academic ways of knowing. Blackstock's equilibrium is also the main objective of cooperatively combining and explaining First Nations ideals, which he says are "…not focused on deconstructing the centric qualities of Western Academia, but rather it is a forum for sharing knowledge…."(Ibid.)

Claude feels there are:

> qualities of the dominant society that are vastly different from aboriginal ways - from aboriginality - to a degree rarely acknowledged or even grasped by people reared in white stream ways. These differences are so deep that it has been impossible to speak of them as involving "irreconcilable or irreducible elements of human relations." (Denis 1997, 87)

To his work, Michael Blackstock (1996, 6) brings the best of both worlds as he relies heavily on his Gitxan heritage to focus on the shared knowledge base that incorporates a "two way exchange." Unlike Michael Blackstock, I do not have a First Nations heritage on which to rely. I do not intend to speak for First Nations people but to use my acquired knowledge and wisdom to present a well-balanced, cross-cultural exchange of ideas; and to present the wealth of Margaret Gagnon's stories.

Denis (1997, 45) points out that he supports this exchange although it is a well-known fact that aboriginal

communities are fed-up with being studied by white academics. In the first half of the 1990's, as before, these academics have taken it upon themselves to speak for aboriginal people. Denis also believes therein lies the greatest challenge for non-aboriginal people. It is not to keep quiet but rather to find a way to approach all manner of issues "in the right spirit." Denis adds, "In fact this does not mean that white academics should be silenced or should silence themselves." These issues are relevant to

> [r]ecognizing that there is a basic theoretical condition of possibility for inter-cultural communications… that the investigators of competence and sensitivity can contribute constructively to discussion of a society or culture whether they are affiliated with it or not… is not an apology for intruding on another's cultural terrain. (Denis, 1992, 45)

Peter Knudtson and David Suzuki also acknowledge several truths can exist concurrently by combining Suzuki's background in science with First Nations knowledge about nature.

> First, traditional Native knowledge about the natural world tends to view all—or at least vast regions—of nature, often including the earth itself, as inherently holy rather than profane, savage wild, or wasteland… Native wisdom tends to assign human beings enormous responsibility for sustaining harmonious relations within the whole natural world rather than granting them unbridled license to follow personal or economic whim. (Knudtson and Suzuki, 1992, 13)

The heart of this study is to learn of the multilayered truths of which Margaret speaks. I try to do this in four

chapters. Chapter One, the introduction and methodology, has outlined the birth of this exploration and gives an overview of the methods employed throughout the study. Chapter Two discusses the importance of Oral Traditions for First Nations men and women. In chapter two I also give my thoughts on Margaret's stories. Chapter Three presents Margaret Gagnon's transcribed narratives. Chapter Four explores the concept of ecocide and the possibility of genocide in the third degree, but turns full circle to celebrate Margaret's resilience and strength.

CHAPTER TWO: *THE IMPORTANCE OF ORAL TRADITIONS FOR FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE*

> *Words for the heart are more alive than your scribblings. When we speak, our words burn.* (Watson, 1992, 11 quoted in Slim & Thompson 1995, 1)

> … *"Listen, children, do you hear the sound of the pine trees singing? It is the wind, bringing stories. I'll put the lamp in the window…" (Baldwin, 2003a)*

There is an ongoing struggle for oral traditions to be appreciated, listened to and used in academia and in the courts. First Nations people struggle in law courts and in academia to have their oral traditions appreciated. Their cultures are under siege by mass media, which chooses to represent their traditions in unauthorized ways, while at the same time, the traditions and languages are being swallowed rapidly by dominant societies. In a recent language study, Laura Boyd scrutinized the status of the Carrier language in the Nazko community. Much to her dismay, she found that within the next generation the Carrier language could become extinct (Boyd, 2003). Like many of her generation, Margaret is fluent in Carrier (which many of her people now identify as Dakelh) and English. Today Margaret narrates her stories in either English or

Carrier, which she refers to as Indian, and which she anticipates as dying out.

Margaret's speech imbues rich figurative language that is drawn from her local community and shaped by Carrier linguistic structures. The poetic "code" of her vernacular needs to be learned by outsiders within a socio-cultural context. Patterns of speech and expression are ingrained within each of us; underlying language structures emerge as rhythm and sound. Because I am not familiar with the nuances of Carrier oral expression, I found the task of transcribing Margaret's words very tedious (challenging and tiresome); as I struggled to prepare her stories for an audience also unfamiliar with this Dakelh language pattern, I kept trying to use my own choice of words instead of hers.

The power of direct speech has a special connection to the human heart. The unrefined telling of experiences has a persuasiveness that the written word tries to imitate. Many of us would rather hear someone speak directly to us than read about them (or their paraphrased words) in a book or have their stories retold by another person. Therefore, passages of speech in a text draw our attention because personal testimony is simply more "engaging than impersonal

commentary or interpretations" (Watson, 1992, quoted in Slim & Thompson, 1995, 1).

Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson point out that speaking is a basic function no matter who we are or where we are from.

> The spoken word cuts across barriers of wealth, class and race. It is as much the prerogative of ordinary people as those in positions of power and authority. It requires neither formal education, nor the ability to read and write, nor fluency in any national or official language. Most importantly, it gives voice to the experience of those people whose views are often overlooked or discounted. The significance of this cannot be overestimated. To ignore these voices is to ignore a formidable body of evidence and information. (Slim and Thompson, 1995, 1)

Gretchen Bataille and Kathleen Mullen Sands observed

> [t]he oral tradition of the indigenous peoples…is an ancient one - diverse, complex, and enduring. It is based on storytelling - on origin and migration myths, songs and chants, curing rites, prayers, oratory, tales, lullabies, jokes, personal narratives and stories of bravery or visions. (Bataille & Sands, 1984, 10)

Instead of using a written language as Furniss explains, oral traditions have been vital to the survival of the Carrier culture. She describes how

> [t]he early southern Carrier developed oral and artistic traditions to fit their mobile lifestyle. Oral traditions consisted of stories that were carried in peoples' minds rather than being written down in books. Nevertheless, oral traditions served, and continue to serve, as a sort of encyclopaedia of southern Carrier history and knowledge. In addition, story telling was and is a form of art and entertainment, for it takes a skilled person

> to be able to capture an audience and remember the intricate details of a story. (Furniss, 1993, 69)

Furniss (1993, 69) goes on to say these accumulated stories are passed down from one generation to the next so that by the time a person is elderly they have amassed a huge collection of memorized stories. An accomplished storyteller must not only have a good memory but must be able to enchant an audience that might also consist of young, restless children.

The reasons for telling stories are varied.

> Some stories such as those of Kebets'ih and Nahoolt'en, the men - giants that lived in the Kluskus and Nazko areas, explain the origin of the world and how humans, animals, plants and landforms were created. Other stories serve as historical records of important events and people. Tales of war and raids between the southern Carrier, Nuxalk and Chilcotin are one example. (Ibid.)

Stories are also critical social tools that teach children appropriate behaviours. These stories draw clear lessons as to the consequences of carelessness or irresponsible behaviours. Julie Cruikshank explains the teaching power of story as she learned it form the Elders of the Yukon.

> One of the many things these women taught me is that their narratives do far more than entertain. If one has optimistic stories about the past, one can draw on internal resources to survive and make sense of arbitrary forces that might otherwise seem overwhelming. (Cruikshank, 1998, xii)

Carrier stories also concentrate on and teach spiritual dimensions of the relationships between animals, humans, and spirits. These particular stories act to reinforce values and beliefs and elicit proper protocols of Carrier society. In addition, stories entertain: they are told and retold as entertainment for the enjoyment of both young and old.

The teaching style of stories in the Carrier culture differs from a model often found in European cultures where the object is to use a detailed explanation to present moral principles. The way Carrier stories are told is consistent with their philosophy of teaching, with the high value Carrier people place on making up one's own mind about what the story means and honouring "individual responsibility and egalitarianism" (Furniss, 1993 72).

Stories cannot be separated from Carrier cultural identity or history. Stories are attached to place names. For example,

> Uskai Talbun, or "Blood flowing into the bay", recounts a devastating war at Kluskus. Neyi Koo, or "neeyi house" near Nazko is the sight of an unusual volcanic cave, "Nahoolt'en Toosulti, or "Nahoolt'en lying in the water", is the story of how an island near Kluskus was created. (Ibid.)

George Copway (quoted in Ruoff Brown, 1990 39) eloquently describes the importance of storytelling for him and his people, the Ojibwa. As he explains, telling stories connects

the place with the rights to the land and teaches children the important relationships between place and the past.

> There is not a lake or mountain that has not connected with some story of delight or wonder, and nearly every beast and bird is the subject of the story-teller, being said to have transformed itself at some prior time into some mysterious formation - of men going to live in the stars, and of imaginary beings in the air, whose rushing passage roars in the distant whirlwinds. (Ruoff Brown, 1990, 39)

George Copway examines the extensive process of passing along traditional legends. This was not only an exhilarating winter pass time, but it was of great importance in substantiating the community's history. Copeway goes on to explain the length and intensity of the story telling process.

> I have known some Indians who have commenced to narrate legends and stories in the month of October, and not end until quite late in the spring, sometimes not until the month of May, and on every evening of this long term tell a new story. Some of these stories are most exciting, and so intensely interesting, that I have seen children during their relations, whose tears would flow most plentifully, and their breasts heave with thoughts too big for utterance. Night after night for weeks I have sat and eagerly listened to these stories. The days following, the characters would haunt me at every step, and every moving leaf would seem to be a voice of a spirit. (Ibid.)

Keith Basso, talking about southern Athapaskans, identifies four major categories of Western Apache oral traditions: myth, historical tale, saga, and gossip. He defines each of these as follows:

> *Myth*: The creation oral history deals with creation themes, and is typically only passed on by a select few Elders and medicine men or women…. *Historical tale*: Pre-contact oral history addresses incidents of people who suffered taboo related misfortunes prior to white contact…. *Sagas:* deals with contemporary historical themes within the last sixty to seventy years…. *Gossip:* is a category of current events. (Basso, 1996, 33-35)

Basso also introduces a minor coyote category: the coyote, raven, and rabbit are characters that are capable of transforming themselves into human shapes. (Ibid.)

According to Basso, Margaret's narratives would be considered sagas, although she does include elements of one traditional story that has been passed down from the "Old Chief" about the little boy, the moon, and the bumblebee. Keep in mind that Margaret tells these sagas in what Basso calls the style of myth.

Elisa Hart (1995, 3) notes that the Elders play an integral part of First Nations' cultures because the knowledge and experience they have gained over their lifetime make them the educators and the keepers of knowledge. Michael Blackstock (2001, xxviii) mentioned that he interviewed Carrier and Gitxsan Elders who are greatly respected in the community for their ability to memorize and narrate history. Although their accounts are not challenged in the communities, they carry little credence with academia. Allen and Montell convey that some academics hold onto

> ...the erroneous notion that Elders' recollections are fallible and should only be used whenever trustworthy records are not available. (Allen and Montell, 1981, 68, quoted in Blackstock, 2001)

Julie Cruikshank examines the legal significance of oral traditions for the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en First Nations. She writes,

> In the case of *Delgamuukw vs. B.C.*, brought before the Supreme Court of British Columbia in the late 1980's, hereditary chiefs of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en First Nations presented their claims to ownership and jurisdiction of lands in north - western British Columbia. (Cruikshank, 1998, 63)

For the hereditary chiefs, this act of presenting their oral tradition as a mode of connection to the land took an enormous amount of strength and risk. They publicly declared "their relationship to the land on their own terms, from their own perspective, using long-standing oral traditions as a medium to present arguments to the court." (Ibid.)

Gitksan and Wetsuwet'en leaders testified formally, substantiating the ancient history of their house and clan system. They challenged the court by demonstrating the connection between past and present through oral traditions. Cruikshank (1998) reports that by

> Addressing the courts in its own language, they identified oral traditions as their declaration of title. Knowledge of land, they continued, could not be divorced from knowledge of social organization. They referred to two distinct kinds of tradition - the Gitksan adaawk (defined as sacred narratives about ancestors, house and clan histories, and territories) and Wetsuwet'en kungax

(songs about trails between territories central to Wet'suwet'en houses. (Ibid.)

Antonia Mills was one of the three anthropologists retained by the Gitksan and Witsuwit'en chiefs to help outline the nature and scope of their societies to the courts. Mills explored the sensitive topics within the oral traditions that have been labelled by some as fairy tales. Exposing this aspect of Gitksan and Witsuwit'en opened the community up for public scrutiny of their sacred beliefs and traditions. Mills reported,

> Kungax that include marriages of humans to animals and journeys to villages under the sea, or the ravages of monsters that not only lived but still live in lakes in the Witsuwit'en territory, tend to be considered as allegory rather than as historical fact by Western audiences. …For a Witsuwit'en, it is entirely possible for a human to leave his or her body and to manifest him- or herself as a bird or animal: for most Westerners it is not. (Mills, 1994, 73)

In gathering together their own legal traditions, in addition to those of the courts, the hereditary chiefs donned ceremonial regalia and publicly enacted narratives and songs that had previously been performed only within a community context. These performances of adaawk and kungax were presented as statements connecting their history and land. They combined their own legal traditions with those of the court and urged the judge to recognize the symbolic importance of oral tradition. According to Cruikshank,

> [t]heir statement of claim asserts that expressions of ownership are made through adaawk, kungax, songs and ceremonial regalia: that confirmation of ownership through totem poles gives those expressions a material base; and that assertion of ownership to specific territories was not being made in this court through specific claims. (Cruikshank, 1998, 64)

The chiefs argued that the legitimacy of the oral traditions should not depend on the literal accuracy of these traditions per se, rather that these histories in fact establish connections between social organization and land tenure. They felt that oral traditions are far more than just literal history and should not be reduced to mere historical data, although they do provide evidence for scholars studying the past. The judge hearing the case, Chief Justice McEachern, did not accept their argument. As Cruikshank asserts,

> [t]he final judgement, printed, published and distributed in a bound volume titled *Reason for Judgement*, provides a powerful example of the unequal weight accorded to different narratives. The inescapable lesson seems to be that removing oral traditions from a context where it has self-evident power and performing it in a context where it is open to evaluation by the state poses enormous problems for understanding its historical value. (Ibid.)

We only have to look at the way in which Chief Justice McEachern, in 1991, discounted three years of oral testimony because he could not accept it as reliable evidence in the Delgamuukw land claims case, to realize how "whitestream" regards First Nations oral history. In contrast to McEachern, who disallowed oral testimony as evidence, Cruikshank views

oral traditions as yet another angle to be considered in northern regions where stories are beginning to play a "rhetorical role in postcolonial policy debates."(Ibid.) The Supreme Court of Canada upheld her views when it overturned McEachern's ruling in the 1997 appeal of *Delgamuukw* and recognized oral tradition as valid evidence in the absence of written text (Cruikshank, 1998 64).[1]

Recognition of the knowledge contained in oral traditions has now moved beyond the courts to branches of environmental sciences. Oral traditions are used to build management models based on "TEK" (an acronym for "traditional ecological knowledge"). These models draw on oral traditions selectively, as do environmentalist models that more closely approximate religious paradigms. Oral traditions can become formulated as indigenous science in one context, yet in another instance they can be called upon as indigenous history. The increasing acceptance of oral traditions as bodies of knowledge made McEachran's judgment all the harder to bear.

[1] On March 8, 1991, trial judge Allen McEachern released his ruling. He dismissed most of the chiefs' oral traditions of claim to their territory. On June 25, 1993 the Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en took the case to B.C. Court of Appeal. That court overturned the trial judge on extinguishment and clearly stated consultation with the Gitxsan had to take place before the government approved any activities that may affect aboriginal rights. On ownership and jurisdiction the Court of Appeal sided with the trial judge in a (3-2) split. The Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en appealed the Delgamuukw case to the Supreme Court of Canada which was heard on June 16-17, 1997. B.C. and Canada continued to argue against any form of ownership even though aboriginal rights were protected in the 1982 Constitution Act. The Landmark Supreme Court of Canada decision was handed down Dec.11, 1997. This is an important ruling for future action for all First Nations court cases, as oral history is now given as much weight as written evidence.(Gitxsan Chiefs' Office http://www.gitxsan.com/html/delga.htm Retrieved on April 22, 2005)

Mills (1994, 176) reveals the first response of the Witsuwit'en and Gitksan to the *Delgamuukw Decision* was one of shock, disappointment, and hurt, even though they knew that in taking their case before a foreign court they were exposing the very essence of who they are. Gitksan Chief Mas Gak (Don Ryan) was quoted in the *Vancouver Sun* as saying, "This is the last time that the sacred boxes of our people will be opened for the white man to look at." (Ibid. 177)

Chief Yaga'lahl (Dora Wilson), a Witsuwit'en Chief, presented a speech a month after the decision on March 8, 1991:

> The court case finished on June 30th of 1990 and we received the decision of March 8th: Which was also, by the way, the International Day of the woman - that was said because it was like slamming our matriarchal system. To me it was a sad day when I heard the decision. And, in a way, it was happy because in a way it was a victory. A victory in a way that yes, our oral history was slammed around as we were witnesses on the witness stand, but we have it written in black and white now for anyone to see those transcripts… (Wilson quoted in Mills, 1994, 186)

In examining oral traditions, Cruikshank echoes this hope by saying,

> [a]mong other things…that when potential for conflict emerges among people with different perspectives, successful resolution often involves demonstrating how a story can reframe a divisive situation by providing a broader context for evaluating such issues. (Cruikshank, 1998, xv)

Similarly, Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson state that

> [w]hile in the North oral history is in this sense one of the newest forms of historical work, it is also the oldest: in both the North and the South, its roots go back as far as can be traced. The first great "histories" of the ancient world in Europe-by Homer, Herodotus, Tacitus-drew on both oral traditions…and direct personal witness. For before the spread of writing, all social knowledge, including history, had to be handed on from memory by word of mouth. (Slim and Thompson, 1995, 11)

In a similar fashion, Kenneth Lincoln (1983, 3) illustrates, each tribe or nation of indigenous people can be "defined traditionally through a native language and inherited place and set of traditions." These cultural traditions evolved before the Old World "discovered" the New World.

The intricate act of blending old with new, as Hart (1995, 3) concedes, is where Elders like Margaret play an integral role in First Nations cultures. The knowledge and experience they have gained over their lifetime make them the educators and the keepers of knowledge. It is through them that the language and oral traditions are passed down through generations. Margaret Gagnon is the perfect person to meld old and new because she learned and internalized the old from her grandmother, Mary Seymour.

Slim and Thompson (1995, 11) suggest the simplest way to define oral history is as "the living memory of the past." Every one has a personal story to tell that contributes to the accumulated knowledge of this century. These stories provide a

font of information about the unparalleled changes the world has undergone for the next generation.

Margaret Blackman also observed that because in many cultures the lives of native women span periods of critical and rapid cultural change

> …the life history affords a personalized, longitudinal view of these changes. The life history is also an appropriate medium for the study of acculturation, thereby making the Native Americans by far the most popular subject material of life histories. (Blackman 1982, 4-6)

Another example of a life history spanning the height and breadth of colonization is the story of Pretty Sheilds (Linderman, 1932, 16). It began before contact, and Pretty Sheild says, "I am an old woman. Many things happened to me." The way the world rapidly changed in her lifetime was extraordinary. Another Elder whose life history is a testament to the 'well oiled wheels of the colonial machine' is Mabel McKay (Sarris, 1994, 23). She was a Pomo basket maker, born in 1907. Mabel spent her life teaching others about the 'Dream' world from which she could not be separated. It was through her dreams that she learned to weave baskets and heal. She believed her baskets were spirits, not art, and that her basket knowledge did not come from her Grandma; rather she was trained by following her 'Dream.' Mabel travelled around the country giving lectures about her spiritual connection with

basket making and "about how she must pray for all the materials she gathers" (for basket making). A student asked her if she talks to the plants. "Yes, if I have to use them," she replied. (Sarris, 1994, 23) Mabel's ability to talk seriously to plants and weave the "'Dream' around the material and spiritual, and between the mundane and magical," is a timeless, extraordinary expression of healing, thus making art and storytelling a vital element sustaining the Pomo culture (Ibid.)

However, exposure to the colonizers' language often has a devastating effect on both language and culture. Edward Said also addresses the ruinous effects of a foreign language on culture.

> The acquired foreign language is therefore made part of a subtle assault upon population, just as the study of a foreign region like the Orient is turned into a program for control by divination. (Said, 1978, 293)

In this way, the obvious arrogance of the colonizers is unmistakably linked to The Church that believes it has the sacred right to speak for all. Said says,

> To this end it is better to let them speak for themselves, to represent themselves even though underlying this fiction stands Marx's phrase…. "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented." (Ibid.)

When people became literate, the importance of oral history is diminished in both popular culture and professional practice. Modernity has pushed First Nations people from oral traditions into the realm of mass media. It is not possible to disconnect visual images from language both spoken and written as they are imbricated. For this reason, the video images of current war-faring terrorist activities, such as public assassinations and executions, have become powerful communication strategies. These images are flashed around the world, making a public audience out of all of us whether we see them or imagine them. Visual images have become a secondary form of orality. Gone are the days when public opinion and thought were conveyed primarily by the printed word. Technology has moved forward into isolated communities through making satellite television, radio, and the internet readily available and more powerful than the printed word. Walter Benjamin noted, even prior to these technologies, that

> …the insidious consequences of deteriorating dialogue in modern society, attributing this at least partly to the diminishing role of the storyteller. As communications technology proliferates, he [Benjamin] argued, information became fragmented and detached from the moral philosophical guidance we think of as knowledge and might once even have called wisdom. The power of narrative storytelling lies in its capacity to interweave such elements by combining drama and practical experience with moral content. Story telling…is open ended rather than didactic, allowing listeners to draw independent conclusions. Medieval storytellers recounted events

> without imposing interpretation, and their practice had equally important consequences for the art of telling and the art of listening. By the very act of telling stories, narrators explore how their meanings worked: by listening, audiences can think about how those meanings apply to their own lives. Stories allow listeners to embellish events, to reinterpret them, to mull over what they hear, and to learn something new each time, providing raw material for developing philosophy. Once interactive storytelling is replaced by mechanical communication… human experience becomes devalued. (Cruikshank, 1998, 154)

Even though storytelling and the importance of oral dialogue have diminished considerably globally they still remain a powerful force. Indigenous storytellers believe there is a relationship between speaker and listener. A listener gains knowledge from hearing a story repeatedly. This allows the listener to contemplate, reinterpret, and absorb different meanings with each hearing. Indigenous storytellers have found that there are urban audiences who often have inadequate foundations of knowledge when it comes to the indigenous narrative style. Cruikshank found:

> Even when the stories are told in English, listeners hearing them for the first time often have great difficulty understanding them at a less superficial level. Yet many visitors are attending the [Yukon Story Telling] festival precisely to experience "authenticity," "cultural distinctiveness," "cultural preservation" - and to listen for such messages even when they are hard to understand. Performers can sometimes work on two levels. On one hand, they recognize the limitations of a diverse audience unlikely to notice subtleties of the stories and songs; on the other, members from their own communities have heard the stories before, are present as knowledgeable and critical listeners, and are attentive to nuances. This ability to address dual audiences is

> especially apparent when songs are sung in indigenous languages, and some listeners hear levels of humour or pathos opaque to the others. It becomes more sharply focused when a performer publicly addresses issues contested within his or her own community but easily grasped by the larger audience. (Cruikshank, 1998, 144)

Cruikshank explains some of the connection between listener and storytellers when she acknowledges

> …oral traditions can expand our understanding of the past, but it might be next to impossible for an ethnographer to produce a document that is not biased. Indeed, there is a longstanding debate in anthropology about whether oral testimonies are statements about the past or attempts to rationalize the present social order. (Ibid.)

That is why Margaret Blackman feels

> …[i]n every life history, the final shape of the narrative, both consciously and not, is determined by the editor/author and the narrator. Asymmetries in this collaboration, however, give the advantage to the editor. The narrator, less familiar with the world of books and publishing, may defer to the editor, as Florence did sometimes in our interviews when she instructed me: "Just ask me questions." Or, as she told me during our most recent interview: "Just write it down the way you think it's best." The life story is also manifestly a product of the times in which it is told and written. (Blackman, 1982, xvi)

There are countless aspects to consider when examining the qualities of oral testimonies. Slim and Thompson (1995, 139) advise that caution should be the cornerstone of examining the genre. As with any knowledge, there is the potential for misappropriation or exploitation of people's words and knowledge. There are fundamental ambiguities and

difficulties that consistently appear when evaluating and interpreting individual testimonies and life histories.

The listener must also be taken into consideration. By nature, listening is part of a transaction and its interpretation is fraught with complications. The ethical responsibility of the listener is critical. The listener must draw out the best of peoples' testimonies without distorting the meaning or betraying their trust. The more practical and interpretational side of these issues relates to

> the nature of memory; the value of opinion; the place of myth, legend and proverb; the impact of the interviewer; the implication of transferring testimony to secondary formats; and the extent to which individual testimony can be regarded as representative. The main ethical issues concern the potential intrusion into people's lives, and their right of ownership over what they say, and over how their testimony is presented and disseminated. (Slim and Thompson, 1995, 139)

Cruikshank (1990, 19) considers how important it is to Elders like Mrs. Annie Ned to be accurate when passing on oral traditions because at some point in the future, someone might have to rely on that information and the lessons they learned orally will protect them. Whenever a story seems simple, we should suspect it is not.

Elisa Hart (1995, 55) points out the crisis of losing traditional knowledge. More and more children are being educated from books rather than from the Elders. While

children do need to go to school in order to survive, they still need the grounding of traditional knowledge. In some communities, the children no longer speak the language and this makes it difficult for the Elders to teach them. Elder Harry Simpson spoke to the Rae Lakes Ida Heritage Survey saying,

> We do not want to abandon the old ways of our ancestors. That is why we continue to work along their traditional routes. Through the oral tradition, I know of their choice fishing spots, places where they could obtain food, and their campsites. I am past the age of 60 so I remember our history. My elders used to tell me stories. I witnessed their work and now we are travelling and working along their trails. They thought our young people today do not really know the ways of our people, we want to retain our traditional ways so that whomever survives in the future will use them. So we are, in effect, working to help them. (Ibid.)

For every Elder that passes away much of the traditional knowledge of the land and animals is lost. Hart realized how time played a critical role in recording the Elders. Hart acknowledges that

> When this project was initiated, there were 38 elders in the community over age of 65. Since the beginning of the project six of these elders have died; and a large number more have been in and out of hospital due to chronic health problems. It was painfully clear a year and a half ago, and still is, that the process of recording and documenting life histories, legends, and Dene wisdom must proceed quickly before too much has been lost forever. (Beaulieu, quoted in Hart, 1995, 80)

The urgency to preserve the Elders' wisdom is pivotal for the children being able to identify themselves with their relatives from the past. "Children desperately need to know their cultural background and history so they can be proud of themselves" (Hart, 1995, 55).

As a society, storytelling fascinates us, and for generations the vitality of storytelling has intrigued students of human behaviour. Stories have repeatedly initiated the awakening of social action around the world. Cruikshank demonstrates that,

> [d]uring the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s with some urgency, Bakhtin, Benjamin and Innis independently imagined the power of oral tradition to destabilize commonsense, to promote non-confrontational ways of revaluating hegemonic concepts, to encourage dialogue rather than monologue. Drawing on classical and medieval texts, they were concerned primarily with what they saw as the diminishing power of oral dialogue in human affairs. (Cruikshank, 1998, 154)

Even so, the consequences of orality are still open to investigation. We are reminded of how deeply threatening oppressive regimes still find the spoken words of the storyteller. In the mid 1990's, shock waves reverberated around the world as news broke of the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a Nigerian writer and storyteller. (Ibid.)

Gradually, those at the centre of 'whitestream' hegemony monopolize what comes to be considered rational discourse and

marginalize those who speak in different idioms. Harold Innis admired the structural characteristics of the role of tradition. He recognized its potential to balance spatial and temporal concepts by reinsertions and appreciation for the importance of qualitative time in human affairs. Innis expresses how

> [o]ral tradition permits continuous revision of history by actively reinterpreting events and then incorporating such constructions into the next generation of narrative. (Innis, 1950, 64 quoted in Cruikshank, 1998, 155)

Flexibility allows a gifted storyteller to adapt a given narrative to make sense of a confusing situation. Innis believed that "orally transmitted narratives developed in their hearers a capacity to listen, a deteriorating skill in an age of ever-fragmenting information." (Cruikshank, 1998, 155)

Until recent times, the First Nations people who lived in the area that is now the Northwest Territories, like the Carrier, lived only by the knowledge that was passed on to them through their oral traditions. Hart explains (1995)that

> [t]he skills for survival, such as hunting, building houses, making clothes, tools, medicine, and religious practices were taught by telling and showing one another how to do these things. Singing, telling stories, and plays are also ways of passing knowledge through the oral traditions. (Hart, 1995, 3)

Information gathered from the Gwichya Gwich'in Oral

History Project also emphasized the importance of honouring not only the oral traditions, but also the Elders who pass on the knowledge. Understandably Andre and Kirtch, (quoted in Elisa Hart, 1995, 4) observed that:

> It has become increasingly important to put on paper the knowledge of those elders still with us today about the Gwich'in way of life, the way they experienced it. There is an urgent need to collect and eventually publish this traditional information so the children of today can identify themselves with their relatives from the past. Children today desperately need to know their cultural background and history so they can be proud of themselves. (Ibid.)

Cruikshank writes about a project she worked on with the Yukon Historical and Museums Association. It was a conference where the archaeologists and anthropologists successively presented papers and projects, dominating the time with their research material and responding appropriately with questions from the audience. After sitting patiently until well into the late afternoon, Mrs. Annie Ned, a southern Tutchone Elder--close to ninety years old--rose to her feet asking,

> "Where do these people come from, outside? You tell different stories from us people. You people talk from paper - Me, I want to talk from Grandpa." Thus claiming her authority, she began telling her own stories about the subjects of the day's discussions- early caribou migration routes; trades between coast and interior; her aunts' and parents' experiences of the Klondike gold rush: her own memories from early in the century. (Cruiksank, 1998, 45)

Cruikshank had worked with these people for several years. Initially her objective was to examine how indigenous women had experienced the tumultuous changes brought to the Yukon during the twentieth century. It became increasingly clear, however, that Mrs. Ned and her contemporaries have very different models about how life histories should be presented. Cruikshank expected their discussions to trace the effects of: the Klondike gold rush, missionary-run Residential Schools, construction of the Alaska Highway, and other disruptive events. Eventually, Cruikshank came to realize that the projects were flawed because she kept trying to put them into an academic framework. The Elders kept redirecting the work away from secular history and towards stories about how the world began and was transformed to be suitable for humans. The more Cruickshank insisted on her own original agenda, the more adamant the Elders became. Cruikshank (1998) shows just how adamant the Elders could be:

> "Not now," Mrs. Ned and the others would reply to my questions. "Write down this story about that man who stayed with the caribou." Or "listen to this story about the boy who stayed with fish." Each woman explained that such stories were important to record as part of her personal history. (Ibid., 46)

These women implied that if Cruikshank expected to learn anything, she needed to become familiar with the pivotal narratives that "everyone" knows about--relationships among

beings that share responsibility for maintaining the social order. Cruikshank felt that by focusing on the primacy of traditional stories, it was narrowing her focus. Eventually, however, it became clear that, in fact, through learning traditional stories Cruikshank broadened her horizons and enlarged her projects. She states,

> Gradually I learned how narratives about complex relationships between animals and humans, between young women and stars, between young men and animal helpers could frame not just larger cosmological issues but also the social practices of women engaged with a rapidly globalising world. Stories connect people in such a world, and they unify interrupted memories that are part of any complex life. Rooted in ancient tradition they can be used in strikingly modern ways. (Ibid.)

It was also through the assistance of women's testimonies that Paula Gunn Allen was able to examine how First Nations women view their contemporary relationship with colonization, politics, and feminism. Allen believes Indian woman had socially recognized power before contact, and have only become socially obscure since then. Allen's insight reflects the far-reaching effects of the colonization.

> In short, colonization alters both the individual's and the group's sense of identity. Loss of identity is a major dimension of alienation, and when severe enough it can lead to individual and group death. (Allen, 1986, 90)

Colonization tried to destroy the socially recognized power First Nations women once possessed; with this

realization Brave Bird (1993, 16) was able to identify and understand how the colonizer's oppression affected her life. She refers to it as the "narrow structures for women." It was only after Brave Bird (1993, xii) stopped drinking that she began to understand the struggle between the traditional tribal patriarchy and women's struggle for a sense of self, freedom and healing.

It took a long time for Jeanette Armstrong to realize the true meaning of representation and appreciation. She explains:

> [t]he value of having a grandmother who could speak to me in the total purity of our language words which have been handed down through thousands of years from mouth to mouth, encompassing actions generated for I don't know how long - thousands and thousands of years. I was given an understanding of how a culture is determined, how culture is passed on. It is through words, it is through the ability to communicate to another person, to communicate to your children the thinking of your people in the past, their history, that you *are* a people. The words of my people are significant to me to my understanding and to my dignity as a person, to my ability to differentiate and look at the world and say: "This is what I agree with and this is what I can choose to care about and this is what I choose to rage about." (Armstrong, 1990, 51)

Julia Emberley (1993, 145) suggests that for Armstrong, Native oral storytelling is the most powerful weapon against the sanctions of the Eurocentric notion of history, a history that often hides the ravages of imperialism.

As a listener/researcher, Cruikshank (1998) discusses her observations at the Northern Storytelling festival in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory.

> Each year an attempt has been made to have the festival coincide with the summer solstice. The festival initially began in 1988 as a local event funded by the Yukon Arts Council, a non-profit society. The festival is now co-sponsored by the Kwanlin Dan First Nations, thus formally acknowledging the contribution of the local indigenous storytellers to the festival's ongoing success. (Cruikshank, 1998, 143)

From its humble beginning with mainly local participants, the festival has now ballooned; in its fourth year it boasted "sixty-four storytellers from around the world."…From the inception, white promoters of the festival touted it as "authentic" (often phrased in terms of linguistic diversity). The First Nations population increasingly views the festival as a vehicle for translating cultural axioms to broader audiences. The storytellers have watched the audiences grow, expand, and change. They have experimented with storytelling methods, keeping track of which stories get the biggest response, keeping in mind, however, that the performances in the big tents in a downtown city park are a lot different from the intimate cultural framework of storytelling in their own homes. The participants are eager to accommodate their audiences by

> …weighing the seemingly decontextualized settings against the opportunity to speak to receptive listeners. Whereas visiting performers sometimes bring translators and speak in indigenous languages, most local storytellers prefer to address their audiences in English rather that working through an intermediary. (Cruikshank, 1998, 143)

As our own culture moves towards cyber communication, it threatens oral traditions, perhaps making them a dying art. Margaret's body of collected work honours the importance of story in the world and should be passed on for future generations.

MY THOUGHTS ON MARGARET'S NARRATIVES

In the next chapter I present Margaret's stories. I have taken the artistic licence of giving them various titles.

First I want to prepare my audience for Margaret's stories by conveying some of the special skills that I have come to view as Margaret's unique style of storytelling. Within her stories, Margaret opens up a series of small windows for her audience not only to catch glimpses of her life experiences, but also to invite the audience to seize the opportunity to ponder her words and the complexities of her narrative structure. Whether heard by cultural insiders or cultural outsiders, she invites the audience to draw their own conclusions. This approach tweaks the imagination and entices

the listeners to experience the magic of narrative on a deeper level. What I have learned from listening to these narratives is not necessarily what the next person will gain from the same experience. Such an understanding is at the core of this endeavour.

Therefore, I was very uncomfortable with the concept of "narrative analysis." I thought that it would be a disrespectful endeavour for me to analyse her narratives. I felt that it might very well turn out to be, yet again, just another colonial exercise of shredding the content of the oppressed First Nations people with my pair of critical "domineering colonial" shears. However, as time passed I came to realize the value of closely examining Margaret's narratives and her pedagogy. Drawing one's own conclusions is inevitable; this concept is the underlying philosophy at the very foundation of understanding oral traditions, whether heard by cultural insiders or cultural outsiders.

Margaret's narratives are not like any of the other narratives I have studied. They are not creation stories. As I stated earlier, Keith Basso defines Western Apache oral traditions and in his categorization Margaret's stories would fall somewhere between *sagas* and *historical tales*. Although *sagas* deal with historical themes, these narratives are chiefly concerned with events that have taken place in "modern

times," usually within the last sixty or seventy years. In contrast to *historical tales*, which focus on serious and disturbing matters, *sagas* are largely devoid of them. Rather than serving as a vehicle of personal criticism, the primary purpose of *sagas* is to provide their listeners with relaxation and entertainment (Basso, 1996, 50).

Margaret's narratives really cover all the aforementioned categories: they are sagas, but the story of her father's death and the tale of smallpox and influenza and *The Poison Water* are sagas dealing with disturbing matters. Some of Margaret's stories, for example, *The Dog That Talked* and *Five Dollars Is A Lot Of Money,* appear to be told primarily for entertainment value. However, even within these stories there are multiple layers of meaning. Margaret tells the birthing stories in the spirit of resilience and strength whereby she overcame the racism and conflict of the nursing staff, and becomes highly respected by the doctor.

Born in simple communication, this collecton of oral testimony is full of surprises as it gives away to more sophisticated and demanding elements of story. By examining the multi-layers of wisdom within Margaret's words, it becomes ever clearer that the value and weight of her stories are enduring. Margaret tells stories that span her lifetime. Yet even these stories unveil Dakelh thought and the social

context of Prince George in the 1920's. She uses her stories to teach and inform the listeners about Carrier culture, respect, ecological knowledge, child rearing, birthing practices, traditions, and the difficult process of colonization.

Margaret's narratives are consistent and waver very little from one telling to the next. Sometimes there are small discrepancies in detail, but the underlying values remain constant. Margaret has clear boundaries about where her stories begin and end. Nevertheless, unlike other oral traditionalists, such as Angela Sydney, Kitty Smith, and Mabel McKay, Margaret's words are not often veiled in figurative speech, nor have they been translated from Carrier/Dakelh to English. Although she is perfectly capable of telling them in fluent Carrier/Dakelh, she tells her stories in fluent English. Her stories are readily accessible to everyone. Margaret surrounds her less animated, instructional stories with the more powerful narratives. There is, however, a temptation to ignore some of the more low-keyed material. This is how clever Margaret is; in fact, this is certainly where the strength of her pedagogy rests. Margaret also has a way of challenging the listener to dig deeper. She does this within a camouflage of naivety that she always adds in an off-the-cuff

manner. "I guess," she says often, as if she is not really taking a firm position within her own story.

> …We got a job for five dollars for a few hours. Which was really good money. So we took it, just a bunch of girls there and they're not in there when we're there to clean. And we make good money. Had to go down to my Stepfather and give him five dollars. And that was a lot of money so, he kinda hollered, "Where did you get that?" "We're working." "Ya but where are you working?" "Mrs. Carmens." I guess he took it wrong. Sporting house I guess. Oh he knew… (Gagnon 1997)

Margaret is so bold and self-assured that her simulated naivety catches the audience off guard. It is as if she places a burr under the saddle of the story, adding a small measure of undetected discomfort. This sense of incongruence is a very effective pedagogical tool.

Let me expand upon the metaphor of Margaret fishing as skilfully as her ancestors at the river. Margaret not only baits her hook with *The Poison Water* story but she also utilizes her other narratives to cast her net wide, encircling the complexities of the dominant culture's insidious incursion into First Nations way of life. Margaret does not appear to be a radical thinker; on the contrary, at first glance, she seems to be compliant to the colonizers' agenda. Do not be fooled, however, by Margaret's candid and unequivocal account of her life. Listeners beware! She is a seasoned storyteller (older than Prince George) and she knows exactly what she is doing.

She has the inexplicable sense to read her audience. Her words not only honour the past but also give credence to the future.

In *The Poison Water* story Margaret tells how the whole community of women and children would go and work for Mrs. Mitchell brushing and clearing her land. Mrs. Mitchell was considered not only an employer but also a benefactor. Through this whole study, I have never once thought about how Mrs. Mitchell may have understandably been devastated by this huge mistake. I find it incredible how marginalized the Lheit-Lit'en were, working for a mere pittance just for food. There is a lack of significance placed on the value of Lheit-Lit'en community as the original stewards of the earth. On the other hand, Margaret made five dollars a day for cleaning Mrs. Carmen's brothel. It seems that more monetary value was placed on the working to support the "oldest profession."

As mentioned in Chapter 1, initially I had wanted to isolate *The Poison Water* story from the circle within which Margaret has placed it. I struggled against not making it the focus of my thesis. In the end, however, I consoled myself by not isolating it but by using it as the critical position from which to examine the hegemonic mindset of the dominant culture towards First Nations People. I return to this in Chapter Four. As a society we are hard pressed to admit to racism let alone genocide. It seems far easier to look to other countries

and point out their disgraces than to look in our own backyards. I argue this is because First Nations people were not considered citizens of this country on any level. On many levels, this view still prevails today. First Nations people are not readily invited to participate in the "white stream" society, and if they do play it is usually only within the framework and guidelines set in place by the colonizers.

Margaret is well aware that *The Poison Water* story is not recorded within the public domain. I asked her why the local newspaper, *The Prince George Citizen,* did not pick up this story and she replied: "Well that just the way it was back then when someone died you didn't just run and call the *Citizen.*" (Gagnon, 2001)

There is a responsibility, as a participant in her audience and as a receptacle of her wisdom, to pass on what is learned. The audience plays a large part in how a storyteller performs and Margaret is no exception to this general rule. When she performs her stories, she is so present in the moment; bright and animated. She tells jokes and laughs and she has an engaging beautiful smile. From the instant she begins talking, Margaret sets in motion an affirmation of the past that informs the present. She immediately begins building a connection with her audience. From my observation, she enjoys telling her stories. It also seems that Margaret really

does get more personal and intimate with her audience when it is smaller and in a more casual setting. Margaret is sensitive to her audience; some stories she tells easily to a mixed male/female group. Others she reserves for women, like the birthing stories that she will relate over a long period of time.

As a participant in the audience, it is important for me to examine if there are moments of reception and moments of rejection or disbelief and where these points might be. I spoke to Jacqueline Baldwin, (2003b) an organic farmer and poet who has published a poem about Margaret's life called *Wild Fire* that I present in the final chapter. Jacqueline Baldwin has been a participant in Margaret's audience. Baldwin feels that the biggest point of non-reception for her was when she found out the rancher who put the creosote in the water that poisoned fifteen children was a woman - Mrs. Mitchell. Baldwin, a strong feminist, was in disbelief that a woman would be, not only so careless, but so insensitive towards the environment and also the women and children employed by her who were camping downstream from the creosoted dump. She felt it would have been easier to comprehend the event if the perpetrator had been a man.

Personally, I have several definite points of non-receptivity. For me, it was the fact that I had lived in

Prince George for sixteen years and I had never heard *The Poison Water* story before. This sent chills of disbelief running down my spine. I am sure that whatever the audience's expectations - such as that a lovely Elder will share a few charming oral traditions and stories from the past - Margaret far exceeds those expectations.

Another point of non-reception for me is when Margaret declares that she liked Residential School. This notion falls on reluctant ears and hearts that have studied the horrendous negative aspects of Residential School. Another topic of non-reception for me is when Margaret speaks of how she disciplines her children and grandchildren in the manner used by the Residential School, corporeal punishment. I know that the use of corporal punishment is not the traditional way. Bridget Moran (1988, 39) writes what Mary John, who attended the same school as Margaret, said about discipline: "Mary [Sutherland] and I were terrified when we saw someone being whipped. We said to each other, - in English - 'This is not a thing our parents do to us.'"

I first heard Margaret Gagnon speak in a Carrier culture class at the University of Northern British Columbia in 1995. She made her presentation to a full house. Extra chairs were brought in to accommodate the overflow of eager students. After the more formal presentation in the classroom, we

adjourned to the Elders' Room in the First Nations Centre for refreshments. The video camera was shut off and home baked goodies and hot tea were shared. It was a warm fall evening, the door was open and a light, fragrant breeze stirred the air. Eventually, the crowd thinned out, leaving only a few stragglers that were still clinging to every word that fell from Margaret's lips. It was then that she began her narration of *The Poison Water* story. The power of her narrative was breathtaking. My only sorrow is that this particular performance was not captured on videotape. What did become evident, however, is that the degree of disclosure is a product, not only of the setting, but also of the significance of the role of the audience members as listeners.

Cruikshank (1998, 142) believes that a single story, well told, can be used to apply different meanings to different audiences. In the tradition of oral narrative, the audience also plays an integral role.

True to form, Margaret's stories also require an audience, and therefore the expectations and reactions of the listeners must also be taken into consideration. Margaret does tell the story slightly differently from time to time; she tells different stories depending on her audience. I mentioned before, Margaret gave a women-only audience intimate details of traditional Carrier birthing stories. It was a rare and

enthralling opportunity to be present in this audience, and I have included these stories in this thesis although they were not intended for a male audience. I did this because I feel that men are now very much involved and participate in the birth process and they too can learn a great deal from the traditional birthing practices.

Margaret is able to weave traditional knowledge into *The Poison Water*. She uses this story to educate the listener about the consequences of pandemic smallpox and the future destruction of Mother Earth.

The Poison Water narrative is a fine example of an oral tradition, wherein Margaret's exquisite oration, like those Russian Matryoshka dolls nesting within each other, becomes a tragedy within a tragedy situated within a larger cycle that holds prophecies. This process develops into a parable, transcending healing within First Nations communities today. *The Poison Water* flows back into the smallpox pandemic of 1860 and the influenza epidemic, which were both even more devastating to the community. The influenza epidemic of 1918-1919 occurred some 18 years before *The Poison Water*, while the smallpox pandemic of 1860 occurred 77 years before.

If there is a "moral" to these stories, it is that compensation for loss equals greed. Margaret is not willing to

jeopardize her traditional beliefs that are vital to her survival and the survival of the Carrier culture.

NOTES ON THE PRESENTATION OF THE STORIES

Transcribing these stories was a time consuming and tedious task as they were transcribed verbatim from audio and videotapes. Most of the stories came from the videotapes and I found them the most difficult to work with as I was distracted by watching Margaret herself. She has a most captivating presentation and I found myself swept away by the story and not with the task. I contemplated taping them from the video onto audiotapes to simplify the process. It is difficult to work from video, as rewinding a VCR is very awkward for transcribing.

I have written Margaret's stories in italics to indicate that they are her words. Originally, I presented them without breaking them into paragraphs, as I felt it added a more poetic and creative milieu. However, I was persuaded to transform them into a form that parallels written text. I was pleasantly surprised that instead of detracting from the story it actually gave it a substantive quality. Therefore, note that the choice of where to begin and end the paragraphs was mine based on repeated listening to the stories. Obviously, I also added the quotation marks. My greatest fear was by

altering Margaret's words; I would loose her voice so I did not alter her grammar. Happily, I am still able to hear her voice when I read them. I however, have, lightly edited the manuscript of Margaret's stories and have sparingly added implied words within square brackets. This is for the reader's benefit to make it more coherent. Some of these changes have been pronoun references such as [I] and [you] and the addition of articles, for example: [the] kids were wiped out. As noted above, I have given titles to the stories, hopefully ones that honour Margaret's sense of and her abundance of story.

CHAPTER THREE: A Story Well Told: MARGARET GAGNON'S TRANSCRIBED NARRATIVES

(Titles supplied by Laurell Crocker)

BLOOD JEALOUSY AND GREED

I was born in South Fort area. My mother was born on the reserve. Only part I remember is seeing the reserve; is the cemetery and the old Hudson Bay Post. The buildings were all gone. I guess that [was] in 1912-13 or sometime.

We went down to the cemetery every Sunday. [Grandma] lived in South Fort but she never was there in the summer months. She used to take us down the river or on our bikes sometimes.

And in the winter months and then she brings us home. And she taught us how to be right and stuff like that. And tell us what it was like when she was a little girl the same age as us. Off side of that we did get, know anything about speaking English or reading. And everything that we done was in the [Carrier] way of doing things. So we do [these things] sometimes. [A]nd we remember and even [remember] her prayer[s] like when we heard [the prayers] later on when we started Sunday school.

She, [Granny and us] we walked along doing things like setting snares or she'd set a net or something. She'd talk to God and guide us and look after us. And we were going to use these things [snares and nets] and we'd have to have enough for the winter months. And the things she always told us later on. She said, "Make sure you live by three rules only. Leave the two deadly ones out." And we didn't know why cause she said, "You, you love one another, respect one another the way you want to be respect and share with one another. Greed and jealousy is deadly. It sheds blood," she told us.

But we didn't really understand the meaning to it. And there you're not allowed to ask questions to see what it's about. If you did, well, she'd just tell us, "God gave me the brains till you were born. You don't cram them too much, take it slowly, it will stay with you. In time, you get to that point what I'm trying to tell you. When you hit the stone wall," she says, "and turn around and ask me if you still can't figure it out I can tell you about it." That's how it was left. Nobody asked question, this kinda wondering what it meant or how it was going to end.

And from there I used to notice people in Southport they have fence around their yard or gardens and we were told never to go in there. It belonged to the people. We were told not to

go through that gate unless we were asked. And that was in my mind they owned the place.

Years later, when I started school she told us one morning, she said, "The kids are going to a white man's school. Learn your English there and take a line with you to learn. After you learn their way of speaking you have to try to live the way they want you to live because you're all on earth together and you share what you know."

So yes, it took us quite awhile--two terms--before we could get our sentences together. That's okay, we were slow at learning. And in them days they used to have the Lord's Prayer every morning in school. And that's where we first learned the Lord's Prayer. And later on she'd take us to the church on Gorse Street and she said, "We pray like a white people pray in there. That's where they worship God."

So that's what we'd done and there we go down to the cemetery. And she stand beside the graves of our dead. And she'd be talking to God like my prayers. So things went along like that and years later I asked my mother. 'Cause grandfather owned this land where the fence was around the garden.

She said, "You don't talk about own. You don't own anything on this earth. You're put on this earth to live and you use the ground right for your food. You sweat before you

get something to eat. For everything you do and do not depend on other people's hands. You do things when you have your hands to work with. That's why your hands are there and use your brains." So this is what we've done and we're to help the older people who can't get around too much, get the water and wood for them. Not thinking about pain because [we] never [thought about] pain, pain nobody talked about it but they'd give us maybe one kind of candy or something some kind of ice tea after [helping the Elders] bring water and wood in. So that was good and when I brought that up [later] she put it in the same way. "A little bit of ground that you might own when you die, that ground is where they put you. You came from the ground and you turn back to it. Thirty, forty years from now even your hair isn't there anymore. You turn back into dirt that's the way it should be. That's the longest time you hold and you can say you hold that little piece of property, but it's not yours to stay [or keep]. Even though it yours to pass it on."

So that way we understood, what the land was about. You can fence it in and put your garden in seriously during the duration that you are using, but if you don't use it right somebody else can come along and use it that make better use of it. So, little things like that went on.

Later on we were out camping with an old chief from North, North side of Miworth Station. My mother is looking after her parents that were quite old and crippled so she lived on the reserve there with them. And during the school holidays I spent the summer there with her [Granny]; during the duration of the school I had to be with my grandmother. So different little things there and we were always with our grandparents.

And this Old Chief, we're looking at the full moon one night, we were fishing, and he was telling the story about a young boy going to the moon; he was brought up by his grandmother or something. The way he describes this boy standing on the moon it looked like that design on it and we couldn't figure out how it [the boy] can go that far but we never said nothing. After he got through with the story, my cousin said, "We're all guarded by my grandparents. I wonder if we can go to the moon one day."

[After] This asking he [Old Chief] looked at us long time around the campfire and said, "You," he said, "your children, their children. Because like," he said, "You, your children and their children about here." He said, "When the eagle lands on the moon perhaps these kids might be going back and forth."

While we never thought about kids then at that time - we were about seven, eight years old. That was okay, but that's a

long time to wait and there's no eagle that's going to fly that high and get to that moon, it's quite a ways up. So, we let it go. We never said anything.

And later on, after we moved to Shelly in 1927, I noticed the houses were same as Miworth, North Miworth, all the houses were built the same and same colour and that was kinda puzzling. So, I asked my mother, I said, "Grandpa built all the houses, why did they make them all the same and same colour?"

She said, "When Chief sold her the land in Fort George the government wanted homes for us. They put a stove, a stove and a heater in each house and they stored all the stuff to where we're suppose to live. After everything is moved then they bring our old house down in Fort George. See that [house] was then at the cemetery is there [now] to stay."

That was okay. For me that didn't mean anything. I used to overhear them say they took our land away from us and that was the reason why I wanted to know. Why [did] they let them take it?

And that's the way she is, she explained it. My Grandmother told us and from there when we moved to Shelly, my Mother lived until 1929 when she passed away. So, I had two brothers and two sisters younger than myself. My mother passed away.

And about two weeks after the funeral my sister and brother, the older ones, we went to the store to look for the mail because that's where the Post Office was. And the old Chief standing there buying food and things and nobody had any, no money, not even if you worked for it. There's no money. He took a dime out of his pocket and gave me the dime [and] to my brother and sister. So we thanked him, I went out to the counter and got loaves of bread, we needed that. And my brother and sister put twenty cents together and they bought a sugar. The old man was watching us, I guess, and we thanked him again. On our way out he followed us out and told us, he said, "Wait I gotta talk to you." So we stopped and turned around and he reached into his pocket and I guess it was a silver dollar. It was big money. Anyways, we never seen big money in my life. He said, "Take a good look at this." He was showing that it was big money. "Don't let it ever turn your head in the future. This is going to be the God of all people. In the future there'll be no God. That's going to be our God. Don't ever let it turn your head."

It didn't mean nothing to us so we let it go by. Never ask any more questions or… We were puzzled why he would say that about money. "How can people think more of money than God?" kinda thing. But we never said that. And as the years went by, we never thought of money until there was an old

person died in Shelly. And I had to figure it out standing at the gravesite. Then comes the Chief [he] stood up in front of the cemetery. The brave one started talking.

"This is the end for her. She brought all her children up, she worked hard, had grandchildren. She's tired and she left now. That's the end. This little piece of ground that we put the casket in is gonna be covered in with dirt. And after all everything is disintegrated there's no more. We came into this world with nothing and we leave with nothing."

We believe what we were told since we were kids and the way they put it was about blood. It sheds blood from jealousy and greed. For that we didn't know until the world broke open and [the dead] body left you. And we went to Granny and I told her I said, "You were talkin about blood and jealousy and greed, this like war."

She said, "Once you put that uniform on you're paid to kill. Without that uniform on, if you kill somebody they hang you. Once you get that [uniform] on you can go kill and get paid and you're getting paid to kill. They [the soldiers] don't even know why they're killing the other [soldier] younger boy. I couldn't say. They're being practically wiped out until the next generation comes along. By that time there's gonna be another war. But its not gonna be over the land and stuff too much. It's gonna be [about] religion. All

the scripts. This is what the battles will be about." So there's a difference. We only knew the Catholic Church we went to and or the way Granny prayed.

But then people had asked me, "How did you like residential school?" I appreciated that school. That was the best thing that ever happened to me after my mother died. I knew my language. I knew everything I had to do in the line of [traditional] food and sewing. I learned all those things at the home. And when I got to residential school they taught me how to can food and cook different ways from what we're used to. How to cook food [and put it] away and everything was canned and how easy it was.

And then the sewing and [em]broidery work, crochet, knitting, fixin up clothes for the little ones that were left in their cribs and the mothers had left. We looked after these little ones and we made over clothes for them because we had so many parts [of cast off clothing]. And that came in handy for me and my sisters.

From time the war broke out we were lucky. Everything was rationed out. We had gifts, yes. But we got a job cooking for the camps. We were making cutting birch for planes. We never got paid for it as long as our children ate. All [during] in the war that what we followed the times.

We never sent all the older ones to school because they might not even eat. After the war was over and then we got a job close to the schools but we were still cooking for the camp.

And the guys that were working there were good because they buy clothes and when it gets dirty and they throw it away and [we would] fix that up for our children. This is what residential school taught me how to do. So I have nothing against [it]. I hear so much about it [how other people had such a bad time] and I just can't figure it out. Because it would [have] been [difficult] for me, I would have been ignorant [not to learn these things] for us [my family].

We didn't all speak the same language. Even yet today we don't. Every reserve have their different language. If we spoke our language in the books and others couldn't understand that, would you? We were there to learn English and whiteman's ways. And were always told, "Once you start school you're going to live with one another, care for one another. Don't think, 'Oh this one is that one' and 'that one came from there.' We're all God's children. We're put on earth to get along."

"Look after of what little you have. Don't cut shrubs down. Don't cut it down unless there's very little place to live. Because that keeps a nice tree in the yard. You don't

touch that. Later on, these trees will grow and your children and grandchildren will be using them. We don't destroy them. Same with fishing and stuff, don't [waste]. Just get enough that's going to put you through till next year. You don't go on out and be greedy 'cause once you're dead it's going to be left behind. So think about that in the deepest way you can and train your children for that."

And we were left, my sister and I, because those kids that were born during that time they grew up with what they had to work for to get what they want. We never took them to the stores. We never took them to town. We're always out in the bush showing them how to set snares and doing things. And now, they know what to do.

But still like my grandmother said, "When they're under fourteen tell them what to do. Once they get old enough they think they know it all. And then they're gonna get out of hand. That's where your heart aches." It's true, yes.

And about the land in Fort George that she let it go because they're too much [into] alcohol. That was a downfall for everyone. So that [parks] been there since. It never had anything to do with us. [Now it is] A little kids park. So those things that I brought out was the most important thing in my life and I appreciate every little thing that I was taught.

The kids of today, my grandchildren, my great grandchildren said, "It must have been tough."

I said, "It wasn't tough, it was fun. It was a style of life."

"Ya, but you had no heat and no water, no running water."

Makes no difference it's nice when you're out doing those things. You work for them. You don't just turn the tap on because water's easy. And I think that's what gets most of us. Is like [it] is too easy now and there's nothing to do. You don't have to cut wood, you don't have to do anything and you're just sewing or whatever. To be out doing things [keeps] a person healthy. So that's the only best thing I can bring out on my part of things like that. But we were taught.

Another thing was we used to go down the river and fish for little trouts when we got hungry and bring them to the smoke house and cook it.

That was another thing an old man told us he said, "In the future you're not gonna do that anymore. They're gonna be slowly fenced in. You're not going up the hill to set snares, you'll be told when to set that snare. And when you get told to drink that water you're gonna be told when to bathe in it. You're gonna be told how much fish you can get. You can't grab a 22 and go up to in the hills and kill a rabbit when you're hungry or grouse. You're gonna be told."

Boy, at that time, "Whose gonna tell us?" We have the whole reserve and up towards Chief Lake way. But we didn't ask questions. The third generation, my cousin was sitting on a hill. Lookin at that short net he had set.

And I ask him I said, "You're, you're not feeling well today?"

"No," he said, "I'm just thinkin about what that old Chief told us years ago. When we were kids."

I said. "About what?"

"Remember," he said, "he put it on his fingers [he held his fingers up to count them] between the third and fourth generation." He said, " Well, here we are." He reached in his pocket and took out a permit. He said, "We're not allowed to set net. Like [only] tonight and tomorrow night, that's it."

"I see."

"And we have to report how many salmon we fish. I got a gun in the house and in the tent I can't pick it up anymore and walk into the hills and get myself rabbit or grouse. I got to be told and I have to have a piece of paper."

This is what he was talking about. And it makes a person wonder. They couldn't read nor write. Half of them can't speak English. How can they know that much ahead? So many years

ahead what we're facing today. And we're still facing more, a lot more. That's what we're facing and afraid.

Because the food of today I can't eat [it]. It doesn't agree with me so well. I have to wait for wild food and that wild food is not so [good]. I see now that the grass and willows and stuff that's growing after this spring is poisoned.

So there is nothing sacred anymore. I guess we just have to make the best of life now. I used to buy meat once in a while, but I don't, I am afraid to touch it now.

So, unless things get a little better, people try to help one another lookin after our wilderness to come back to the way it was. There's all kinds of medicine out there. We were shown.

Like my Grandmother said, "There is no such thing as cure, it will leave on its own remission. You go out and get this medicine, the roots or whatever. You try it. Try it for one week. If it not gonna work it's not gonna make it worse. It just wouldn't do anything. You have to try another thing til you picked the right one. When you do get the right one that one it will leave that sickness on remission for or a certain length of time." Which is true, I would think, and then everybody knows that we're all gonna die, one time or another. For if there was such thing as cure from medicine you

don't want to live forever. You're still gonna die in the end. So, this is how I look at it. Like people on the highway, Time comes when it's time to go I guess they're killed or now it's knives and guns. It's not even asking us. It's nonsense. (Gagnon, 1995a)

MEANING TO THE WHOLE THING IS CRAZY

Well, I remember Dad off and on, like when he was home he was working on the boat with my uncle, he [my uncle] was the Captain.

And the river was high he went below that bridge built to the industrial park - on the other end. I guess the foundation might still be there, a log or something.

I remember it was dark. They had a lantern. My Mom was holding my little sister and Dad was gonna get into the boat. Captain Brown pulled in there to pick him up for South Fort. And I was walking beside my Grandfather, my Dad's Dad Lafrenier. And then he got in a boat and left.

And then my Grandfather carried me back to the land or something. And I don't know how or when we were way down the river probably twenty-two miles down. They used to call it the Hudson's Bay Garden.

And my Grandmother's sister, Jenny Weasel, they were down there looking out through the garden. I guess I don't know but it did lot of things for them. I don't know how long it was or how we got down there, I can't remember. But when the boat was coming [back] it was dark again they had the lanterns standing on the shore at the land and usually the boat comes on the side the landing.

I guess at the Hudson's Bay Garden but it was on the other side of the river and it was blowing off and on. And Granny Seymour's sister said it must be something wrong. Captain Brown doesn't do that he's on the other side of the river and they gone way up the river and then kinda floated back towards our side. And dad's usually the one that gets off he jumps off the boat into the water. And Phillip decided that, like there's a rope hiding, and puts out the plank but Dad didn't get off. It was somebody else got off.

And Mother was holding my little sister.
We're suppose to get on that boat I guess, I don't know. But we were there and Granny's sister was holding on to my hand and when this guy got off of the boat he came over to Mom, said something to her and she looked. The river was high and she just about dropped the baby when he told her something and she started to cry. I grabbed the baby and everybody was crying so I was crying, I don't know why. Then we got on that

boat and back to South Fort. I guess they told one another what happened but I didn't, I didn't see Dad.

That's all I remember. So I don't know how long it was after he got drowned, June seventeenth or something like that, I was told. And this must have been in August, sometimes the water runs down low.

There was an old blind guy walking he heard the calls. He was walking sandbar below where dad got drowned. So I guess he was moving around 'cause he never found him. With his cane he felt something under the sand he said. And that's where he found Dad's body.

We went to the funeral, my sister and I. But this place where they kept the bodies, and there was casket laying there. Everybody went up there. They were crying. Sister was crying by time my Uncle picked me up and brought me to the casket. There was [somebody in the coffin] I don't know it wasn't that person [Dad] to me. He was covered in sand just the way they picked him up. I guess his eyes were all eaten out by bugs.

The only thing I recognized on him was [my] Dad's watch and chain. I knew it was Dad's [and] that he [uncle] didn't know it was him and before we left Quesnel few days later we stayed at the Grandmother's aunt's place, Mrs. Boucher.

She made me promise never ever to tell my Mother or Grandmother [about] my Dad from what happened [to him]. But

this was Dad's funeral arrangement. Because it would kill them [Mother and Grandmother if they ever found out] so we were told to never to open our mouths at all.

Same with my sister, so we promised her [Mrs. Boucher] and all the years went by every time the water rises Grandmother used to sit on the hill and cry, cry, cry, and so forth.

There [were] times there I when I phone[ed] home and [wanted to tell about Dad's death]. The meaning to the whole thing is crazy. We'd sit there and watch them but we wouldn't say any thing so they never knew Dad was just left by it. Mother died without knowing, she finally passed away. Maybe we could have eased it up by then if they knew but I don't know. It would hurt them too much. Cause they didn't see [the body]. I guess they didn't want them to see the Chief.
(Gagnon, 1997)

TAKE THINGS AS THEY COME

…He drowned in June and they found what was left of him in August… My sister and I went down and stayed with the Bouchers'… Well we were sent down there. Maybe my sister (Evelyn) knew because she was older. Only that I had to go with her but they didn't say nothing about my Dad. All I know

is that Dad left and then the next thing I heard Dad was drown.

But I mean, you don't know what death means when you're young. There is no meaning to it, just he drown and then I guess when they found the remains of him.

I guess when we were sent down to Quesnel with Captain Brown he took us down but he never said anything to me or Evelyn, never said anything to me. It was old Mrs. Boucher [who looked after us until] after the funeral because his eyes and everything was all taken out by the crows. What was lying there wasn't anything to me. Everybody was crying and the only thing I noticed was Dad's watch. I remember him wearing that when he left and that was still on him. It was full of sand and stuff, and I don't know, I just recognized the watch. I knew it was my Dad's watch but this thing that was laying there didn't mean nothing to me. So I pointed to the watch and Captain Brown took it off and handed it to me.

I cried because everyone was crying but I didn't know what I was crying about. And then when we spent a few more days with old Granny Bouchers', the day before we left, she had this big picture behind her chair of Christ on the cross and it was colored. And she spoke to Evelyn in French and Evelyn was crying and she was kneeling in front of the old lady. She was sitting on a chair. She put her hand on her

head. She prayed over her and then she sent her to her room because we were all dressed in black for that purpose and we were supposed to change clothes I guess. And she called me over and I was going to kneel in front of her but I guess I was too small so she said not to kneel. But I was facing that picture behind her [and] she said, "I am going to tell you something. I don't want you to lie and I don't want you to talk about it."

She pointed to this picture and she said, "If you say something you are going to make it worse with that big nail on his {Christ's] hands and feet. You are going to make it bleed that much more. And I don't want that. [You must] promise me in front of him [Christ] that you will never tell your grandmother or your mother that we put your Dad away in the ground." Which didn't meant nothing to me cause that thing in the ground, it wasn't my Dad. Because there was nothing to show that it was only that watch so I promised. Didn't meant nothing to me, only the watch.

I didn't understand the full meaning of death, like Dad drowned in 1918. Death, they talk about people dying but it didn't mean anything to me. They're going to come back.

And when that flu hit on the reserve we went to bed that night… We crossed the ice, just froze, in Miworth. Mother and my cousin and I, we crossed the ice straight across because we

didn't want to go way around on the road. Every house was lit up but the sickness was strong in Prince George because Granny sent us home. Sent my mother back to the reserve.

"Stay put," she said, "The sickness is getting strong."

And it was heavy fog night and day. I remember that. And we went to bed that night and I can't remember anything. My cousin's older than me, and [later] we just couldn't put it together. We went to bed and when he woke me up I was weak. He helped me out of bed because there was mattresses right across the floor in the front room and everybody was sleeping to me when we went to bed. But why were we going to sleep on the mattress on the floor? But I didn't ask. But when my cousin woke me up it was sunshine like this. And he said, "There's water outside and there is grass and the leaves are starting to grow. And when we went to bed last night there was ice and snow."

That's how come he got me to get on my feet from the bed. He told me to push a chair, to hold myself and that's what I was doing. We looked through the window and yes, the leaves were budding and the grass was starting to grow and puddles of water, and it's supposed to be Christmas or something. It was November when we went to bed. So I don't know, I guess we were sick all winter. I don't know, this was late in the spring.

So we stayed put, moved around and Grandpa came back. He was the only one that didn't get sick in that house. Everybody was sick I guess. And his son Frank, it was just the two of them that didn't get sick on the whole reserve in Miworth.

And the two brothers, Morris Quaw and his brother, they were sent from Miworth to check on the Shelly people. And when they got there everybody was dying and they couldn't leave. Those are the only two that did not get the flu, and my Grandfather and my Uncle.

Well, what Morris told us there was another flu later on in the year that was pretty bad. Everybody was in bed, kids and all. And Morris Quaw brought this rum, 35 over proof rum, and poured some in our coffee and when you don't drink that's strong. He said this was the only thing that will fight the flu, that is what saved us on that Spanish flu. So Mrs. Seymour and I, we'd sip on it and we were kind of half groggy because we were not used to drinking.

We would have to run around looking after [everybody]. Like she'd go down and I would go up keeping the fires going and try to get something into these sick peoples' mouths so their throat wouldn't dry too much and we didn't even get a headache.

My cousin and his wife didn't get sick. Morris didn't get sick. Everybody else got sick and quite a few died. And none

of us got it, so that stuff had to be, it was strong enough as it is had to fight some kind of sicknesses and they said that's what done that with those. They started drinking that and they drank it all the way through I was told. And by the time we got out and we were going to visit these people with little babies and stuff, by the time we got on our feet good we went from house to house and where they had their last meal or where they had taken off their moccasins or clothing everything, you know, if you are in a hurry you leave your dishes and everything and you're gone and that's the way it looked in every house.

So we thought, they went out trapping. It's time of the year they are trapping up at Chief Lake and all over. They're going to come back. They're dead. Didn't you hear the church bell ring night and day? They're all dead. No, well, they're going to come back to us. We were waiting for them. Look at how many years we waited. Second round of flu went by killed some more.

In 1923, my little sister was dying with whooping cough. That's when my mother and grandparents told us to sit beside her dying bed; she was dying on her bed. To watch her go, that's what death is. So we sat there and we watch her go. And still it didn't really, she went to sleep to us. We tried to wake her up in the next few days and she was stiff as a board

and ice cold but she's going to come out of it. Not until they're going to take her to the cemetery and they were going to get us to look at her in the casket. Rubbed her face she was cold, she wouldn't move. And then they start nailing the cover which was going to choke her. We started crying then, and said, "She's dead she's finished." Went down to the cemetery and they put her in the ground and started covering her. She's not going to come back then. That's the end.

After it was all covered they took us by the hand and started walking through the gravesites in Fort George, all fresh graves. These are the people we were waiting for, my cousin's dad, we thought he was going to come back any time and he was buried so that was the end. So that's how we found out the meaning of death, it's finished.

That's why people try to tell little ones, well that one dead. They got to see it before you understand. Even if they see them in the casket, they're not, it's not really sunk in. I know. Look how long it took me.

But little did I know how many people I was going to be with. My own children I was holding them in my arms when they were going. But like they say, you take things as they come and you keep on going. There is no turning back. And then there was another flu after that again and that's what we done, Mrs. Seymour, Mrs. Paul and I. Old Morris would bring us

a bottle of rum and that what we were drinking. And we were the only ones that never took sick. So it had to be something that fights it, I guess I don't know. I don't know if they have it yet. There's everything with a lot of chemicals in it, maybe it's not the way it was. But whatever it was in there, it had to be pretty strong.

We never got tired and sleepy. We were drunk all the time I guess. And we were running from house to house you know and we didn't get tired and sleepy or anything. We'd come back in and get something to eat and we take another drink and we would be on our way again. And later on when we were drinking and the old guy used to tell us, "You better to cut down. Don't start drinking it's no good."

Who started us? It was him. Every time we had a flu going around he would bring us a bottle. He had taught us how to drink. That what we were doing now. But it's funny how just people that drank it never got the flu, even the Spanish flu. That's why I always think [that].

Besides, there was a woman died in Nadleh with that after effects of those flu shots. So I'll die the way, die the way I am going to die. (Gagnon, 1995b)

FIVE DOLLARS IS A LOT OF MONEY

We got a job for five dollars for a few hours, which was really good money. So we took it, just a bunch of girls there and they're not in there when we're there to clean. And we make good money.

Had to go down to my stepfather and give him five dollars. And that was a lot of money so, he kinda hollered.

"Where did you get that?"

"We're working."

"Ya, but where are you working?"

"Mrs. Carmen's."

I guess he took it wrong. Sporting house I guess. Oh, he knew. He went up there and he says, "She just phoned us and said she was sorry but she had somebody else." So we never thought anything of it till later and we heard about it but thinking the other way and that's not why. By the way I said it I guess, made him think working for Mrs. Carmen, I guess, which meant nothing to us but to him it was the other way around. 'Cause he knew what was going on there.

(Gagnon, 1997)

THE DOG THAT TALKED

I don't remember his name but I seen that old dog.

The clock that chimes every hour, and one time I could remember we were outside playing and we heard the clock start to chime. That old dog was getting pretty old too, I guess. One time we heard that clock start to chime so we ran in. The old dog was laying inside beside the fire. When we run in we shouted, "One", then we shouted "Two." On the third strike, we were all going to holler. And the dog jumped up and yelled, "Three," just as plain as could be. He looked at us and went out the back door. I guess that he had heard us counting so many times that he finally learned it.

We couldn't find the dog and he never came back. They finally found the dog, he had crawled under a log by the cemetery. We always said that the reason that he died was because he said "three."

I mean, now you see dogs singing and everything on T.V. now.

I guess that they can really do that. They hear it so many times that they finally just learn it. Dogs, I used to see every old person with one big dog and this old Indian language to it and it understood that.

Anything that they tell the dog to do the dog would do it. So they do understand even the language. They are smart, I guess, in their own way. But, that dog sure scared the heck out of us.

My daughter had a dog and we would go to work and work twelve-hour shifts. I'd come back at nine o'clock in the morning and the dog would be waiting at the door and I would ask her if they were mean to her she'd whine, and walk around on her hind legs until we got into bed and she would lay at the foot of the bed. That's where she was always when we came home.

This one time I came back from work and she was at the door. I said, "Were they mean to you, my baby?" Oh, she was walking beside me on her hind legs into the bedroom. She was whining away. Oh my goodness! And then I thought about that old dog and I thought that, that little dog and she was almost crying and was going to say something. It scared me so bad I never ever asked her anything again. (Margaret Gagnon, Transcribed Audio Stories, 12/09/97)

THE POISON WATER

At the time there when we used to work, W.M. Ranch, we used to call it, Mitchell's Ranch. It was at a place now, for some purpose [it is the historic Hubble Farm] I don't know. We used to go there, McLeod Lake People and Shelley, we use to go there to clear land and stuff like that. So, we don't know where the guys are. There's only an older man but the rest we didn't know where they were. We left Shelly.

And we had to go by team and we spent the night over at Salmon River Bridge and then make the rest of the way to Mitchell's ranch the next day.

So we women were doing the slashing but we had to pile everything and burn it, [leave] nothing scattered all over.

I guess, and the men from McLeod Lake they were logging a couple of logs so I don't know how much [money] they got or anything like that. And we were out there and we used to drink water from this creek that comes down this hill there where we were camped every year.

And that's what we were doing [slashing and brushing] and all of a sudden everybody got sick. All the kids got sick. They got worse and they were passing blood and everything, and they couldn't figure out what happened. Then Mrs. Mitchell, I

guess she had to go to town and somehow to get the doctor out. And my little girl the oldest girl passed away five minuets before the doctor and his wife got out there.

And he looked at the body and he told me he said, "She's poisoned."

I said, "With what?" Like we all ate together, a group of us when we were working. And he looked at the can of milk on the table. Well, it was empty.

He said, "How long does a can of milk last here?"

I said, "We go through about three cans with a group that eats here like we eat together."

He said, "These kids are poisoned, poisoned with something and it can't be the milk if you use it up."

I said, "The can is empty."

"What do you eat?"

And then he seen what we had and he couldn't figure it out.

He said, "I have to take some of those kids in."

He said, "I have to get them to the hospital."

And all he had was a car so they put as many as they can. And the older people were getting sick too, like they were passing out while they were working. So anyway, they started bringing them in. And we left the next day.

They make a cover for the wagon. When we started out bringing the body of my little girl home, we stop at Salmon

River because it was lightening storm. And those horses were going crazy. So we decided to spend the night there and my cousin, Helen Seymour, started a fire there.

And they put the horses aside and it just down poured. At two o'clock in the morning the other little girl passed away. So then it kinda stopped raining. Horses were quiet and we started out from there, got back to Shelley.

And the old Chief was standing on a hill. We told him what happened and he said, "I don't know" and he said, "How are the other kids?"

So we told him the doctor tried to get them all in but those that he couldn't get in the car is the ones that we were bringing home. So we had two bodies and in them days there it's not like now. We keep the bodies two days and on the third day they have to be put away, always on the third day.

So doctor went out there and I guess he took some water out of the creek. And then and then after we had the funeral for my two little girls we were just coming back from the cemetery and the storekeeper hollered from across the river that, "They're sending another child's body out on the train that night."

So okay, and then we settled back. Tried to settle back into the houses and we couldn't locate the fathers, like our husbands where they were. We didn't know where they were.

So we just left it and one by one, sometimes two bodies sent out, kids who had just died and the doctor said that, "If it was the water there was some creosote or something in there."

And we couldn't figure it out. Here I guess they were dipping over 500 cattle up on the hill there. And they dammed this place [in the creek] and after they dipped the cattle in there they let the water go and that's what we were drinking. And we didn't know, so we were all sick but still getting around. Finally there was 15 children gone. They were wiped out--that one generation.

And then my cousin, she died from the birth of the baby she was carrying. And the doctor want[ed] to abort me for my child that I was carrying. I said, "No." It was going to be critical. I said, "I don't care, it's a child. We don't kill the baby before it's born. I don't care what shape it's in."

So anyway, I guess the baby was paralysed and he spoke to the priest about it. And the priest came up and said, "It's got to be done because the baby there wouldn't be any life for it." So I said, "No, I can't do it. I'll give that birth even if it kills me."

So the baby was born dead and it was okay. They tried everything. They couldn't, it couldn't, it couldn't hold any kind of milk down, they tried every different way.

It was in the hospital, my cousin's baby, and being that I lost mine, my breast was full. So I took that baby and I nursed him and he was doing good until he was eight or nine months old and he got pneumonia and that's when I lost him. So he was gone but that water didn't affect that baby he was okay. It was just that he got pneumonia.

And then the doctor, oh he was so upset. He's got to go to court. Sue this old lady for everything she's got. But what good is money? That's when the Chief said he's going to get a lawyer and everybody the best lawyers they can find and he's going to fight that case that Mrs. Mitchell [will] lose everything she's got. But he said, "I am not tellin' you what to do. Make up your own mind." And then when he came he brought that up, "You can take her for every penny she's got."

I said "Doctor, not me, my kids are gone. There's no money ever bring them back. They're finished and I am not selling my children's dead bodies for money." I said, "No." So I left and the mothers of the other kids they followed me out. They said, "Can't do it…" (Gagnon, 1997)

"YOU'LL FIND OUT WHEN IT COMES"

Well, I was brought up by my grandmother, late Granny Seymour. She took the oldest of each of her grandchildren to be with her and she kept us with her until we were school age and she taught us every little thing to be taught to an Indian in our way.

And we spoke nothing but Indian until we started school. And after we started school there was only six of us and she said, "You are going to start in a white man's school and you are going to learn the white man's ways." Which didn't mean too much to us because we didn't understand them anyway.

It took us almost two years to put a few sentences together in English. That's how hard. It is just like if I told you, you had to learn [Carrier] my language now.

So anyway, we come through that and from here on she told us, "You have to learn the white man's way. In every way what I taught you pick out the best part of our culture and the white man's culture; put it together because you have to work together.

You don't put other people down no matter where they're from or whom they are, you are all the Creator's children."

She was looking at the ground and said, "All the ants and insects of all descriptions is put on the earth for a purpose, like you and the other children. And as you are growing up there are three things I would like you kids to keep in mind; love, respect and sharing. You will live happy, you will live a long life. If you should put greed and jealousy with it, that's deadly. It kills and sheds a lot of blood. And that's where she left it, which didn't mean too much to us, we didn't quite understand."

But as the years went by, she keeps on bringing the three main important things. So we gradually caught on to that. And we ask her about the greed and jealousy and she said, "Leave it, it's coming. You'll find out when it comes."

So we had to learn the white man's way there all day long and the evening when we come home we are back to our own. We follow our own. We get hungry in school. We had to eat the white man's food that we're not used to, because the teacher wouldn't allow us to bring our own kind of food. So we had to go along with that and it took us quite a while to finally get to where we were and then she told us, "Think very deeply what I told you. Now you are going back to your Mother and you help your Mother with the children. You have to baby-sit. I am taking the next one. I am taking all the children from there and they are going to be with me. I have to teach them, you

know, what to do. You know every move to make from here on in your own way." So this is how we helped. We were trained to baby-sit and look after our baby sisters or brothers so from there we learned.

And as the years went by we used to go to church every Sunday morning. And after the Church they would take us out and walk us down to where the tennis court is now. It's a massive grave of young children I guess from way before our time. She told us later how they died and what happened.

Previously to that they used to cremate their dead down on the end of the old Nechako Bridge where the old power house is. That is the place where they cremated their dead. That was the second place we were never allowed to play around there.

But when these children died she said, "They call it the smallpox." And they explain to me which way the kids died, and not only me couldn't figure out why they had to die that way. And they always connected this when the Hudson Bay blankets came in. That [was] when all this generation wiped right out in Fort George. And they were told to wrap as many bodies as they can in one blanket and dig a ditch and they were not to cremate any more. So there is a massive grave there and that's why they prayed there.

Later on when they built a church they had a cemetery in the church yard. That's the cemetery that's there now. And

they go down there and they pray over the dead, but they had [a] little house like built on to each grave. I guess it was their most important possession that was put in there. I don't know but we were told never to touch it. This belongs to the dead you're not to touch it, leave the place alone.

So as the years went by in the late twenties that's when they noticed some of the little buildings were ripped off little by little and after there was nothing left. But they never said nothing, they just let it go. And then she brought it up and said, "This is greed. That's what I call greed I warned you kids about. There is something there that belonged to the dead and is going to designate with them, but some greedy person came along and maybe they could sell the stuff, that's why they took it. So leave it; don't look back on it."

She started telling us about the sale of land that they didn't understand the meaning to it only that the priest told them, "Everybody going to die the same way as these children died if they don't sell out."

So that's how come they divided them in five different places. Anyway, they scattered and went their way but they wanted to keep the cemetery part for later on because they didn't want to make another cemetery. That was their two and a half acres that belongs to them.

And later on we were about seven years old and she said, "There's something I want you to see. You've got to learn." There was a woman having a baby and I guess she was a midwife. She worked with the doctors. She brought us there and she made us watch a full birth until the baby's born. And she hand the baby to us. Well we were all cryin' by then. It's scary. And she said, "This is the way you were born so you got to listen to your mother. You don't ever look into her face and answer her back. This is what she had to go through and from here on, after you get married you are going to have children the same way and you are going to have children. Wherever you are [give birth] you depend on nobody. The babies will be born. There's nothing to be afraid of." And that time we thought, "Not that way. We will never have any." Little did we know we were going to have big families.

But then from there we knew what had to be done and she showed us every step, what way she cleaned this baby and what she done with different things she used right after they're born. They are soft, kinda like jelly or molding jelly. She pressed the little ears in and shaped their little heads so it wouldn't be out of shape later on I guess and the nose. And she counted the little fingers and toes. Everything was perfect, I guess, to her.

And then she told us, "Now," she said, "I am going to wash the eyes out. And she had already boiled something like herbs. She washed the eyes out and she got a teaspoon and she had this inner bark of balsam. She had boiled that, and she gave a teaspoon full of that down the baby's throat. That was to clean the baby out, take all the phlegm out.

And then she said, "They had belts. They made belts for pregnant mother. That belt is extended slowly until six months. And then you don't extend it because the baby will over grow and you have to work and you got to do a lot of heavy lifting and that belt saves you from having miscarriage." So all them things were taught to us. And after, after this woman had the baby she bound her up and she told her to, "Get up, time to look after the kids." So she was up and around. It didn't bother her. So then we realized that it's not that dangerous to have children.

Yes and the years went by. She taught us every way to look after the sick and different sicknesses that comes whichever way it acts. And the herbs that we have to take. But she said, "You don't run out in the bush and start pulling roots out or taking barks. You meditate. You thank the Creator for what He gave you. This is your Mother Earth that's given you all your food from. You don't go anywhere but there. Everything grow[s] there for you."

"What if some things are poison?"

She said, "You taste. Don't ask me. Whatever you think. In line of berries or something, you taste it and if it's poison you're not going to swallow it because it going to be bitter. You have to spit it out. You find out that way. Ok."

She said, "You meditate." But in them days they always smoked. "You take the root out. You replace it with tobacco because tobacco grows. And if you don't smoke put seed in there. Something that's growing, because you have to replace every little thing you take."

Everything on earth is put on there for a purpose. You don't kill it for no reason. The little ants, you think, "Oh they're in the way. They're all over everything." When you have something to eat, the crumbs fall and these little insects picks it all up and keeps the earth clean.

You don't cut the little trees down. You want to play, go and pick up some dry stuff that's been wind fallen. You cut a little tree down, it's like me taking an axe and cutting your feet off, your mother's going to cry.

Well we camped under this tree for years, berry picking time and fishing. One fall she was getting a place ready but she moved under a different tree.

"How come we're not under the old tree?"

She said, "Because we are going to use it for fire wood now. It's not dead yet, it's still alive, but your grandfather's going to chop it down for wood tomorrow. I'll wake you up in the morning and I want you to listen and watch what your Mother Earth does.

"When the tree is cut down so far and starting to twist to fall, it's not time for it to die but they are going to kill it ahead of time. It's going to moan and groan while it's going down. It's going to bounce three times when it hits the ground and you'll feel the vibrations where you're standing because Mother Earth is going to cry for that dead tree."

So we got up in the morning and she lined us up and we were watching. And I guess a lot of times you see loggers cutting the trees down and when it starts to fall it does twist, and starting to slowly twist. And it does make noise. But to us, the ways she put it, to make us think I guess. We were all crying because she told us it was moaning, it's going to moan and that's what we thought, so we started crying. And we watched when it hit the ground. It did bounce three times and when it bounced and hit the ground the whole place we were standing was vibrating.

She said, "This is what happens when you cut something down before its time. Windfalls, don't take shortcuts in anything, do it the hard way around and you live longer. You

take shortcuts on anything and you shorten your lives because you are running. Watch the little animals when you are out berry picking, when you are having a rest. Chipmunks and squirrels they're chasing one another back and forth. That's the way you kids are going to be later on if you don't listen. You're going to be running after one another and don't even know what you're after. You're going to run in circles. If you can break that chain and find a path to the Creator you'll live a long time but if you keep following and running in circles, don't know what you're after, your life wouldn't be long. You are shortening your life. You have to break that chain in a circle."

So we did watch little animals and if there's a tree that fell, it's quicker to run over it instead of going through the bush around it but we had to do it that way.

So every little thing, birds or anything, there was meaning into every little thing. And that's what was taught to us and that's what we taught to our children. You watch a baby from the time it's born, you carry the baby, especially the mother.

When I got married the Chief's wife told me, "You're not a girl anymore, you're a woman, a married woman. You're going to have children, as many as you can have. You do not depend on your husband. You do not ask him for anything, from your

husband, even if he's working. You have got your hands to work with. You fend for your children, they're yours. If your husband should come back from work, if he's working, and he offers you money then you take it. You do not ask. Your job is at home. You're the one that keeps the home fire burning. You're the backbone of the home for your family. What your husband does has nothing to do with you. If he's foolish he be dead before you. You'll live longer. So leave things the way they are. So you don't get after him for anything, or ask where he's been."

So yes, we had children wherever, out in the bush, anywhere, like nobody went to the hospital. Like they seemed to be all healthy. I had no problem with them. By the time the babies born, you carry them for nine months. And they were very strict on diet, I guess you would call it today. Meat was something, a "no-no"; you can eat everything else but meat. They say it hardens the little babies and person will die from the birth of that one.

Not much liquids, you do not drink anything ice cold. That was taught to us from the time I could remember. If you drink anything ice cold it shocks your whole system and you will have stomach trouble later on. Anything you're gonna drink, it's got to be blood warm and we don't eat cold food

and you don't eat more than you can eat because that waterlogs you. You get lazy.

If you drink too much water you get lazy, you can't do much, you want to lay down and sleep. So they tell us don't drink too much water, you're not a fish. It's made for a fish to be drinking water while it's traveling, where we don't.

Things like that and we follow it right through. So I guess that's why we were lucky. And when a mother-to-be goes into labor they got medicine for that. They don't linger. Fast, maybe three, four contractions, the babies are born. And right after they are born there is medicine for the mothers to take. And after, and after they get cleaned out, about a week, there is no menstruation as long as that baby is being nursed.

And that baby is in the mother's arms in bed at nights to keep it warm from the mother's body. During the day that baby that's nursing we have to pack that baby on our backs with a shawl so they don't get choked if they are left anywhere. That child is with us right through from the time they are wrapped up when after they are born. We used to pray every night and every morning. And the old people if they were around, they take the babies hands out of the wrapping and pray with them. They bless, they hold their little hands and say the prayers with them, a short little prayer. And most of those kids

didn't say "Mom" or "Dad." Their first word was "Jesus," because they heard it so many times.

And then when we went to church twice a day whether there was a priest or nothing. We went to church. We walked in the church. The Children know what the church was all about. They were all quiet. They can play when they are outside but not in the church. If somebody died we explain to them, "This person's with Jesus, and you don't make noise." "And then they understand. And I noticed that I went to Tommy's funeral, the little ones they were quiet all the time we were there. So they are starting to train all over again.

Today what I find they always like, they always told us, "Don't rush the kids. Let them grow, learn how to talk on their own. You can't cram everything into their little minds because you'll drive them crazy. They'll pick up your language; you're with them every day. They'll pick it up slowly. You don't teach them how to say words."

When you go visiting you let the kids outside, you don't bring them into the house. Because a child can change something into a big story that's not there and you don't want them to lie to you. They have to tell the truth. But to them one word can change a whole thing, it cause a heartache there.

My kids didn't learn how to talk until they were five, six years old, before school. Because I was told not to teach them how to talk. They would pick it up on their own.

What I find today with my grandchildren, the baby's born, there is no reason for them to work. There is enough work with that one child at home. But there is a greed that they talk about. We got along with almost nothing and we lived through it. But today they want everything. "I am going to have this; I am gonna have that." They put their babies in daycare. The mother's not there. From there they put them in play school, kindergarten and then school. Those little tykes are so tired out with their little mind. I think that they start dropping out of school, can't take it any more. Sometimes people think the Native Indians are very slow in learning. There is something wrong. No, there is nothing wrong, not when they are brought up that way. They take their time in learning and we teach them that way. So there's a big difference there between our time and now. And if we didn't have a child every two years there is something terribly wrong and everybody starts worrying. So this nursing the child until they wean themselves that space the children two years apart. So we each had seventeen, nineteen, and twenty. Like I had twenty children myself. I've got ten living and I lost ten. I lost five, the oldest of my children.

We were out clearing land. The men were somewhere. I guess we didn't know where the men where. Just the woman in Shelly. We had to clear land to get winter's food like flour and stuff for our kids. We took the whole family and went to W.M Ranch for work for this woman. We were clearing land there. And I guess she had a bunch of cattle. They were dipping these cattle from lice or something with some stuff. And this water was let go into the creek that we were drinking. Our children started dying off. We lost fifteen children in one week. Some of them [when] we were taking the bodies home.

At Salmon River we stopped over night. Some of them died there. Finally we got them all home and we were told they were poisoned. So that was the end of that generation there.

And then we were grieving for our lost children and we were told, "They are not your children to grieve. Get started and do what you have to do. You got your winter's food?"

"Who are we going to make food for?"

"The Elders, they need it. Get together and get busy, but you don't grieve. Those children were given to you by the Creator. Goodness knows only the Creator knows what kind of life they are facing so He decided, "I'll take them back." Don't be hurt because of that poison water. Your days are marked. From the time you're born, the day that you going to

die, and whichever way you are going to go is the way you're marked out. He is good. He'll be good to you. You're all young yet. He may give you boys, a bunch of boys to look after you. He'll replace these kids."

Like I lost five, He'll replace these kids maybe double or triple. I thought, I'll never get them all back. These were all little girls I lost. So I had eleven boys and nine girls after that, was more than that.

While we were grieving, they bring us up the Frazer River. Like in Indian they call it the "Mighty Fraser" -- your lifeline is to follow the mighty Fraser. It is born in the mountains as a baby, a little creek. As it is coming down the creeks and rivers running into it, it widens. You're going to hit a lot of rough waters. This is a canyon, a canyon up the river somewhere, not Fort George. This is where you are now, by losing all these kids you'll hit calm water and you will be happy again. These rivers and creeks that are running into the mighty Fraser, you are the mighty Fraser, you're the mother.

In years ahead, your children and their children and so on, will be all of different color with a different language intertwining with these rivers. The river goes on, it never turns back. What you done yesterday to hurt other people you can't undo it so leave it. Just leave it as it is. But live for today, just today alone. Thank the Creator for giving you

this day and you thank Him in the evening that you had a good day. Trying to undo the hurt or hard feeling you gave others yesterday -- the river never turns back -- so you don't turn back to what happened. You don't plan for tomorrow. You may not be here. Just today. You have to try your best to do things.

Once the Fraser hits the Big Water, they call it, going to intertwine with four different Nations like a quilt. If you weave it like a quilt, your children, other peoples' children, to get along, you'll see how nice this world will be. But it's not going to work this way. It's not going to blend together that good and I guess this is where things are now.

Year by year we can see it coming and what it had been told to us at the time, we didn't think too much of it. When the war broke out, that's way across the ocean, it's not going to bother us, that kinda thing, we thought. That's when the old lady told us. She said, "Now did you think about the greed and jealousy I told you about years ago? No. I told you there is going to be bloodshed. *The governments are all jealous of one another, fighting one another for one and rule the world. They don't think about the Creator. The Creator rules the world not people like us. And who is going to be the bullet stoppers? Is your brothers and all these young kids? There is going to be a lot of bloodshed. That's going to be finished*

right there and then it starts all over again, quieting down for awhile but there's going to be killing in years ahead. You're going to be slowly closed in. You are not going to have your freedom. You are going to be told when to drink the water. You're going to be told what to fish. You're going to be told how many rabbits or grouse you can kill and where to get as many as you want now." Well that's crazy, we were never told.

But as the years went by into the third generation, yes our children on, the third generation can't speak their language and they are of a different color because of different fathers so there the color showed up.

And later on we were fishing, we had to have a piece of paper. You set the net twice a week, a certain length of net and that's the only time you're going to fish.

You're not to drink the water, we were told again. Another time, towards the end after this bloodshed of war. That's what is happening, floods, tornadoes, everything they predicted is happening.

There is one more that we are supposed to be facing, starvation. I think this is where they're headed for because the animals are slowly going because they are poisoned too from the grass they eat.

And I guess this is what they meant, slowly going to starve. The lucky ones will survive. So when you think about things in a different way, what gets me now, is why is everything they predicted happening? How could they know that far ahead when none of them could read nor write? Was it a vision or something? It had to be something because they go out and go on a fast by themselves and then they come back and they start telling us things. "This is what you are facing, not right now, in the future. It's going to be a long time coming to you but it's not that far ahead."

So this is where we are now. Every little thing that they said is happening throughout the world. Young people, our young people, you talk to them yesterday and today they're gone. That's how short life is for them. To them they are having a good time. They are enjoying their lives but they're not. This drug and alcohol's getting the best of them. And there is no way we can stop it. We've tried different ways. Only thing is to get back to their own language because our own language means a lot, word by word. We don't use love, thank you, or please, those are words in the air. It's a demand in the Indian language. (Gagnon, 1993)

THE BOY ON THE MOON: THE OLD CHIEF TELLS A TRADITIONAL STORY

We were looking at the full moon and oh it was pretty that night. He was telling us little short stories before bedtime and we were admiring the moon.

And he said, "The full moon looks nice."

And he starts telling us a little story about a young kid that was brought up by his grandparents. How he went up to the moon.

"Is he up there?"

"Oh yes" he said, "You can see."

By the way he said and the design on it we thought sure as heck he's up there.

He said, "You see that stick across his shoulder?"

"Ya."

He said, "That piece of fat hanging on the end of that stick that was his food. And the dog sitting beside him, he took his dog with him."

And that's how it looks because he said that to us. You know it looks exactly like that.

So we looked at one another and thought, "Gee we were brought up by old people and we were always with them. Be nice if we could get up there too, like them."

He said, "When the bumble bee comes in the spring you know how it flies around your head. Why do you think we say, "Don't brush it away? Stand there and let him buzz around your head until it goes to the next person. That's the little boy from the moon. He turns into a bumblebee and sees if everybody's ok."

So it's after he got through he said, "Its time to go to bed, you kids."

And my cousins said, "We are always with our grammas and all the other grammas fishin' and berry picking."

She said, "I wonder if one of us could go to the moon?"

"But it's so far away." he said.

He looked at each one of us and said, "In time." And he looked at us and back at the moon. He said, "Your kids. We won't be around. Your kids and their kids." And he came to about the four generations, when you think about it. "They could be going back and fourth. Maybe you'll even be gone by then."

"When the eagle lands on the moon," he said. And we were discussing that, 'In God we trust' and so on and from there on when Mabel brought that up, she remembered that. She said, "What was it that guy say when he landed on the moon?"

"Oh that." I said. "The eagle has landed."

"But," I said, "he wasn't talking about the same eagle that the old man was talking about." I said, "That mighty

dollar got in you hand." I guess he was thinking about how much he would get paid on it. So anyway, it was silly, but we figured that what these old guys were talking about, it's the money there again kinda thing. We thought maybe we are wrong.

I don't know but different little things, like Philip was talking about Granny Seymour. What did she do? What was her main thing? She had every type of grandchildren and she talked about the four nations.

"When you started school I warned you once you start that school, the white man is different than our way. When we speak to you, you sit there with your head down, put everything in the back of your mind, that you'll remember in the future. You don't have to cram your brain with it. Just take certain part that you think is very important. That way it stays with you for the future. But when you get into a white man's school you're gonna hear their way of life and you got yours. You already know all yours." And I guess she meant a teacher. "When a white person's talking to you, you don't drop your head. They'll think you're ashamed of what you are and you drop your head. And," she said, "That's a no, no. When you speak to a white person, you look them straight in the face and talk to them. Never drop your head and that part you do with us but not with the white people." Which I found out was true. (Gagnon, 1999)

THE HUDSON BAY BLANKETS

Granny didn't lose the kids, but the older people on the Fort George Reserve, one told me she lost twelve of them altogether. Like, so I don't know, they said the kids were wiped right out. And [buried] where I think the tennis court [is] down by Fort George. They used to pray there but there is no marking.

But they kept the grass nice. They raked the grass by hand and there's no fencing, no marking and when we left the Catholic Church and go down to the cemetery, they never prayed like we prayed in the church, in the English way of worshipping. We had to do it in the church the way they do it, kneeling and clasping hands and pray. And then when we get out of there we'd go down to the Fort George cemetery. It's more talking to God like I am talking to you, asking God to guide us and look after the kids and stuff like that.

That's the only kind of prayer that we knew growing up because Granny had all her two oldest grandchildren with her when we went to the lakes and rivers and stuff. And she had showed us all the things to be done in the future for our livelihood, tanning hides and stuff, everything. She spoke nothing but Indian to us until we were ready for school.

It was back in the late twenties, we were going back down after church, people stopped there and they were crying their hearts out. That's when I asked Granny. I said, "Why are they crying and talking to God here when we are going down to the cemetery?"

She said, "This is a mass grave of the kids that died -- Europeans call it smallpox." She said, "They never buried their dead before that. They used to cremate them where that old bridge crosses the powerhouse. Site is still sitting there, right as you are coming down that road towards the bridge." Right in the corner they used to come from Miworth Reserve and Shelly. They come down the first of July or something and they used to camp down where the bricks or something. Now [where] that big building [is] that part was a campground.

Like, my uncle used to own that piece of land and they never let us cross the tracks, it was a no, no! You don't go there and we wondered why, until my uncle's wife took us across the tracks. You could still see the poles where it rotted down where it used to be a building, I guess, for cremating bodies, and she told us, "That's where they used to burn the bodies of their dead. They never used to put them in the ground until the priests and them and came and built a church in Fort George." Fort George Cemetery was in

churchyard. And these kids, when they are all dying off so fast, and they told them to bury them as fast as they can, they [had] no time to cremate them. Put three, four bodies in the one blanket and bury them so fast as you can because the whole reserve, everybody is going to die but these are kids, [from age] twelve, ten, years and down or something and these were the blankets that they said was shipped from down south.

Hudson Bay Blankets they used to call it, 2.5 points, 5 points or something, depends on the size, and they brought them blankets. The Hudson Bay was trading off on fur and stuff. Well, they never had blankets like that you know. They used to have homemade blanket, weaved rabbit skin was their blankets. And when they saw this was something different and beautiful. So then they start selling them. They bought it and naturally it was for the kids so they could keep warm and that's when they started dying and then they were wiped right out. And they told to wrap them, as many as they can, in these blankets and make sure they buried them right away because everybody was going to die.

They said there was no older people that died with it because it was just the kids that were using those blankets. And this blanket comes up just about every time Granny told me about it.

I said, "How come they never put a cross there?"

She said, "Because there was no such thing as, you know, Catholic prayers and that, not at that time. That came later on. They built the church down there." She said, "They built a fence around it. That's where Fort George cemetery come in." So they stopped burning their dead and it was weird because why can't they fence it instead of leaving it like that.

Then when we moved to Shelly in 1927, I was talking to this Granny Paul, they call her, she was quite old. I was talking to her about what Granny told me. "Yes," she said, "Out of my family twelve died, [the] kids were wiped right out." And it's the way they said it. They go into high fever and they start bending backward. They try to hold them but they just keep on going until their stomach splits in half like, and then they are gone."

It was really puzzling. Every chance I had I went to a different old person and asked them and they had the same story and when the blankets came, were brought in, was the start of that and how they went, it was puzzling. They had the same story. But I never said nothing.

Years later we were living in Central Fort George and Margaret, my second youngest, was sick, oh was she ever sick. I call for Doctor MacArthur and he came to the house and he checked her and said, "Your little girl's got smallpox."

"Oh my God!" I said. "All my kids are going to go."

He said. "No. There is only one case in the hospital. The hospital is quarantined. I can take her in there."

"Well," I said. "If it's quarantined it got to be contagious."

"No." he said, "It's ok. Just don't let them go close to her. That's all."

I was crying, because I was going to lose all my kids. The way they explained about how these kids went and that's how I was looking forward to, you know. I was always beside her night and day and he was there twice a day, Dr. MacArthur, to check on her. She's ok. She's coming out of it and finally, oh about five days like, she's in a coma. About five days later she snap right out of it. When he came he said, "She's ok now. You've got nothing to worry about." And then he checked all the kids and he said, "They're ok. You don't have to worry about them."

But still I wasn't sure. So he was having coffee with me in the kitchen and he said, "What makes you think they are all going to die? You keep on thinking that."

That's when I brought that up about the smallpox they were talking about.

He said, "In Fort George?"

"Ya, I've been told that. I asked the old people. They have the same story. The weirdest thing is that, when they say

that when these blankets were brought in and how they split in half."

He looks at me he said, "No."

At that time when he's a Doctor in this day and age. There might be something [a disease] that could do something like that, with all the things they're coming up with in different countries.

But he said, "No!"

He said, "It's nothing like that."

I said, "Ya!" I told him they all saw it. I told him about where they are all buried in a mass grave.

And he said, "They put a tennis court over it?"

I said, "Ya."

"Nobody said anything?"

I said, "No, they used to pray there a lot but after they done that, they bypass it after."

And he said, "It's too bad a person can't dig even one body out to study to see what the heck happened."

"Well," " I said, "They go around and say these bones are thousand and thousands of years old. What's wrong with that."

"Well," he said. "I don't know about thousand of years old, the body disintegrates."

I said, "I know it does. Even bones, even hair forty years after, even thirty years, there is nothing there."

So he couldn't figure it out and he said, "Where are these blankets?"

And it's quite awhile after, I don't know, I went to see him about something and get medicine I think.

He said, "You know I read somewhere in a book I picked up, a book somewhere. I've been thinking about what you said." And he said, "These blankets were sold down around Chilcotin area or farther down. At first they sold these blankets and you know people are all along the river. They never had no village or nothing. For their livelihood they were always around the river cause that's the only place they can travel."

And he said, "There they got them blankets, people got sick."

I guess you know no doctors or nothing. And maybe they might have died that fall and nobody notice anything until spring time when they're starting to haul freight up this river, Fraser River. They hit the river and they stopped there and it looked like there was a village, cause they can see like smoke houses and caved in. They got off and went in there and everybody was dead. They were all rotted in those blankets. So what them guys done, they just dumped the bodies out, folded the blankets and sold it, along the way and everywhere they sold it was what happened the same way as them old people told me.

So at the end he said, "They must have got scared when you put as many bodies in one blanket and bury them right away instead of cremating them."

He said, "This is where they got scared."

I said, "They knew they were killing people."

He said, "According to the book." He said, "I couldn't believe it. It's a hard thing to believe."

But he said, "Things happened in those days."

Which is true. I guess they never got over it. And then he died on me. Then Doctor Clark died on me. They're all dying on me.

Ya, just like that time Ronnie and them were all fishing and he had to put a stop to these people digging the Blackwater Cemetery. Somebody told him to go down there and put a stop to it. And when he went down there, he said they were digging bones out or something and all this is so many thousands of years old or so.

"Boy," I said, "This can't be thousands of years old. [It's] from 1918 flu, that's when they were wiped out." He had to put a stop to it. But that's how old these bones supposed to be. There was no such thing, as they never buried their dead in them days. But [the] 1918 flu, it just wiped [out] well, just about every reserve out. Like up here at Miworth,

just my grandparents, my uncle and two other people [left] out of nine houses full of people. The 1918 wiped them right out.

In Shelly was the same. Some of them were out on the trap line and they had to wait until spring to wrap the bodies and what was left, we were lucky to come through it. Then the following flu some kind of flu, they call it. We were lucky to come out of that. Third one that went through Shelly, there was quite a few died. But we were lucky to come through that. (Gagnon, 1999)

HEY MOOSE COW ARE YOU PREGNANT? CARRIER CHILD BIRTH TRADITIONS

Now the kids are in bed for how long. I don't know. But right then [after we give birth] we get up right away. After we take the after birth out and we are back on our feet to do our work. Look at all the stuff they are going through now. They call it hot flashes or whatever, I don't know. Oh boy, I don't think I would want to live through life like that. I don't think I would go for it any way.

I always battle my way out of things. "You have to take these pills." I say, "Nobody's going to make me take pills if I don't want to. I wanna be in my right mind till I go. Not bumble and stumble and stuff like that."

You see too much of that with younger people. So that's

deadly right there. I had to be something to do with these, because the old Doctor Lyons, when the flu hits Shelly Reserve, we take turns looking after the sick. We start getting so tired that we start getting headache. He used to give us one, two of those aspirins in the little box. He wouldn't give us the box, he put two on the table. "If you are going to take that to have a little sleep, don't you ever take it on an empty stomach." There is some stuff in there that's no good for your stomach. That was the warning he gave us. Look at the stuff they give people now. But outside of that, everything seems to be going good.

Well, look at them old people. Look at how old Granny was. She was in her right minds. They made a mistake. They said that Granny was 114, but they made a mistake. But that was her older sister. I got all them papers back from Victoria. And Granny was 107 when she died. Yah, she was 107. She was in her full mind. She never took no pills. And all the things that she taught us, she, from the time I can remember, she told us, she said, "People bothers me for information. What I am giving you," she said, "you keep it in the back of your mind, keep it there. It will always be there, in the future." She said, "You'll be pestered like I am being pestered. You give so much and that's it. Not full details, because. Because it will be there for the future of your

children."

And we were just kids when she told us, "What's the three main things that we brought you up on. Don't fall for the other side." Well what is that? You can't ask questions. You dare not ask questions, you are supposed to think things over and try to solve it. If you are smart you will make it and if you're not you're dumb.

But that's the way it was. She was sitting there and she told us, she said, "You." She must have meant generations, she said, "There's you, your children, and their children in about there." So she must have meant generations. "Those children will be of different color and different language." Yes, it's there today. Third generation it was. So I think that's why she said, "Different color and different language."

When God made the four colors, He didn't say, "You black people stay right here; you red people here; you white people here; you yellow people, four corners of the earth." He didn't say, "Stay there." We were to mix, mix like the way I make my quilts. I mix all the colors. We are to mix with one another. And get along in this world because we have to live together, care about one another. Something we are taught from the time we are able to talk. You learn how to love one another, respect one another, and share what little we have with one another. If you fall for the other side it's going to be

deadly.

You have your God to believe in and no matter what organization, it always comes back to the same one God because there is only one God. But in the future, where it's pointing out to you about your future children, you are going to be sucked into this. On the other side, there is going be-- money is going to be the God of all people. So money, no more God for them. Money, power, and greed. Please keep your children out of it, teach them don't fall for it. But they have already fallen for it. Which yes, today is here. Everything you hear in the news is, and everything is money, money. To heck with these people that's dying and killing. Why should they worry? They are going to get that money back somehow. So there it is. So that's what she meant. I guess money is going to be the God of all people. Scary, but that's what life is all about today.

And a lot of times I've been asked, "How did you manage with all your kids?" Good. I have a lovely life. What I was taught at Residential School: I didn't have to buy clothes. I got my younger sister to stay with me and then after we had kids we got a job when everything was being rationed and war broke out. So they taught me how to cook and bake and stuff at Lejac, and how to make over clothes for these orphans. So I knew how to do all that, and then I taught her that. So we worked together pretty good. And when we had children, we got

a job out in the camp cooking for the camp. Because we can turn our ration books in and then we get our groceries shipped out every two weeks to the camp because we are cooking for these people. That feed us and our children the very best of food. They didn't go hungry.

And they used to say, "You must have made lots of money." We weren't there for the money. We worked there for our food and our children's food. So we were okay. We lived a healthy life. It's not to have money. As long we had a roof over our heads and our children were fed that was the main thing. And we didn't have to buy clothes and we knew what to do.

We knew how to tan hides so we didn't have to buy shoes. Kids wore moccasins. The only thing we bought was those moccasin rubbers, they called it. They used to wear it over moccasins. That's the only things we bought. So we had a happy life. I feel sorry for the kids today. Everything's gotta be brand new, and the price of things.

And then if we ran out of hide, when the camp closed down, them guys never washed their clothes, they throw it away. We pick them all up and we wash all the clothes and rip them down for the children. And if we run out of hide, we wash all those felt hats and we make moccasins out of that. So they were okay. We do bead work on it and we were pretty proud of

it. They got brand new moccasins, you see, and they were so happy. So it was nice. We had a really happy life.

Antonia Mills: *Hmmm, Hmmm, Well, the story of The Poison Water though. That's quite a story.*

Margaret: *What's that?*

Mills: *About when the water from the dipping the cattle.*

Margaret: *Oh, I don't like living through that. That's why I lived through that and I can't, don't want to go right through it. It will bother me until the day I go, that part. No. They figure that it should be in [The Prince George] Citizen that the good Citizen, wants it. We never splashed stuff like that on a paper. We lose our loved ones and that's it. We put them away and we don't advertise to nobody. Every little thing that happens in a person's life, even when it happens to somebody else, even now puts you right back to that day. So it's very, very hard on me for that. Every time I hear drowning it brings me back the day that two of my sons drowned so, it's hard too. I have to live with it no matter what.*

Mills: *Maybe you can tell some of the funny stories like when you were doing the cleaning at Mrs. Carmen's*

Margaret: *While my stepfather--Mrs. Carmen had all white girls and Sarah Morrisette had all dark girls. We couldn't figure out why she only had all daughters and no sons. One of Doctor*

McKenzie's sisters was working there. She would get all dressed up and go to church every Sunday.

It's an old dog, the one that called "three" for us. It was an old, old dog. It used to lie in front of the fireplace at Old Grandpa Roy's, down by the meat packing plant. I think that old house is rebuilt and is there still sitting. He had this big clock there, the old fashioned clock. And we could be playing outside. We not supposed to, like our parents, when we visit someone, are never allowed to be in the house to listen in, we got no business to listen.

And so we are playing outside and soon as we hear that chime we run in and then they all stop talking, whatever they were talking about. And we'd stand there and count with the old clock. For years we had been doing that, and then outside we'd go again.

And later on what Ronnie told us was, when you have kids that you go visiting you don't allow the kids hang around because they are very nosy and they want to find out things and they can change words. You can be talkin' to someone about maybe they tell you something about, what happened to this person, and you don't want the kids to tell a lie, you want them to be truthful in everything. And if you leave them to listen to that, they can turn around and tell that person by one word switch, that they misunderstand, could cause a

problem between the people. So she said, "Don't ever allow the kids to be in the house while you are visiting. Outside is where they belong." And when they ask you something, teach them not to ask question. You don't tell them nothing. That is the worst thing to explain to the kids, they learn as they go along. So that's what we had to do that way. And you do want to tell them the truth, like you want them to tell the truth, not make up stories.

So that was the good way of bringing up children for us. If they ask you a question, if it's a good question, yes, and then you tell them, "Yes." If they want to find out something, you tell them. "No I can't tell you that. You learn as you go along." So things like that were good in that way. They're not too nosy to try and find out everything.

And what we see on TV that makes you sick, the way they suck their babies' mouth and everything. And kissing that was a no-no for us when we had our kids. You do not kiss the kids anywhere close to the eyes, mouth, and ears, because of what you could pass to them. If you want to kiss your baby, you love them, you take their little hands and their little feet, but never on their face. So even though you love them, you were never allowed to do that.

We don't pick them up soon as they cry. We let them cry cause they have to strengthen their lungs. They need to cry.

But most of the time we don't leave our babies loose like we do now. Cross their little hands like that and wrap them from here down [from the neck] and we put their legs straight so their legs wouldn't be bowed like those kids today with those big diapers. We never put diapers on them. The boys you fold the diapers and wrap it around and make it thicker on top and the girls you make it thicker on the bottom. But the legs got to be straight. And that's the way they are wrapped tight, right after they are born. They are all fixed up like that.

And the bonnet, that's another thing. We have it ready to put on, to hold their little ears that they don't stick out.

And then if you drop something, maybe something heavy, on the floor and if they are laying on a bed, it's going to jar the floor, and it's going to affect their ears, they told us. So we had a swing above the beds and you could bring them around in. And then we put a little mattress on the bottom, it's something like a crib, but they are wrapped up but you don't lay them on their back. They say they choke. You lay them one way after you nurse them. Clean them up and then you bring, lay them on the left. The next time they wake up to be fed you change them, hold them, wrap them up. And after you feed them, you turn them the other way, and it's back and forth like that, but never on their backs.

And they stay in that swing until they are sitting up. There they could fall out and that's when you take them out of the swing. But that's where they lay. That when you drop something, it's not going to affect their little ears because they are up there, not on the beds. So I think that helped a lot in a lot of ways. We know when they are hungry. But if they cry and they want to cry we let them cry. After so long, after they wouldn't stop, you push that little swing and it rocks them to sleep. They do have to cry. They need that for their lungs to strengthen their lungs.

All during pregnancy, there, we do the same work as we always did, every lifting and everything. It never affected us because we have support, a support belt. And we extend that a little bit, just a bit, and safety pin it on each side and criss-cross the back. And you have that up until five and a half months. You don't extend you keep it tight there.

And you are not to drink too much liquid. That's the worst thing, they say. The water builds up and it gels and it's hard to break. So we are not allowed to drink, only if you can't go any more, that you are so thirsty. But you don't drink cold water. Even without pregnancy you are not allowed to drink cold water. It has to be blood warm because they say that cold water shocks your whole system when it hits your stomach! And later on in the year you are going to have

stomach trouble. That's what they told us, yet today I can't drink cold water. I can't drink too much water. Once in a while I might have half a cup, that's about all. I don't touch that water that much. Because when we start our labor, that first labor, labor pain we call it, when we first get that first one, if you're alone, like mostly alone anyway. You start getting things ready. We have a pad and everything ready way before that. And then you put it beside a chair on the floor and all the babies' stuff in the kitchen table. [Everything] but the scissors and what you are going to wipe their little face with is all [cleaned with] Boric acid with boiled water. And is all set beside you by the chair, and then second contraction you got everything ready in the kitchen where you are going to clean the baby. You don't lie down, you walk around. You know the third contraction your baby's going to be there. So you kneel on that pad beside the straight back chair and you put a pillow on that seat of the chair like that, goes above your stomach and you reach over and hold the back of the chair. And when the third contraction comes you just press and your water breaks and the baby's comes right with it. So that's why they say don't drink too much water because it gels.

And they don't cry, they got no breath, so you have to pick them up by their little feet and slap them on the bum

there maybe once or twice and they get their breath and that's when they start crying. And then you turn around. And you cut the cord and clean their little face and eyes, that's the first thing, and the ears and everything. And then you fix them up. But we used to have a cloth, cheese cloth, about that big with a whole in the middle. And when we cut the cord we put the cord through it. Like you leave enough and twirl like that and then you got a little belt and you put it around them and pin it down. So it's going to be there until it falls out three days later on its own. You don't have to bother with it. And after you do that you lay them aside and you take the after birth out and clean yourself good and put your support back on and you are back on your feet to go and clean your baby and your kitchen. Give it a good bath and clean it up. That's all there was to it. And then back to your daily work.

You don't have to lie down and as long as the baby's nursing, you don't pull the baby away from your breast. They know when to get away from it themselves, even if your breast is empty they keep on. And that space the children, like two years apart, by them weaning themselves in their own way. So it worked out pretty good. They didn't need no pills or anything.

So it was pretty good. So right after the birth we get that ready way ahead of time, winter or summer, we take the

inner bark of the raspberry bush. Now I wouldn't touch it with all the poison spray. And then the raspberry bush and rose bush inner bark, we boil that, boil the heck out of it and strain it. And after we don't drink too much tea, we drink that. We take a drink every now and then. That cleans everything right out of you, that tea will, so that you're not going to bleed too long. I hear some of the girls, they bleed for quite a while after birth. Five days and that's it. The next time you start menstruating, that's when that baby, the child, cuts off nursing. And then you start getting your period. But all this time you don't get your period so that was good for that.

They explain to you when you are going on to 15 years old about menstruation. God, today some of those kids are 11 and 10 year old menstruating. Why God, it must be all the exercise they give them at school, all the stretching all over. It's got to affect their insides.

***Antonia Mills**: I think there are some hormones in the meat they eat too.*

***Margaret Gagnon**: Well the food, I don't think there is safe food in the stores anyway, nothing. And even the wild food we used to get which was pure and now it isn't because they're shooting the junk into them and then spraying the bush all over. Mosquitoes never killed anybody as many as we had. They*

never kill nobody. They used to say mosquitoes are good for you. They take all the bad blood out of you, all the winter blood, so you'll have your summer blood built up, so it's like that. I kinda believe it. Mosquitoes, as many as they were, it never killed us. But now all the junk they use, look at how the kids are, their skin and everything. I am glad my kids weren't brought in them years. But then when [they] got married and started having kids, started running to the Doctor. Now they are having problems, whatever you call it, hot flashes. I don't think I would want to have a life like that. If they stuck to the old way they would have been well away. The doctor says you have to drink so much water, you got to lay down, you got to sit down. The doctor don't know anything about it, they never had babies.

Just like that Mrs. Paul in Shelly, she's got great grandchildren. She is the same age as my oldest daughter. But we lifted a canoe her dad made across the river and brought it back and we had to clean the inside part and scrape it out. So we had to help him lift that boat from the shore and up on top of the hill. I guess that lifting done that to her, brought that labor on. She went into labor, right away, she couldn't figure it out. She still had quite a while to go. So anyway, she said, "You know, it's getting worse. I am going to have my baby." She said, "Way ahead of time." So I ran and Granny

Seymour was visiting Granny Paul two doors away. I ran over there and I told them, oh my goodness. So they came over and started the cook stove they used to have, warming over in there. They started the cook stove to heat up water. Sure enough, yes, she was going to have that baby. So I went down a ways by the church to get her mother and she came over, Sophie. Oh dear, she had that baby. Yes, while in the meantime, her husband jumped on the saddle horse to get Dr. Lyon and his wife, cause she was going to have that baby way ahead of time and he got scared.

So the doctor and his wife came before he got back on the horse, cause they had a truck. After she was born, ah gee, you could see right through her skin like it was plastic. You could see everything, all her veins, everything. And there was no fingernails just like egg white. Ah gee, she was pitiful, skin nothing, she weighed two [pounds], but she was breathing. And Dr. Lyons and his wife said, "Oh Lord." He said, "I can't take her out of here." He said, "If this baby hits the air out there it's going to die. I know she's going to die, there is no way." The more people look at one another, "We're going to try. We're not going to let you take this baby out. We know the air is going to kill it."

"Yah but look, you can see right through, there is no skin there, Granny."

"Oh, I will try and see how long I can keep her alive."

So he said, "Ok." And what they done at that old lady, her grandmother, had that paper box what she brought size four rubber, moccasin rubbers they call it. She still had a box laying around and she brought that and she took Dr. Lyons and his wife [who] was sitting. She asked Granny if she had cotton batten. Granny Paul said, "I got some." So she went home and got her roll of cotton batten and took, she took so much off, so much off, and she dipped it in this olive oil and laid it on the side. She dipped the baby in it too and then put it in the box.

Dr. Lyons said, "Now what are you going to do?" So they covered her with olive oil and cotton batten soaked in olive oil and they put her in the warming oven.

"Oh boy," he said. "What you old people going to think of next?"

"Well," she said, "we're going to try."

They sat there for a couple of hours and they left. Next morning I had good sleep and I came back [and] that baby was still alive.

And they used to save, well not only them, we all saved that, what you call it in the grouse, that stomach. We wash it out when we kill the grouse and it's like a balloon. We wash it good and then we blow it up and we used to have it hanging

in the house. I don't know why. I guess a balloon kind of thing. They took that down and washed it good in warm water. After they clean it good they boil fish just for the broth. They put little bit in there, it's just like the balloon. It's got that long thing on it. And then they tie it once on the end, but not tight. And they cut the end off so it was about that much sticking up. And they squeeze it and put it down the little throat.

It never cried. It tried to move once in a while. But they had to soak that in olive oil. And when Dr. Lyons and his wife came that morning they brought a bunch of olive oil. She is still alive.

When he looked at that thing there he said, "What's that?"

Granny said, "We boiled some fish just for the broth."

"To feed that baby?"

She said, "Yes, she had a good feed. We squeezed it into her mouth. It'll be okay, she'll live."

He shook his head and he looked at the box again and he said, "I brought this bunch of olive oil." So he brought two jugs out.

So he was there every morning and every night, even his wife. It took quite a while there before the skin started forming, but she was in the warming oven all that time until

all the skin you know. And then they took her out of there. But they didn't bath her with water. It was always with olive oil. For quite a while after and she is still alive. She lived up until four generations and has a bunch of great grandchildren.

I used to tease her. "Warming oven kid," I said. "I never thought you would get out of there."

"Yes, that's what Grandma and Mom told me, but I say I couldn't believe it.

"But," I said, "You're alive and you are doing things and you have kids and you don't have to run to the hospital to have your kids. At least you've got your mom yet."

Later on she got grandchildren and great grandchildren. She's still walking around. Yah, Dr. Lyons and his wife couldn't get over it; that she made it through.

"Olive oil, boy oh boy, try telling them that in the hospital," he said. "They wouldn't dare touch that." But he said, "I see nothing." He said, "I follow you. You women what you show me what you, I say nothing. I follow you in my way with the reserves like." But he said, "In the hospital I can't, they got their own way."

***Antonia Mills**: None of your kids where born in the hospital, were they?*

Margaret Gagnon: *I tried first time, I went there with my little boy. Like I had all boys at home. The girls are quite separated. They baby-sit one another. And I thought, "Well gee, I can't have that baby at home. Why not try the hospital." So I had the first contraction, I got up there by the taxi. I told that nurse, I said, "You better call Dr. Clark right away."*

"Oh, you got another six-seven hours."

I said, "I am ready."

"No, I can tell."

I said, "You don't know your ass from a hole in the ground. Get the hell out of here!!"

And she came running back with an enema.

"You have to go to the bathroom and use that."

I says, "Yah, ok I'll do that."

And she took off. "Going down to have coffees," she told the other guys.

She said, "She's got a long time yet; no use calling the Doctor." This was through the night, about one o'clock in the morning.

At that time they had that cloth towels not paper towels in the bathroom. It was on that roller. I thought 'gee whiz' the second I got my second contraction. The third one I was going to have that baby, I thought, that's what I was waiting

for. She told me another eight hours. So I ripped that off and I stuck it on the floor beside the toilet bowl and I had my little boy there. Then after I slapped him a few times and he started crying. Then I heard them all running. There was four of them came running.

"Call the Doctor."

I said, "No." I said, "Wait another eight hours then call the Doctor."

"What did you do that for?"

I said, "I told you that I was going to have that baby. That's what I came in here for." I said, "You know it all. You don't know nothing."

"Call the Doctor."

I said, "Bring the scissors, cut the cord."

"Oh, the Doctors got to do it!"

I said, "Can't you even do it?"

Doctor Clark came running in there after, bedroom slippers and pajamas and [bathrobe] what do you call over it."

"What the hell's going on?"

I said, "Ask 'know it all' there. She said another eight hours and I said, I told her I was ready."

"And you didn't listen to her and you let her have her baby here?"

"Well," I said. "She told me eight hours so I don't know which one called you, but sure it wasn't her."

So he looked at her and they took off. Then they brought that scissors and stuff there. They tied the cord, cut it, and then they took the baby and went to clean it up. And then two more came.

I told Dr. Clark, "Would you mind waiting out of the bathroom for a while?" So he went out in the hallway. And I took the after birth out and put my support back on. I was standing there and two nurses came running in with a bed like this, a stretcher I guess.

I said, "What you doing?"

"We have to take you to the ward."

I said, "I walk over there."

"No, we can't let you."

"No!" I said, "I am going to walk. I am not sick. I just had a baby."

"But you can't do that."

I said, "Are you trying to tell me what to do?" I said, "I know what to do."

They looked at one another.

Dr. Clark said, "Let her go."

So he walked to the ward with me.

And my cousin, Tina Harper, she had a baby two days before me. And she said, "Oh you're here Margaret."

I said, "Yah, I had a little boy in the bathroom."

She said, "I know what you mean."

She was way in the far end.

I said, "How long have you been here?"

"I had a little boy too, two days ago." And she said, "Now they want to keep me here twelve days."

I said, "Twelve days?"

She said, "Yah."

I said, "I am not staying here twelve days."

"I wonder if your Doctor will let you out?"

"He'll let me go. He knows."

So I clean up and went back to bed. I had a good sleep.

I got up early in the morning and went and had a good shower, a nice warm shower, cleaned up good. At that time we had long hair and I was brushing my hair. Nurse come around again.

I said, "Leave me alone!" I said, "Why do you have to bother me." I said, "I am brushing my hair."

"You're not supposed to be sitting up."

I said, "Why? I had a baby."

She said. "You're supposed to be resting."

I said, "I don't want to rest. I have work to do. I have kids to look after at home."

She kinda grunted and looked at me. Tina went to the bathroom as soon as she left. She cleaned up and she went back and she was sitting there in her dressing gown. So anyways, she was brushing her hair.

I just got through brushing my hair when doctors were making their rounds. [Doctor] Clark came in.

Oh, everybody was just moaning and moaning after-pain or what they call it or I don't know what, doubling up and just about crying.

"Clark" I said, "I'd like to go home this afternoon. Will you have time?"

"Oh yes, I can drive you home,"

I said, "Okay, I'll be ready."

He said, "I'll bring you home."

So he had a few others but they were all in after-pains and he left. Quite awhile after, Tina's Doctor came in.

"What are you doing up, sitting in a chair?"

She said, "That's what I am doing. I am sitting up on a chair. Just got through having a shower and brushing my hair." She had her hair braided by then.

She said, "I want to go home to my kids today."

"You got to be here that many more days."

She said, "No! I am going home. I don't care what you say." She said, "I am going home."

"Do you think you can make it?"

She said, "Yes, I can make it."

She said, "I got kids at home. Nobody's going to look after them all that time." She said, "I am going home."

She put her support belt on too, right away.

"Well," he said, "When you're ready, tell the nurse to call for a cab for you."

The woman in the next bed to me was just moaning, oh after-pains.

"Don't you get after-pain, you?"

I said, "No, not when you move around. But laying down, that blood builds up in you and must do that." I said, "I don't go through that. I don't know what you are talking about, but I imagine that's what it is blocking up on you. If you move around," I said, "It will let loose and I don't think you…"

"Oh no, I am not supposed to sit up or sit down on the chair."

"Well," I said, "Listen to your doctor then." By that time Tina was ready. She was all fixed up for her Doctor when he comes around. But then she said, "I am not going to tell them. I already told them."

I said, "He said to tell them so they can call for a cab."

"Oh yes," she said, "That's right too."

That woman in the next bed, she was just moaning and she look at the woman next to her.

She said, "She's really going home, isn't she?"

"Wait for the Doctor." When they brought the baby, he looked at her and said, "Those God Darn Indians are like, what you call it? Cow moose."

"Yes," she said, "That's for sure."

So Tina looked at them and never said nothing.

And then the Dr. Clark came in and said, "Are you ready?

"Yes, I'll have to pick up the baby."

I was goin' out. I waved at Tina and I said, "Hey, cow moose, you'll be going home anytime now too. This old cow's leaving now."

She started laughing.

And everytime I see her when she was pregnant, I say, "Hey cow moose, are you pregnant?"

I tell her, "Not yet." So that's what we call one another when we are in the hospital at the same time, "cow moose."

And after that they started sending them home five days and then three days. If their husband do take them home, they have to lay around for so long or something. I think that's

all they do, sit and lay, sit and lay. Ah what a life to live. It was nice the old way when you're healthy. No problem. (Gagnon, 2001 [women only])

The Gold Watch

…Yes, I was in Lejac School with him and his sisters. We talked to one another but we didn't think we were going to get married. Nobody thought about marriage. That how it was. Every body knows everybody.

The Chief [and the] ones that's looking after you [they] say you got to marry, that one. That's the way it was with me.

It was Mother's brother's wife, Duncan Seymour's wife. When Mother was dying, she told Uncle to take me and look after me until I was old enough to be on my own kinda thing. So he took me and then his wife didn't want me around. So she spoke to the Chief and she arrange a marriage. And Uncle couldn't say anything 'cause she had all the say. She was from McLeod Lake. So was the Chief.

…About that watch, I guess James Boucher was going around. [He was] buying stuff from different Natives in different places. And he was in the Queen Charlotte Islands. And he stayed there a few days pickin' up stuff to take back

to Fort St. James. He was treated pretty well by the Chief and he thought, oh you know, "What can I give him? He's such a good guy."

So I guess in them days a gold watch with a chain meant so much to a person. I guess they're a pretty high price. So he took it off and told the Chief, when he is leaving, he said, "I don't know what to give you've been so good to me, you look after me, you fed me, and I got all the stuff I needed. So this is the only thing I can give you." And he put he put it in his hand and held his hand and kinda hugged him.

Well, the old Chief had nothing to give, him that could be more than that watch. So I guess he told him, "I got nothing to give."

"I don't want nothing else Chief."

"I got a young daughter. You gave me this watch. I gotta give you something in return in our way. So if you love her you can marry her". And that's how she got married to him there.

When I was still kicking around about my arranged marriage. [Granny Seymour] She said, "Don't worry. Look at my Mom they traded her for a watch. You got nothing to worry about." (Gagnon, 2004)

CHAPTER FOUR: *REFLECTIONS ON MARGARET'S RESILIENCE AND STRENGTH*

Call The Name Gently: Nechaaaaa-ko

(Jacqueline Baldwin 2003a, 39-40)

Margaret Gagnon, an aboriginal elder
told us a story her grandmother told her
about rivers:
"a river doesn't turn back on itself
it flows on
knowing the danger of re-visiting
old hurts"

Tuataras know this
older than dinosaurs
they are still alive on the Knights' Islands
in the South Pacific Ocean

their giant eyes can see for centuries

in 1952 without consulting Margaret's grandmother
or the river
the guys from Alcan drilled a hole
in a mountain
so they could turn water
from a sacred river back on itself

now they are at it again they who don't know
sacred
from a hole in the ground

first, let us dance a path to the river
sing water songs
ask forgiveness for old hurts
of the nineteen fifties

the Tuataras have been consulted
on pacific winds
through an indigo sky
they send

wildfire
to light our way.

Baldwin's poem encapsulates the essence of Margaret Gagnon's life philosophy. This philosophy contains a deep wisdom passed down to her from her Grandmother and the elders of the time.

After studying Gagnon's words and being engrossed in the many layers of meaning and the nuances held within the tightly woven circle of her narratives, I still feel an agitation, a burr if you will, under the saddle of this thesis that keeps irritating my subconscious and will not go away. Even at the final hour, this body of work keeps revealing itself in subtle whispers and I find myself trying to exhume the ghosts of bygone reflections and First Nations cosmology that are not part of my own culture or repertoire. I have made a final realization, an amazing turn, in fact a 360 degree turn that has brought me not only the long way home, but also brought me full circle through the narratives to a place of understanding.

My initial feeling of outrage upon learning about *The Poison Water* story and all the implications of holding that incident up like a mirror with which to view the dominant culture have not entirely subsided because I am ever aware of the human condition. However, unexpectedly, up through the middle of my incredulity surrounding this situation, came a

clear, strong message of hope and resilience that Margaret passes on through her stories. Nonetheless, it is hard for me to imagine a world untainted, without money as the God of all, a time when residential schools will not have cut so many familial and cultural ties, a time when abuse from these institutions will not cause much strife and subsequent intergenerational rage that ravages First Nations communities today.

The symbol of a river not turning back on itself means it is flowing onward. This is what Margaret and the Lheit-Lit'en community had to do to recover from the death of so many of their children. They had to continue on, not to turn back on the past and revisit the old hurts. Margaret metaphorically illustrates how she rejected taking on the characteristics of a victim. She thrived in her life because she always demanded her own space in relationship to the dominant culture thus insisting on agency in her life. This philosophy connected to flowing water enabled the community to move forward from a place of great grief and pain. A deep belief such as this provides a powerful message for First Nations communities today to take back their power. This brings to mind an intimate meeting with Margaret that I mentioned before when the camera was shut off and the gathering had dwindled to a few students still engrossed in the magic of story. Margaret

spoke of how devastated the community was over the sudden deaths of the children and how every day they went to the graves and wept upon them. Finally, women from Burns Lake were summoned to assist them in their immense grief. These visiting women cared for them and instructed them to bring all the children's belongings out of the houses and burn them. This old custom helped them move through their grief process. These visiting women reminded them of past devastations even greater than this loss, like the smallpox and the flu pandemics that wiped out whole First Nations communities. These accounts are contained in Margaret's stories. They were encouraged to take strength from the ancestors and to be mindful that it was possible to survive their grief and to continue living. They were able to draw upon this strength and look forward to the future filled with hope that they would one day be blessed with many more children.

For me it was initially a troubling discovery to find that there is no evidence to support the recording of *The Poison Water* by the prevailing contemporary culture of the time. One would assume that the bereavement of fifteen children would have had an enormous impact on a town the size of Prince George. I scoured the *Prince George Citizen* archives and came up with nothing. I tried to locate the coroner's reports from that year only to discover they had been

destroyed by a flood. It disturbed me why the poisoning of fifteen children in 1937 was not reported in the *Prince George Citizen*. I asked Margaret why this was and she replied candidly, "Well, that's just the way it was back then. When someone died you didn't just run and call the *Citizen*." (Gagnon, 2001)

The Huble Homestead/Giscome Portage on the Frazer River north of Prince George was sold to Josephine Walker Mitchell in 1929. Mitchell ran the property as a dude ranch of sorts in the summers from 1929 through the 1950's until she sold the property in 1957. (Virtual Museum Canada/Community Memories http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm. Retrieved April 22, 2005)

Perhaps if Margaret had followed the suggestion of the practicing physician and brought litigation against Mrs. Mitchell, the poisoning would have been reported in the paper and would have made the expected impact on society, one inherent in a tragedy so large. Margaret, however, makes it very clear that she was not seeking to gain financially from the loss of her children. By not seeking compensation and drawing attention to the heartbreaking event the story seems to have been omitted from local white history.

Both Granny Seymour and the "Old Chief" warned Gagnon (1995a) of the dangers and pitfalls of greed and the

effect money has on people. Obviously, Margaret has taken this warning to heart when she said:

> *The old man was watchin' us I guess and we thanked him again [for the dime]…. "Wait [he said] I gotta talk to you."*
> *So we turned around. And he reached into his pocket and I guess it was a silver dollar. It was big money…"Take a look at this," [he said]. "Don't let it ever turn your head in the future. This is going to be the god of all people in the future, they'll be no god. That's going to be our god. Don't ever let it turn your head."* (Gagnon, 1995a)

Margaret Gagnon acknowledges the hard aspects of Colonialism, although Colonialism is not a word Margaret uses herself. However, she considers herself fortunate to have learned English and other skills at Residential School. She does not appear to be as concerned about her people's waning tongue; instead, she is more concerned about the extent of genocide towards nature. Although the focus of this chapter is in part celebrating the resiliency and strength of Margaret's life, I feel I would be remiss if I did not highlight the glaring issues of ecocide and genocide. The very essence of *The Poison Water* narrative is one laced with environmental and human disaster.

Ward Churchill (1995, 90) defines the different degrees of genocide and for a substantive term of reference, I include the first and second degree of genocide. However, I focus on his definitions of the third and fourth degree of genocide.

Genocide in the third degree helps define the act of Mrs. Mitchell's carelessness and genocide in the fourth degree explains the residential school experience.

Churchill, (1995, 90) presents his degrees of genocide with examples as follows:

> *Genocide in the First* Degree would encompass instances where clear intent to commit genocide was evident, could be documented/ proven, and where the systematic/efficient focus of policy and resources toward accomplishment of genocide has occurred. Historical examples of this degree of genocide, which may serve to orient us to it, might be the undertaking by Nazi Germany, the USSR under Stalin, and much of the U.S. conduct towards its aboriginal population during the nineteenth century.
>
> *Genocide in the Second Degree* would encompass instances where genocide per se is unclear, but where genocide occurred while its perpetrator was engaged in otherwise criminal activities such as the waging of aggressive war, territorial expropriation, etc. Historical examples of this degree of genocide would include the U.S "effort" in Southeast Asia, the Turkish reduction of Armenians, the military strategy directed towards its Algerian colony by France during the late 1950's and Japanese policies in occupied China before and during the Second World War.
>
> *Genocide in the Third Degree* would encompass instances where genocidally specific intent is probably lacking, and where the perpetrator is not otherwise engaging in activities judged to be illegal, but - through recklessness, insensitivity, or some combination - the perpetrator allows genocide to occur as an "inevitable by-product" of its national activities (water diversion mineral extraction, and other forms of majority group "development" come immediately to mind as the possible generative processes in this regard). Historically examples of this sort of genocide are aspects of forced collectivization in China, some elements of the Khmer Rouge "autogenocide" in Kampuchea, much of the nineteenth-century Australian and New Zealand policies

> towards their aboriginal populations, and Vietnamese practices regarding the so-called Montagnard population of the Annamese Cordillera.
>
> *Genocide in the Fourth Degree*, which should be viewed as corresponding to manslaughter rather than murder, would accommodate instances where intent, other forms of criminality, and reckless insensitivity are all unclear or lacking, but where genocide nonetheless occurs. Such cases, where poor (or arrogant) judgement is at issue rather than overt maliciousness, might seem fewer than the other three categories, but include U.S. assimilation and termination programs directed at American Indians ("for their own good")in the twentieth century, certain Arab "development" efforts extended at the South Sahara Bedouins, aspects of the Soviet collectivization experience, and so on. (Churchill, 1995, 90)

Using Churchill's theory of genocide in the third degree *The Poison Water* would definitely fall into this category. A more contemporary example of this occurrence would be Anastasia Shkilnyk's (1985) account of environmental pollution affecting an Ojibwa community described in A Poison Stronger than Love would qualify as such an act, as well as host of other environmental disasters. Shkilnyk's describes the Grassy Narrows incident where thousands of pounds of methyl mercury were disposed of by dumping them into the network of lakes and rivers surrounding the Grassy Narrows reserve in Ontario, intentionally polluting the whole area. This would also be a case of Genocide in the Third Degree. It was suspected but never proved that the mercury had found its way into living human tissue of Grassy Narrows people. The dumping of methyl

mercury meant that the Grassy Narrows people were already suffering from the effects of the poison, or were doomed to wait for months, years, even generations, to learn whether harm would yet be done to them or their off spring. As if this was not enough, the contamination of the waterways created a multitude of economic and spiritual problems. (Shkilnyk 1995 ixiii) Grassy Narrows is, however, only one of many such environmental disasters that not only destroy the environment but also endanger human life.

In India for example, contaminated drinking water is a common occurrence. Mahasweta Devi (1995, 123) writes about yet another environmentally disastrous situation:

> ...The rain fell on the fields and fallow lands [that had been sprayed with insecticides] on the hillside and the poisonous water flowed into the wells they had dug...
>
> ...They died from drinking that very water. The fleshy tuber of the Khajra is their chief hope. The roots sucked up that water. They died eating the fleshy tubers. (Devi 1995, 123)

These types of environmental disasters are frequent and are the consequences of industry, they, obviously manifest themselves universally. Knudtson and Suzuki (1993) confirm:

> The ecological impact of industrial civilization and the sheer weight of human numbers is now global and is now changing the biosphere with frightening speed. It is clear that major problems such as global warming, ozone depletion, species extinction, and world wide toxic pollutants will not be solved in the long run by perpetuating the current world view and applying band

> aids such as tax levies, greater efficiency, and recycling.(Knudtson and Suzuki (1993, xxxv)

Genocide rears its ugly head in many shapes and forms and by today's standards, just for the act of blocking off a stream, the rancher, Mrs. Mitchell, could be criminally charged. Mrs. Mitchell's act of putting a toxic chemical, such as creosote, into a natural water source should be viewed as a gruesome act, an environmental disaster. We presume that from Mrs. Mitchell's point of view, she was only doing something to help the cattle and thereby supporting her own business.

Having presented the third and fourth degrees of genocide according to Churchill, I will show how these notions do not connect with how Margaret views the dominant culture. There were times while studying Margaret's words that I could not help wondering if she had not begun to identify somewhat with the dominant culture's agenda. However, after a closer examination I discovered that Margaret's traditional upbringing really did fortify her against the pitfalls of being swayed by the influences around her. Her Granny's sage and timely advice was also very practical and non-judgmental. She said for instance:

> *"Once you start school you're going to live with one another, care for one another. Don't think 'oh this one is that one' and 'that one came from there.' We're all God's' children. We're put on earth to get along." (Gagnon, 1995a)*

The fourth level of genocide examined by Churchill addresses the cultural genocide that Residential Schools put into operation. Gagnon's residential school experience was not however genocidal in nature, as it did not destroy her strong conviction to resist making greed her God, nor did she lose her culture and language.

Margaret did not view her experience at residential school as a negative one. She believes it was a tremendous opportunity for learning skills to keep her and her family alive. She states:

> *I appreciate that Residential School. That was the best thing that happened to me after my mother died. I knew my language I knew everything I had to do in the line of food and sewing. I learned all those things at home. And when I got to Residential School they taught me how to can food and cook different ways from what we're used to. And then the sewing and [em]broidery work, crochet, knitting. Fixing up clothes for the little ones… (Gagnon, 1995a)*

However, not all residential school experiences were as pleasant and appreciated as was Margaret's. Conversely, most of the literature on Residential Schools deals with people who were treated even more harshly that either Margaret or Mary.

Mary John and Margaret Gagnon were distant cousins. They both knew Granny Seymour, and yet they had two quite different residential school experiences. Moran writes from Mary John's point of view:

> …I was always homesick.
> …"I am always hungry," said Mary Sutherland.
> We did not say this in our own language, but in the halting English, which we were slowly learning. The nuns and the priest who was the principal had warned us all that it was forbidden to speak the Indian language, and if we broke this rule, we little savages would never learn a civilized language! We were deathly afraid of being whipped. Even when we were alone, Mary and I tried to remember to speak in the new language. We saw so many pupils whipped for speaking their Native language or running away or stealing food. The boys were thrashed for speaking to the girls, and the girls were thrashed for writing notes to the boys.
>
> Mary and I were terrified when we saw someone being whipped. We said to each other - in English - "This is not a thing our parents do to us."…I was always hungry. I missed the roast moose, the dried beaver meat, the fish fresh from a frying pan, the warm bread and bannock and berries. Oh how I missed the food I use to have in my own home!
>
> At school it was porridge, porridge, porridge, and if it wasn't that, it was boiled barley or beans, and thick slice of bread spread with lard. Weeks went by without a taste of meat or fish.
>
> Such things as sugar or butter or jam only appeared on our tables on feast days, and sometimes not even then. A few times I would catch the smell of roasting meat coming from the nun's dining room and I couldn't help myself - I would follow that smell to the very door. …I found I wanted to learn. I liked to read; I even liked arithmetic and spelling. Sometimes I found myself wishing that we did more studying. I said this once to an older girl. "I wish," I whispered, "That we were learning more things out of books." I remember that she looked at me as if I was crazy… (Moran, 1988, 53-54)

The two separate accounts of Margaret and Mary John shed some light on how two Carrier women, who were of the same generation, had such different experiences at the same residential school. The difference doubtless relates to, in

part, the fact that Mary John went to Lejac for many years and from a young age, while Margaret Gagnon attended only for six months when she was a teenager. Margaret Gagnon's experience was short, sweet, and useful; Mary John's stay was longer but she too remained strong in her language and cultural knowledge and she was not physically or sexually abused. The real difficulty is for students of residential school who were abused and lost their language and self-esteem. Margaret is a strong example of how to avoid being a victim. This is an attitude that runs deeply embedded within Margaret's psyche and enables her to resist the dominant culture's carefully laid assimilation tactics.

It would be heartening to think that the world has changed since *The Poison Water* incident took place, but in many areas, better treatment of First Nations people and of the environment has been relatively slow. The notion of looking after the environment still takes second place to industry and profit. It was not until 1970 that the government of Canada recognized the need for better control and environmental management of our water systems by passing the Canada Water Act. A year later, the Department (Ministry) of Environment was opened; it is now called the Ministry of Water, Land & Air Protection. (www.ec.gc.ca/water/en/policy/e-policyhtm 2002-03-19). This was only after a huge amount of

degradation to both the water and the environment had transpired by not following First Nations concerns with connections to water and to Mother Earth. Instead, previously, there were no government restrictions and certainly no consultation process was in place with First Nations, thus allowing those seeking the almighty dollar to mine, log, and otherwise treat the earth without due concern.

It becomes evident how the environment and First Nations people were both held equally in low esteem. On December 17, 1801, Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours, wrote a letter to Thomas Jefferson stating:

> The inhabitants of your country districts regard - wrongfully, it is true - Indians and forests as natural enemies which must be exterminated by fire and sword and brandy, in order that they may seize their territory. They regard themselves, and their posterity, as collateral heirs to all the magnificent portion of land which God has created from Cumberland and Ohio to the Pacific Ocean. (Churchill, 1995, 106)

It is not difficult to speculate on what the hegemonic mind set was at that time. This body of generally held views seemed to have come somewhat to fruition when, a hundred years later, in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt said:

> Of course our whole national history has been one of expansion…. That the barbarians recede or are conquered, with the attendant in fact that peace follows their retrogression or conquest, is due solely to the power of the mighty civilized races which have not lost their fighting instinct, and which by their expansion are gradually bringing peace into the red wastes where the

> barbarian peoples of the world hold sway. (Churchill, 1995, 107)

Roosevelt uses strong language. He represents the American people's view that First Nations people had started to conform to the colonizers power. The mindset in Canada at this time was not very far removed from south of the border.

Daniel Francis (1992, 200) explains the fundamental aim of the Indian Act was to "assimilate Native people to the Canadian mainstream." He goes on to say that, Canadians realized how costly the American process of waging war against First Nation people was in terms of money and lives. Therefore, instead of trying to eliminate the Indians they decided to try to eliminate the Indian way of life. This would be done by several means education and training whereby the Red Man would attain civilization. Francis asserts, "Most White Canadians believed that Indians were doomed to disappear any way. Assimilation was a policy intended to preserve Indians as individuals by destroying them as people." (Francis 1992, 201)

Ceila Haig-Brown (1988, 29) explains the context of how Residential School policies were implemented in Canada. Initially the ideas of a report written by Egerton Ryerson formed the basis for the future direction of government assimilation policies. Allison Prentice and Susan Houston

(quoted in Haig Brown 1988, 28) confirms the colonizers agenda:

> Clearly expressed is the perception of superiority of the European culture, the need "…to raise them [the Indians] to the level of the whites," and the ever-increasing pressure to take control of the land out of the Indian hands. At the same time the contradictory need to isolate Indians from the evil influences of white society is acknowledged. The general recommendations of the report were that Indians remain under the control of the Crown rather than the provincial authority, the efforts to Christianize the Indians and settle them in communities be continued, and finally that schools, preferably manual ones, be established under the guidance of missionaries.(Prentice and Houston quoted in Haig Brown 1988, 28)

Keep in mind that this time span is not far removed from when Margaret was born, in 1914, and the national vision and thrust of the day in Canada was the same as the United States; one of settlement and expansion. This is not a focus that is compatible with First Nations cosmology and worldview. First Nations people view the parts and process of the world and the universe with varying degrees of sacredness, hence the term "sacred ecology." This is a broad term, rich with aboriginal cosmology and wisdom that has always been known and is still waiting to be recognized and witnessed everywhere.

Margaret Gagnon's story *The Poison Water* could have taken place anywhere in Canada. Imagine if you will, how different the scenario would have been, had a catastrophe of such proportions taken place in the 'white' community in 1937. What

if fifteen 'white loggers' had been accidentally poisoned while working in the bush? Imagine the panic and disbelief. Visualize the intense drama that would have ensued! Fifteen families touched by the tragedy, fifteen coffins all in a row. There would have been, undoubtedly, inquests, law suits, charges laid, church and government support for the victims' families, perhaps a commemorative cairn in the park, perhaps a day set aside to acknowledge the community's loss and, unquestionably, somewhere, someone would have written about it in the newspaper. The bereaved families of the Lheit-Lit'en community were left alone to cope with the haunting realities of the carnage of their children and suffered the indignity of the devastation of their loss being unrecognised, the names forgotten, whether they noticed or not.

Since colonization, First Nations people have been marginalized and unable to participate in prevailing Canadian culture, therefore First Nations people are largely absent from history. Adams (1995) maintains because of colonization, First Nations people:

> …are not allowed a valid interpretation of their history, because the conquered do not write their own history, they must endure a history that shames them, destroys their confidence, and causes them to reject their heritage. Those in power command the present and shape the future by controlling the past, particularly for natives. A fact of imperialism is that it systematically denies native people a dignified history. (Adams, 1995, 43)

Yet lacking in confidence is not a way one would describe Margaret. On the contrary, she radiates a self-assurance that attests to the strong foundation that her traditional upbringing provided her. Margaret never rejected the philosophy of those ways. She has continued to live by the basic principals that were handed down to her. Throughout this study the only time I can recall Margaret really displaying genuine anger is in her recounting her hospital childbirth experience when she was not treated with dignity and respect by the nurses. At this point in her life, Margaret was confident about the intricacies of childbirth and yet the nurses did not validate or acknowledge her life experience. According to Margaret, they didn't believe her when she told them the baby was soon to present itself. They even went so far as to reprimand her for finding her own traditional, albeit innovative, method of childbirth within the hospital setting. After all these years this is a very real point of contention with her. When she talked about this experience sparks flew from her eyes. The reference to 'cow moose' was derogatory indeed. This incident is wonderful testament to Margaret's strength as well as her wicked sense of humour, as Margaret sardonically turned this into a long-standing joke with her cousin Tina Harper. (Gagnon, 2001) This unpleasant incident suggests how deep-seated the racist mindset was and

still is on many levels towards First Nations people. Yet Margaret is proud of her ability to give birth without the pain she saw non-Native women suffer, even after birth.

The Poison Water incident was not significant enough to appear in the local newspaper. This illustrates how "'whitestream' supremacy endures as the tightly woven fabric of Canadian institutions and includes churches, schools and the courts." (Denis, 1997, 13) Denis uses the term "whitestream" to illustrate that "white" is far from being simply Caucasian in socio-demographic, economic, and cultural terms. Denis examines the repercussions of racialization and the social and racialized position that both leaders and colonizers hold that allows them to separate themselves from First Nations people. The "white stream" concept also permits a broader perspective and a heightened awareness of "norms" within First Nations communities and dominant society, thus allowing a closer contemplation of how superior hegemonies evolve and take root. (Ibid.)

Edward Said articulates that Western Empires are driven by the need for expansion and profit and hope of more profit, stating that it

> … was the ongoing inertia, the investment in already ongoing enterprises, traditions, and the market or institutional forces that kept the enterprises going.

> But there is more than that to imperialism and colonialism. There was commitment to them over and above profit, a commitment in constant circulation and recirculation, which on the one hand allowed decent men and woman to accept the notion that distant territories and their native peoples should be subjugated, and then on the other, replenished metropolitan energies so that these decent people could think of the imperium as a protracted, almost metaphysical obligation to rule, subordinate, inferior or less advanced peoples. (Said, 1993, 10)

Frantz Fanon speaks to the very nature of the dominant society; one he believes is based in an ancient religious doctrine whose foundation considers the separation of matter and spirit. He goes on to say that the way the natives challenge the colonial world is not, as he puts it,

> [a] treatise on the universal, but the untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute. The colonial world is a Manichean world. It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, which is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation, the settlers paint the native as a sort of quintessence of evil. (Fanon, 1963, 41)

When Europeans discovered that the basic features and values of aboriginal societies were so unlike their own, it raised the possibility there could be other ways of existing apart from Christianity. This, however, was not a concept that the European colonizers accepted. Instead of learning about the way the First Nations people lived in this new found land, those holding the power of weapons and book knowledge chose to recreate the ways of Europe in North America. The projection

of their own ways on the new continent was formulated first by the transformation of people. This conversion took place by ripping children from their natural element and families and placing them in Church-run institutions.

From the moment of its inception, in contradiction with the Christian philosophy, the residential school incorporated cultural genocide, cloaked in unethical practices and dishonesty. This utilization of unethical practice was incorporated in both intentional and inadvertent forms.

Prentice and Houston (quoted in Haig-Brown 1988, 29) point out how cultural oppression was written into policy.

> Their education must consist not merely of the training of the mind, but weaning from the habits and feelings of their ancestors, and the acquirements of the language, arts and customs of civilized life. (Ibid.)

Kevin Annett reveals the disturbing genocidal language in policy when he noted:

> Early in the residential school era, the Indian Affairs Superintendent Duncan Campbell Scott outlined the purpose of the residential schools as thus "to kill the Indian within the Indian." Such violent language was not accidental, nor inaccurate, for it legitimated and encouraged an "open season" on native people across Canada. (Annett, 2001, 12)

The residential school concept is not only a North American construct as colonizers implemented them globally. Haig-Brown mentions meeting a group of Coorgs indigenous to

India. She was amazed that within such a diverse group, a familiar and broad ranging set of themes began to emerge:

> The similarities between modern life among the Coorgs and among North American Native people were eerie: alcoholism, suicide, lack of economic self-sufficiency, racism, dependency…and residential schools that the Coorgs are still forced to send their children to. (Haig-Brown, 1988, 15)

These distinct patterns of placing First Nations people at a disadvantage in every socio and economic category in our society should be cause for alarm. However, the Truth Commission on Genocide in Canada (2001) revealed:

> Christian European culture in Canada still sees nothing fundamentally wrong with its invasion and occupation of the New World and its destruction of aboriginal societies; it simply regrets the "excesses" of that process. No wing within any of the mainline Canadian churches is challenging the Christian missionary effort per say, merely aspects of it, such as the sadism of particular school staff, or the "cultural insensitivity" of missionaries to First Nations. (Annett, 2001, 24)

The genocidal assault on aboriginals was not only physical but spiritual as well. This was the European culture wishing to own every aspect of the Indians' life: the heart, soul and mind. The Indians they didn't kill they wanted to turn into third class imitations of themselves. (Arnett, 2001, 25)

Howard Adams examines Eurocentric history as a political interpretation of the world based on Christianity. Smugly, Christianity holds within it the power of practicing a blind

confidence that they are superior, and thus it is their right to exploit and profit from this Western European notion. Adams expresses his view thusly:

> Eurocentric history embraces the myths of Indian inferiority, a myth that encourages Aboriginals' complacency in their own oppression. Although white historians claim that their versions of history are objective and correct, their perspectives are in fact biased and the result of tunnel vision. According to these historians, Indians, Métis and Inuit have no history because almost nothing is known about them before European conquest. Eurocentric historians aggressively seized Native intellectual space and claimed it as their own in much the same way as imperialists seized and occupied Native land. This displacement does not allow for the recognition of Aboriginal thought and history. (Adams, 1995, 26)

The narrative of *The Poison Water,* as told by Margaret, is in fact a catastrophe of significant proportions, and yet it is not a component of local history. However, this situation is the norm rather than the exception. Histories, as Furniss points out, are only "commemorating the arrival of early non-Native explorers, settlers, missionaries, and industries in the remote regions of Canada" (Furniss 1997, 7). These histories are then presented in the public realm, through local museums, media, film industries, curricula, religious institutions, and political agendas which saturate the every day world of the non-Native Canadians who encounter these narratives everywhere (Ibid.).

Patricia Monture-Angus criticizes the collective memory loss of the dominant culture and suggests the "biggest loss is the other half of the duo-vision we now know to be Canada" (Monture-Angus, 1995, 103). If you loose half of the collective memory, the Native half, you have lost a lot.

Himani Banerji believes that this silencing is salient in colonialism and within "silence there are other words speaking of gaps, absences, being 'hidden in history,' of being organized out of social space or discourse, or into apathy, becoming 'a problem without a name'" (Banerji, 1995, 49). How could history possibly tell the truth of the past when it contains such greed, control, displacement and genocide?

Besides the implicit genocide and the resilience and strength of Margaret Gagnon and First Nations people, *The Poison Water story* also presents a lesson leading to deeper, holistic understanding of what steps need to be taken to preserve the future of this earth. Right now, we are at a point where Mother Earth is so nearly terminally diseased that we need to reverse the destruction. This is something Margaret Gagnon also mentions; nothing is sacred any more with the poisoning of the grass and willows (Gagnon, 1995a).

Margaret's concerns echo those of an eco-feminist. For example, Starhawk (1990, 82) examines ecological issues by addressing water concerns like acid rain and ground water

pollution. She argues: "We need to stop the pollution of the ocean, the oil drilling off the coast, the depletion of the fisheries and the killing of whales" (Ibid.). However, in order to reclaim the earth, Starhawk argues, "Environmental issues cannot be intelligently approached without the perspectives of women, the poor, and those who come from other parts of the globe, as well as those of all races and cultural backgrounds" (Ibid.).

One of the advantages of seeing environmental issues as global is that they are then rapidly transformed into social justice issues. Starhawk paints a grim picture with sobering statistics. "It is estimated that there are four pesticide poisonings a minute, three-fourths of them in the Third World" (Ibid.).

Like Margaret Gagnon, Jacqueline Baldwin, in her poem *Philosophy and Longing,* refers to this particular principle of ploughing over the environment for profit as "greed-speak" and believes this is what propels humanity to abuse the earth saying,

> We manage forests by clear-cutting them we manage oceans by mining them we manage agriculture by growing food full to the brim with invisible poisons all in the holy name of profit. (Baldwin, 1997, 16)

Knutson and Suzuki, like the "Old Chief," have observed that within dominant western culture we "regard property,

ownership, possessions, and wealth as natural goals and rights of all citizens" (Knutson and Suzuki, 1992, xxvi-xxvii). The focus of the dominant culture is greed and expansion.

Gagnon's narratives are laced with warnings about the pitfalls of succumbing to the dominant culture's ideals. Gagnon reiterates Granny Seymour's beliefs about possessing more than necessary.

Granny Seymour said to Margaret:

> *"You don't talk about own. You don't own anything on this earth. You're put on this earth to live and you use the ground right for your food. You sweat before you get something to eat…. A little bit of ground that you might own when you die that ground is where they put you. You came from the ground and you turn back to it. Thirty forty years from now even your hair isn't there anymore. You turn back into dirt that's the way it should be. That's the longest time you hold and you can say you hold that little piece of property, but it's not yours to stay. Even though it yours to pass it on."* (Gagnon, 1995a)

Because of colonization, the "shared connectedness" has become a thinning and shredded strand in the unravelling of cultural identity. The colonizers have impinged themselves upon every thread of tribal life, and upon the environment. Yet Margaret has remained true to Granny Seymour and the Old Chief's teachings

Roger Dunsmore believes the power of Native people to share one consciousness comes from the environment, stating:

> …to feel what the others are feeling in the chest and the belly goes far beyond the family and the clan. It extends to every aspect of the environment with in which the people live, to the rocks and the winds. Such perspectives rest I believe, in the pervasive experience and concept of the primal value of relatedness. To be successfully human, both individually and communally, is "to plunge purposefully deeper in the relatedness of all things." (Dunsmore, 1997, 12)

Margaret Gagnon would like to keep the connection to the environment and the creator a strong one. She speaks about the war and the damage to the environment as the consequences of jealousy and greed:

> *"…The governments are all jealous of one another, fighting one another for one to rule the world. They don't think about the Creator. The Creator rules the world. Not people like us….In the year ahead, you're going to be slowly closed in. You are not going to have your freedom. You are going to be told when to drink the water. Your going to be told what to fish, you're going to be told how many rabbits or grouse you can kill and where to get as many as you want now."…that's what's happening, floods, tornadoes, everything they predicted is happening. There is one more that we are supposed to be facing, starvation. I think this is where we are headed because the animals are slowly going because they are poisoned too by the grass they eat…This drug and alcohol's getting to them. And there is no way we can stop it. We've tried different way. Only this is to get back to their own language because our own language means a lot, word by word…."* (Gagnon, 1993)

Here Margaret does speak about the importance of language. She makes the connection between language, culture and healing. Her use of the phrase "word by word" is impressive. Margaret Gagnon does not use the actual words "ecocide" or "genocide," but she does understand and use the

concept. She believes the Elder's prophecies are coming true and marvelled at how they could not read and write, yet they would go out into the bush alone and meditate and pray and come back and tell them what was in store for the future. (Ibid.)

As always, genocide stands only to serve the colonizing powers. It permits the accumulation of wealth necessary for industrial development from the labour and lands of subject peoples. It renders powerless a large number of potential enemies and minorities, who the people of the colonizing cultures felt and feel superior to (Davis and Zannis, 1973, 1).

Alvin Josephy et al(1993, 17) notes the calculations by demographers that show that by the seventeenth century more than fifty million Natives of North and South America had disappeared as a result of war, disease, enslavement, and the careless or intentional harshness of some Europeans, making this, by far, history's greatest holocaust.

The damage continues. Dara Culhane Speck presents a gap analysis that demonstrates one aspect of the disparities between the dominant culture and First Nations people. This is a very typical example of the traumatic impact of colonization on First Nations people. Specks' (1987) research shows:

> …We found from our files [from Alert Bay] that in two years, from January '77 to January '79, one white man died. He had cancer.
>
> 44 Indians died.
>
> The white man came from a population of approximately 600, the 44 Indians came from a population of approximately 1200, …one white man in 600 means that there should have been two Indian deaths. Why 44?
>
> 1 did die from cancer
> 8 did die of old age
> 1 was a premature infant
> 2 were small babies
> 2 were young children one of which died of malnutrition
> 1 died from a ruptured appendix, an eleven -year old boy
> 1 died from the effects of T.B.
> 1 died of pneumonia
> 1 from a blood condition
> 1 from a brain infection
> 2 died from heart attacks
> 1 was a mental defective
> 1 died from a stroke
> …4 between 23 and 46 drowned while under the influence of alcohol
> 3 aspirated while drunk they were 26, 28, 34
> 5 between the ages of 57 and 69 died of liver failure due to alcohol poisoning.
>
> 2 were murdered while drunk - stabbed to death
>
> 3 young adults killed themselves while under the influence of alcohol. (Speck 1987, 53)

The extent of these less blatant forms of genocide casts a long dark shadow over every aspect of colonization and globalization. Davis and Zannis (1973, 58) believe "Colonization is predatory and parasitic in nature. It drains not only the material wealth it seeks, but sucks the life-blood from host peoples."

Margaret's narrative gives voice to her struggle as a woman, but also sheds light on her precarious path in the multi-faceted, cross-cultural world she lives in. There is no mistaking her strength, or her prevailing, solid, traditional grounding.

Even though the Doctor wanted to press charges against Mrs. Mitchell for *The Poison Water*, Margaret Gagnon and the Lheit-Lit'en community did not. Margaret explains:

> *And then the doctor, oh he was so upset. He's got to go to court sue this old lady for everything she's got. But what good is money? That's when the chief said, "He's going to get a lawyer and everybody the best lawyers they can find and he's going to fight that case that Mrs. Mitchell lose everything she's got." But he said, "I am not tellin' you what to do. Make up your own mind." And then when he came he brought that up, "You can take her for every penny she's got."*
>
> *I said, "Doctor, not me, my kids are gone there's no money ever bring them back. They're finished and I am not selling my children's dead bodies for money." I said, "No." So, I left and the mothers of the other kids they followed me out. They said, "Can't do it…" (Gagnon, 1997)*

Yes, she chose to eclipse *The Poison Water* story from the newspaper and courtrooms of Prince George. The almighty dollar may be the "whitestream" God, but Margaret Gagnon never allowed it to be her God, her goal.

Margaret lives by her principles. She lives by the wisdom of her Granny; she heeds the Old Chief who warned her that the almighty dollar was going to become the God of all people. She lives by the principle of looking after the land, looking

after her family, and not chasing money. She embodies her Granny's words, "Don't fall for the other side." "Love one another, respect one another the way you want to be respected and share with one anther. Greed and jealousy is deadly. It sheds blood."(Gagnon, 1995a)

I now see Margaret's stories as showing the strengths and resiliency she embodies from the wisdom of her Dakelh/Carrier people which has carried her and her people through generations of difficult genocidal experience. In closing, I offer you an expression of wisdom and strength about stories offered by Thomas King. May we listen to Margaret Gagnon's story.

> Take it. [Margaret's story] It's yours. Do with it what you will. Tell it to your friends. Turn it into a television movie. (29) Make it a topic of a discussion group at a scholarly conference. Put it on the web. (60) Tell it to your children. Turn it into a play. Cry over it. Get angry over it. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now. (King 2003, 151)

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