

**Family of Louisa Oyee:
A Matriarch in the Nisga'a Nation**

Sally-Ann Nyce

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Notice

The final report will be housed with the writer, *Simo'ogit Baxk'ap* (current holder and future holders of the name), Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a, the Nisga'a Lisims Government, and the Gitwinksihlkw Village Government. Descendents of Louisa Oyee will have permission to view the final project. Access to it from the general public will be limited and only upon request from the writer or *Simo'ogit Baxk'ap*.

Abstract

The purpose of this research project is to record the genealogy of Louisa *Oyee*. Louisa was the matriarch in the House of *Baxk'ap* in the community of Gitwinksihlkw. She was a member of the Nisga'a Nation. Louisa was one of the most important historical figures in this small community. Along with the genealogy, I collected data, photos and stories that tie this family together. As the Nisga'a follow a matrilineal descent, one will see how the House is structured. The genealogies will also show the blood connections to the other Houses that belong to the four communities of the Nisga'a.

The final report will be housed with the writer, *Simo'ogit Baxk'ap* (current holder and future holders of the name), Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a, the Nisga'a Lisims Government, and the Gitwinksihlkw Village Government. Descendents of Louisa *Oyee* will have permission to view the final project. Access to it from the general public will be limited and only upon request from the writer or *Simo'ogit Baxk'ap*.

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T'ooyaksiy nisim.

Chapter One

Introduction

I have been fascinated by the genealogies of the Nisga'a for a long time – since I married into a Nisga'a family and began to learn the relationship system. It is with enormous pride that I now attempt to formulate the family tree of a great matriarch. Her name was Louisa *Oyee*. She was a “princess” in the Wolf tribe in the House of *Baxk'ap* and a member of the Nisga'a Nation. In the late 19th century she was one of the only women left to keep the family line of this House alive, a matter of crucial importance as the Nisga'a are a matrilineal society and the future of each house depends on the children of the woman's house for its perpetuation. From her two marriages, she left a legacy of people from whom many people today are descended.

The Nisga'a people live in northwestern British Columbia along the banks of the Nass River. The Nisga'a society is divided into four separate tribes/clans that are called a *pdeek*. These are the *Laxgibuu* (Wolf), the *Ganada* (Raven), the *Laxsgiik* (Eagle) or *Lax Ts'imilx* (Beaver) and the *Gisk'aast* (Killer whale). The Nisga'a follows a system of matrilineal descent in which every child becomes a member of their mother's *pdeek*. The father's *pdeek* are an important part of your life and I will show some of the connections which link the families together. They are a proud people and they hold their values and traditions very close. The values and traditions are passed down the generations through each family.

Each tribe is divided into a *Wilp* (House) which is governed by its *Sim'oogit* (Chief) and *Sigidimnak'* (Matriarch). The *wilp* may have several families within it and they have

connections with their paternal relatives as alliances to traditional territories and customs. Members of a *wilp* may have several alliances with different tribes as each individual has connections to their paternal relatives. An example of this is that of my children. We belong to *Baxk'ap's wilp* which is *Laxgibuu*, but their father is *Lax Ts'imilx*, so they have a connection with their father's *wilp*. My daughter's partner is a *Killer whale* and her children are connected to his *wilp*. I will attempt to explain in future chapters how this works in both marriage and death practices of the Nisga'a.

It is difficult tracing the family tree further back than Louisa *Oyee* for two reasons. First, the Nisga'a have an oral society, and keeping written records of births, marriages and deaths was not a part of the traditional ways. This sort of information was recorded orally and passed down through the generations this way. Today with the loss of many elders, this information is in danger of being forgotten. In the northwest, written documentation did not begin until the arrival of the missionaries and people like the Hudson's Bay traders. The second difficulty is that Nisga'a names are inherited within the matrilineal line and the same names may recur over and over in succeeding generations. Therefore it can be difficult to disentangle information about individuals who held the same name in different generations unless information in a story dates the events and links it to a specific individual.

The advent of outsiders increased inter-marriages within the North West First Nations. Non-native men of many nationalities traveling in and out of the Nass Valley added to this. It was not uncommon for a woman to be "married" to a trader, surveyor or fisherman, although such unions may not have been formally registered. Beginning as early as the 1860's through to the 1900's, people began to travel to southern communities such as Victoria, and even further

south across the border into the state of Washington. These travels brought people into contact with more outsiders, and there were more unions that may not have been registered.

Sometime between the years of 1880 through 1886 Louisa found herself leaving her traditional home territory and heading south to Victoria. People say that she became the “wife” of Robert Moore, a non-native man who possibly was working for a surveyor in the Nass. They had three sons and a daughter and I have found no record of this marriage. Louisa *Oyee* was eventually brought back to the Nass in about 1887-88 along with three sons and was “married” possibly by a Nisga’a ceremony to a *Gisk’aast Sim’oogit*, Peter Williams. Again, I have not found a record of this marriage. Peter was living in Louisa’s home village but may have been from the Gitksan Nation. From this relationship came two daughters, who were the women who kept the family growing once again among the *wilp* of *Baxk’ap*. There are many stories of these marriages and I will attempt to capture the essence of this era in my research for family to read. There is some documentation that will provide some validity to the stories, but corroborating documentation has been the struggle in doing this research.

In this project, I have not only portrayed the genealogies, but have tried to show how names were passed on and how a matrilineal line was held. Adoption happened between families when a woman was not producing girls to carry on the line. There are several situations when this happened with the two daughters of Louisa. This arrangement was made between the families and often no record was kept to verify the fact, but I have seen it noted in Church baptism records. This form of cultural adoption happened fairly often. Another type of adoption was when a *Sim’oogit* “adopted” a person into his *pdeek* and gave that individual

the same rights and responsibilities as his own family. Arranged marriages were also very common, as late as the 1950's. The family connections were important to maintain the traditional territories as well as the customs.

There are documents that can be referenced that will be of interest. I have collected as many birth, baptismal, marriage, death and burial records as possible to show this history.

Photographs are also valuable documents. I know that there were many natural disasters such as floods that caused the loss of much documentation, but people still have a wealth of information sitting in boxes, trunks and albums that they are willing to share. It is through meeting with family members that I have been working to bring back the memories of this family.

As the *wilp* of *Baxk'ap* is quite small now, I hope to compile important information that the existing family members can cherish and use: whom they are related to, their traditional names that were passed on and who their paternal relatives are. This type of knowledge can become critical in a society where oral traditions are becoming less utilized. For the younger generations I feel it is important that this information be documented so that the culture and traditions remain intact.

Chapter Two

Methodologies

Collecting information on Louisa *Oyee* and her descendants has been done through a mix of interviews and archival research. There are benefits and limitations with the use of each method which I will discuss in this chapter.

Oral history is the most reliable source of data and I have spoken to many elders from within the family. This is crucial as the elders are getting older and some memories are fading and their stories add to the value of this compilation. Without the memories of these people, the family history could only be based on what the non-native people have documented in written materials, and these are not always precise. Many marriage records, for instance, are inaccurate as young women sometimes lied about their age so that they could marry. Parents' names were often left off the record; dates were estimated for deaths because the Indian Agent only came through two or three times a year. Often documents list the parents' *Nisga'a* names only.

As I developed the family tree of Louisa *Oyee*, I continued to struggle with the issue of research ethics. Being an adopted member of the *wilp* of *Baxk'ap*, and following the customs of a matrilineal society, I worked with members of this *wilp* with their support. I attempted to stay within the parameters of the female line only, but this did not give a complete picture of who this family really is. From those who have passed on I may be within appropriate bounds, but there are many, many living descendants in this family. It is an ethical dilemma

that must be thought out carefully with the appropriate resources involved as to whether to include the other *pdeek* without first asking their permission.

One of best ways I found of gathering documentation was through the BC Archives in Victoria. "There are three public areas in the Archives – the Main Reference Room; - the Photographic and Visual Reference Area; - The Map Reference Room."¹ They have a Vital Statistic section on their web site that you can use to find birth, baptism, marriage and death records. If you can get to the BC Archives in person, or to a public library holding the microfilms, you can search through the microfilms and print out copies of these records. I have found this very valuable data as it adds to the credibility of the information in that one can compare the oral to the written history as there are many mistakes that one must work with and verify.

The Census Records of Canada are also available, but with limited information on the First Nations Communities within the North West. I have searched through the years 1881, 1891 and 1901 and many of the names on the census are registered with the Nisga'a name instead of the English name. This is awkward as the census taker often wrote the name phonetically and it was not always correct. I have copies of these records that have been added to the project as family names were found.

Church records are valuable in that they contain information about baptisms and marriages. In the 1860's, the missionaries were just beginning to convert Nisga'a people to Christianity. They baptized adults who were willing to turn away from their old ways of traditional

¹ Terry Ann Young, Researching the History of Aboriginal Peoples in British Columbia (Victoria: Queen's Printer for British Columbia, 1995) 10.

Nisga'a customs and follow a "new path". They were baptized with "Christian" names or had their Nisga'a names anglicized. The information from these sources helps the research process as people have sometimes forgotten the old names.

Elders show a sense of pride and joy in remembering stories of these days, and data from Church records can assist in interviews as well as being an independent source of information. Church records are not always easy to find. There were floods and fires in the communities over the years that have kept documents from being archived. For example, the Anglican Church has a wonderful archive of records from the villages that they served in the Nass and they must adhere to the Privacy Act before releasing information.

Other areas that add to this research are written documentation of other scholars that have spent many years working in the Nass Valley or the northwest. Their research has added valuable information that, when combined with the oral information, adds credibility. William Beynon, Marius Barbeau, Wilson Duff, Charles Lillard and Stephen McNeary are only a few of the scholars whose publications have added to my research.

Our own *Ayuukhl* Nisga'a department within the Nisga'a Lisims Government is there to protect, promote and preserve Nisga'a language, culture and history. The libraries of the *Ayuukhl* Nisga'a hold collections of oral histories, territorial binders, a traditional name repository and other sources of valuable data that enhance the family research. "Ayuukhl Nisga'a is also a sophisticated set of laws that establishes and defines Nisga'a institutions, as

well as a code of conduct.”² Wilp Wilxo’oskwhl Nisga’a (*Nisga’a* House of Learning) is the university/college in the Nass Valley. Through this institution there are printed resources available to students that have also proved as valuable to me.

I have pursued my research by combing through available archival resources for written documents that relate to the family of Louisa *Oyee*, and by speaking with family members and other knowledgeable community members for information to add to the oral records. I created a collection of the available information this will be presented and kept by the *wilp* of *Baxk’ap*. This collection is by no means complete and will be available to be amended as needed.

² Nisga’a: People of the Nass River, Nisga’a Tribal Council, Gitlakdamiks. Douglas & McIntyre, Vancouver/Toronto. 1993. pg 4

Chapter Three

Ethics and Genealogy Within First Nations Families

I have been struggling for a long time to grasp the definition of “ethics.” For me it determines my own values that I adhere to. In the process of this research, the question of ethics became very central and there were a myriad of ethical questions to grapple with. An example of this is if someone were to share an important detail in his life, what would be the best way to ascertain if it was to be kept very private or something that he would share publicly? In doing genealogical research I often come across information that individuals share with me, that I have to then determine what should be documented and added to the family trees that I was building. I have to make an ethical decision on whether to ask for permission to use the new found information. Following are some of the definitions and statements about ethics that I have used to help me frame my own ethical practices.

According to Webster’s dictionary, ethics is 1) A principle of rights or good conduct, 2) A system of moral values, 3) Ethics -The branch of philosophy dealing with the rules of conduct.³ Within the context of gathering family information, the system of moral values appears to be one of ethics that one would choose to follow. Moral values, beliefs, traditions and culture all play a role in the ethical practices of working with people.

³ Webster’s II New Riverside Dictionary: Revised Edition. (1996) Boston, NY: Houghton Mifflin Co. 236 p.

Ethics and Social Sciences

The Social Science and Humanities Research Council has joined forces with two other councils to draw up an ethics policy in relation to researching people. The three councils have developed their own policies and in accordance with keeping a commitment to Canadian people, they combined them and drafted the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. The other two councils were the Medical Research Council and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council.

This Tri-Policy Statement attempts to identify the highest standards in ethics. They had been drafting the policy since 1994 and have had three separate documents published in 1994, 1996 and finally in 1997. There have been many consultations involving the academic community and they have realized that this policy will continue to evolve as new ideas are formed. The councils have a mandate to Canada, which is “to promote, assist and undertake research in the domains indicated by their names.”⁴

Why study people in the first place? According to the Tri-Council “Research involving human subjects is premised on a fundamental moral commitment to advancing human welfare, knowledge and understanding, and to examining cultural dynamics.”⁵ As researchers in the social fields, we want to help people in some way, whether it is in education, health and economics or in understanding the past. The Tri-Council acknowledges three categories of benefits to the researcher and the participants which are: “the basic desire for new

⁴ NSERC. Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. Sep. 17, 1998.
><http://nserc.ca/programs/ethics/English>

⁵ Ibid

knowledge and understanding, the quest to advance knowledge which sometimes benefits research subjects; research benefits particular groups and society as a whole.”⁶

Respect is the foundation of research ethics. The first principle of the Tri-Council policy is respect for human dignity. Tuhiwai Smith states “the term ‘respect’ is consistently used by indigenous peoples to underscore the significance of our relationship and humanity.”⁷ Within the Nisga’a Nation, respect is the first law held in *Ayuukhl* Nisga’a, which is the code of laws. And so, when it comes to the laws of the Nisga’a, if you can't understand the meaning of respect, then it means that you are going to be running afoul of every area of the Nisga’a law.⁸

The next seven principles are also from the Tri-Council's ethics framework, which have been recommended by a diverse group of research disciplines.

- ✓ Respect for Free and Informed Consent
- ✓ Respect for Vulnerable Persons
- ✓ Respect for Justice and Inclusiveness
- ✓ Balancing Harms and Benefits
- ✓ Minimizing Harm
- ✓ Maximizing Benefit

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Tuhiwai Smith, Linda (1999), *Decolonizing Methodologies – Research and Indigenous Peoples*, London & New York, Zed Books Ltd., page 120.

⁸ *Nisga’a, People of the Nass River*, (1993), Vancouver/Toronto, Douglas & McIntyre, page 125

A researcher must look at the cultural sensitivity of his contact with aboriginal people. The Tri-Council created a section specifically within their policy to deal with research and aboriginal peoples. They have not yet had discussion with aboriginal groups and therefore have not developed full policy. They do believe that aboriginal peoples have "rights and interests which deserve recognition and respect by the research community."⁹

In working with aboriginal communities, research usually involves more than one individual. It will affect the whole community as everyone is related in some way or another. The standards that will likely need the most focus will be the risks of potential harm, what the benefits will be and the confidentiality of the information gathered. Informed consent is also very important. As Tuhiwai Smith notes that research "should set out to make a positive difference for the researched."¹⁰ As First Nations people, they must see the benefit of being researched. Tuhiwai Smith states that the "research approach also has to address seriously the cultural ground rules of respect, of working with communities, of sharing processes and knowledge."¹¹

In Randall McGuire's article, "Why Have Archeologists Thought the Real Indians were Dead?" He makes note that the Society for American Archeology (SAA) has developed a new statement that addresses the ethical principles within its field. "The statement includes six principles: 1) Stewardship; 2) Accountability; 3) Commercialization; 4) Public Education Outreach; 5) Intellectual Property; and 6) Records and Preservation."¹² The SAA feels that

⁹><http://www.nserc.ca/programs/ethics/english/sec06.htm><

¹⁰Smith, Tuhiwai (1999). Decolonizing Methodologies. London & New York: Zed Books Ltd. Page 191

¹¹Ibid p 191

¹²Biolsi, Thomas & Zimmerman, Larry J., Indians and Anthropologists – Vine Deloria, Jr. and the Critique of Anthropology, Tuscon: The University of Arizona Press, 1977, p. 79.

as the stewards of any materials that they come in contact with, hold it in "public trust." The aboriginal people believe that materials about their culture belong to them.

Another formal group of researchers which has published guidelines on ethical practice is the partnership of the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA) and the Southern California Applied Anthropology Network (SCAAN). The two groups drafted their policy on ethics and it was published in 1988 and is referred to as the NAPA Ethical Guidelines for Practitioners. As professionals, NAPA feels it is the responsibility of each anthropologist in the field to uphold those guidelines.

The guidelines that NAPA follows are summarized in the following:

1. Our primary responsibility is to respect and consider the welfare and human rights of all categories of people affected by decisions, programs or research in which we take part.
2. To our resource persons or research subjects we owe full and timely disclosure of objectives, methods and sponsorship of our activities.
3. To our employees we owe competent, efficient, fully professional skills and techniques, timely performance of our work and communication of our findings and recommendations in understandable, non-jargonistic language.
4. In our relations with students and trainees, we will be candid and fair, nonexploitive, nondiscriminatory and committed to the student's or trainee's welfare.
5. To our colleagues, anthropologists and others, we have a responsibility to conduct our work in a manner that facilitates their activities or that does not unjustly compromise their ability to carry out professional work.
6. To the discipline of anthropology we have a responsibility to act in a manner that presents the discipline to the public and to other professional colleagues in a favourable light.¹³

The Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies (ACUNS) has created a statement of ethical principles that relates to the unique needs of the north. Northern scholars conducting research in the northern communities have recently noted that the times have

¹³American Anthropological Association. AAA Ethics. 1988 ><http://www.aaanet.org/napa/code.htm><

changed and people who do research must have a mutual understanding and respect for the culture of the north, whether it be the social or the physical environment.

When reviewing the principles of the ACUNS, I noticed that I have already followed many of them as they are very similar to the protocols of the Nisga'a. Of the twenty principles, the following examples are only part of the ethics that have been used for this research:

"1. ...abiding by any local laws, regulations or protocols...

3. Mutual respect...respect for the language, traditions, and standards of the community...

4. ...respect the privacy and dignity of the people." ¹⁴

As this research has begun I have followed the protocols for the nation by seeking permission of each *wilp*, the Nisga'a Lisims Government, Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a, and our Gitwinksihlkw Village Government. All of this was provided in the original proposal before I could begin.

Mutual respect is paramount in the nation. Respect is the first law and I have been taught this since I was taken into the community. One must respect each and every person and honour their privacy and dignity. As a member of the nation and community, the culture stresses this respect in everything that they do, whether it is in the home with immediate family, with your extended family or even out in the work place. Respect is a powerful component of the Nisga'a that makes the people unique. These three principles from the ACUNS report are just samples of what is important in my research. As I read them I found that all of them pertain in one way or another in how this research was done.

¹⁴ Ethical Principles for the Conduct of Research in the North, Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies, 2003

Ethics and Genealogy

There are several recognized genealogical boards that I have come across in my research to this point. They each have their own set of values and beliefs to guide their practice. These ethical standards are very simple and as I give an overview on their codes of ethics, you will see the similarities that exist. As an amateur genealogist, I feel that the standards are more common sense than anything else. I would expect that anyone who is helping an individual or a family with a study such as this would be respectful of the information collected.

Through searching over the Internet, I came across a general code of ethics that was publicized in the Ancestry.com site. This code is stated simply as:

- “To protect the integrity of public record and published materials:
- I will be courteous and respectful to all record custodians, librarians, archivists, and others who serve the public.
- I will handle carefully all books or records entrusted to me and return them to the designated place.
- I will not tear, erase, mark or remove any document, book, or film, nor will I mutilate, deface, destroy, or otherwise change any part of such document, book, or film.
- I will present my genealogical findings with honesty and integrity, using permission when necessary and attributing work that is not my own to the proper entity.”¹⁵

These guidelines are clearly oriented towards the protection of research materials, rather than the privacy of individuals, families and communities. There are several associations to which

¹⁵Ancestry.com. Ethics. 1998-2007. <<http://www.ancestry.com/learn/start/ethics.htm>>

many genealogists belong., I have come across three. They are the Association of Professional Genealogists (APG), the Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG) and the National Genealogical Society (NGS). Their codes of ethics are very similar to the ethics that have been previously noted.

In particular, I found that that BCG has each certified member sign a pledge. “As a practicing genealogist, mindful of responsibilities to the public, to the genealogical consumer, and to scholarship, I hereby pledge:

To strive for the highest level of truth and accuracy in all phases of my work;
To act honorably toward other genealogists and toward the field as a whole;
To adhere to the Board for Certification of Genealogists' Standards of Conduct;
(And if engaged in research for others)
To act in my client's best interests, and
To protect my client's privacy.”¹⁶

This is a very important pledge to make to those with whom you are working. As genealogists, we must encourage one another to uphold these values as they constitute the values of every good researcher.

Genealogist Barbara Brown writes, “to be a Responsible Genealogist is to be honourable, fair, truthful, and to show respect for your ancestors by presenting a true and complete picture of their existence, to be fair to your fellow genealogists by acknowledging their

¹⁶Board for the Certification of Genealogists. BCG Code of Ethics.2007><http://www.bgcercertification.org/aboutbcg/code.htm>>

contributions to your research, and to be relentless in your factual data and in the search for the truth.”¹⁷

As an insider, within Nisga’a communities, it is often difficult to justify what can be shared when gathering genealogies. People know me quite well in the community of Gitwinksihlkw. In reflecting on a class that I attended, the late Dr. Bert McKay (Nisga’a Educator) comment on the law of respect, stating that this was the first law of the Nisga’a. Dr. McKay stated that if one emanates respect, then respect will follow. I feel that I am accepted as a community member and as an equal participant and I respect the traditions and feel that I am respected as well.

As an adopted member of the *Laxgibuu*, I participate in cultural events. This enables me to not only to be known, but also to be able to understand the culture as it is practiced. My personal life and community involvement intersect with my area of research. How then, can I go out, as a researcher and gather information related to genealogy? On what basis can I go into the community and begin asking confidential details as to who is in your family? In order to form genograms that are easy to read, one must ask very simple, yet personal questions of each individual. From this perspective I am unsure as to where the boundaries should begin and where they should end.

Ethically speaking, I had the permission of my husband and the support of his family to put this tree together. At first, I had not approached anyone else and continued gathering the names of many relatives. I compiled this information into a data base using European

¹⁷Brown, Barbara A. babrown@fast.net *Restoring Ethics to Genealogy*. (April 1999)

principles of genealogy. The families were each drawn up into paternal lines, as that was the norm. Each head of household was a male figure, followed by his spouse and the children that they had. The genograms were then continued through each son and so on and so forth.

It is only recently that I have thought about what I have been doing for all these years. The structure of a Nisga'a lineage was through the mother, a matrilineal format. I am now trying to plot out how a family tree could be "Nisga'anized?" How can I structure them in a way in which they would have been looked at many years ago? By following through the mother, the grandmother and so forth, you can see the members within the *wilp*. All members would be connected firstly with their *wilp* and secondly with their father's *wilp*, which was also important in the culture.

Ethics plays a huge part in what I, as a researcher, must consider. Yes, I am a member of this community, this tribe, this Nation, but do I really understand the cultural protocols in acquiring this information. I have been a member of the community for thirty years. During this time I have been witness to many events within the nation. As I enjoy documenting information from these events, I am known to carry a journal and document. When I attend a Settlement Feast for a death, I listen and take notes on the side. People will ask me what I am doing and will become very interested in what I am doing. I usually will write the date, who the feast was for, which family is having the feast, and include the tribe. I note the family connections and do mini genograms that assist me in knowing who they are.

Studying family trees is beneficial for many reasons. You can know who you are related to, how you fit into a certain family, and then you can begin to note your similarities or

differences. This information can acknowledge why your family may live in certain geographic areas and why there appears to have been no changes in family location for years. You may also find that you have medical genetic information that you can only know when you have the family histories.

The Nisga'a *Ayuukhl* states that only individuals of a *wilp* are entitled to evaluate, tell about, judge, critique any and all practices of that *wilp*. For example, only *Baxk'ap* members could discuss *Baxk'ap wilp* plans and activities, publically. No other Nisga'a, be they also *Laxgibuu*, shall do so. However, other *pdeek* members can speak on behalf of (in this case) *Baxk'ap*, when invited to do so, and only as directed by that *Sim'oogit*. This is called *lagamdal k'askw*.

In the chapter that follows I will share my own personal history and show how this relates to the study that I am doing. I am an outsider that was taken in by adoption and my children are now a part of the family that I am researching. They have to also understand where they come from and how they fit into both worlds of my own family and their father's family. The story that I tell is my story and it is a story that will be passed on through generations to come like that of Louisa Oyee's story. Whether it is oral or written, our family line is important to each of us.

Chapter Four

Gwin Wilaaks and her Roots

“*Gwin Wilaaks*” is the person that I have become since adoption into the *Nisga’a* Nation. It has become a part of my family tree. I have always had a fascination with discovering my roots and finding out where my family had come from, who they were and why I might be the way I am today. In this chapter I want to share my story and how it has molded me into the life that I live today. It also shows how I feel about the importance of genealogy and family.

Forty-nine years ago, a baby girl was brought into this world. She was born to a young family, who were new to Canada. They had come from England to what they referred to as a land of opportunity. When they arrived in a small community just east of Prince George, they worked hard and tried to make this country a home. They arrived with a six year old son and eventually had two more boys after their baby girl.

Over the years my parents moved from place to place, but they never returned to their homeland, the land of their parents. They gradually lost many of the roots that tie a family together, which are so important. These roots are what give a tree life, to branch out and to sprout new growth. A family can be thought of as the same, branching out into aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. As children, my siblings and I did not have those memories.

During my preteen years, I found that my parents were drifting apart. So there I was a fifteen year old, with two younger brothers and an older brother who was getting ready for a

university career and parents who were getting a divorce. We were living in a town called Smithers at that time. Our roots were being torn apart, and transplanted into different places. My dad took my younger brothers and headed for Kitimat where he had a job lined up. My mother wanted to move as well, so they sold our log house and she went to Terrace. I was the stubborn one and convinced myself that I wasn't going to be the traitor and choose between my parents. So I refused to be uprooted and moved in with a friend.

This lifestyle continued on for about a year, when I began to miss my mother. Finally, I gave in and connected with her once again. I was sixteen and in the midst of a teen crisis. School was boring, friends were more important, and I began to realize that I had to get my life in order. It became an obsession with me, to do things in order, graduate from high school, get a career, a job, then marriage and finally, children. I swore up and down that I was going to follow this path.

I enrolled in the local high school and managed to finish my grade twelve and graduate. After that I enrolled in the college in Terrace and received a certificate in Early Childhood Education. During these years I got to know lots of people both in school and out of school. Many of my friends were First Nations and it was through them that I met a young man who was three years older than I.

Arthur was quiet, almost shy, when I met him and this inspired me to get to know him more. He wasn't like the other men I knew, who were loud and always trying to impress everyone. We began to go out with each other and it didn't seem very long before he was introducing me to different members of his family.

Me, being of a Caucasian background, and he being First Nations, did not appear to distract us in any way. We only saw each other as people and not by a race. When things got serious and we decided that we wanted to be married, my mother was concerned. She really liked him and knew that he would be good to me, but as my mother, she was concerned that a) I was not ready for marriage; and that b) I did not have any ideas as to what our cultural differences could be.

She was my mother and I know that she worried about me. All she wanted was for me to be happy and to understand that we both came from two different lifestyles. We needed to be prepared for the differences and know how to deal with them. I was stubborn as usual and was only interested in the love that we had for each other. I had only known the life that we had lived and couldn't fathom any problems. We did get married with the blessings of both sides of our families. This is when I saw some of the differences between our cultures. We did a lot of compromising in the plans for our wedding, but everything turned out great.

When I remember thinking back to a family as a tree, I have to say that my husband's family was like a forest of trees with the roots connecting to each other and twisting over and around and over and around and never ending. There were family members everywhere. For the first time in my life, I had grandparents! There was *Ye'e* (Grandfather) Peter, my father-in-law's father. There was Granny Mary and *Ye'e* Eli, my mother-in-law's parents. It was the late Eli Gosnell "*Wii Gadim Xsgaak*" who decided to formally adopt me in the Nisga'a Nation. Eli was a *Laxgibuu* and in December of 1977, at a traditional feast, I was adopted as his sister. I was now a member of the *Laxgibuu* and these new roots began to take hold.

The honour of being adopted into the culture was overwhelming. I had this new name "*Gwin Wilaaks*", which meant "Let me be known". I found that the name has fit my personality for I am always letting people know who I am. I spent many years learning what my role was supposed to be and in the time I have followed the traditions to the best of my ability. I knew who my husband's extended family was and even found out who my new extended family was.

I gave birth to three wonderful children who are *Laxgibuu* as the Nisga'a society is matrilineal, so all children follow in their mother's line. They began to learn what it means to be Nisga'a by witnessing events in the community, by taking the language in their school, and by listening to their family members. This has been difficult for me at times because I am continuously learning at the same time and there is never enough time.

I remember back to when we first moved home to my husband's community. *Ye'e* Peter would come over almost everyday like clockwork. He would visit with me and I would offer him tea and while trying to catch up with laundry or entertaining our toddler, I would listen to his stories. He was so sweet and I took to him like my own real grandfather. I think back now and wish that I had paid more attention, because little did I know that he was also teaching me with all the knowledge that he had gathered in his eighty plus years.

Due to the Federal Government laws and the Indian Act, I became a Status Indian when I married my husband. Because of the traditional laws of the *Nisga'a* Nation, when I was adopted by the late Eli Gosnell, I also became a member of the Nation, a member of

Gitwinksihlkw and more importantly a member of the *Laxgibuu pdeek*. I can vote Federally, Provincially, and in any affairs of the Nation. I have the right to run for office, which in November of 1994, I did and won a seat on the Nisga'a Valley Health Board. A great honour for me!

I have been an active participant in the daily events of community life. I have sat on many organizations and still do. I helped build a log house with my husband and together we raised our three children. Through these years I committed myself to the community of Gitwinksihlkw and also to the Nisga'a Nation. I feel very proud to have been a part of this. There have been both happiness and sorrow, both success and failure. But it has given me a feeling of acceptance, of having put down some roots that have succeeded in taking hold. I am now a proud grandmother of six grandchildren.

I have spent the last thirteen years in attendance at both Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a and the University of Northern British Columbia. I have completed a Bachelor of Arts and am now completing a Master's Degree in First Nations Studies. Included in the courses that I have taken are language and culture. Classes only reaffirm the struggles that the Nisga'a people have had to endure over the years of encroachment of the non-native population. The impact of assimilation has affected every single individual in one way or another.

My husband and his immediate and extended family have suffered through tragedies in their own lives because of this forced assimilation. Residential schools, alcohol, drugs, sexual abuse and spousal abuse are amongst the hurts that Nisga'a people have had to endure. It has

taken years to repair the broken lives and may take many more before it can even be thought of as partially accomplished.

The Nisga'a people have always had a law that was number one in their lives, which was the law of respect. Respect for what their Creator had given to them, to the land and the resources. Respect for everyone around them and their belongings. Respect for themselves. This last component of respect was the most important because if a person does not have the respect for himself, he cannot expect to earn the respect of others. Learning about your family can strengthen self-esteem, and I hope that the results of this project will be of value to young people in my adopted community in future.



Figure 1. Tombstone of Louisa *Oyee* standing in
Gitwinksihlkw, BC Canada

Chapter Five

The Work of Compiling the Louisa Oyee Family Tree

When I began to formulate the family tree of Louisa *Oyee*, I decided that the easiest way was to do a descending tree by starting with Louisa and worked towards the present. I began asking questions of the elders in the community. Who was Louisa *Oyee*? Who was she married to? What were her children's names? And who were they married to? I have used the Family Tree Maker 2005 edition to collect the data. It has not been an easy program to work with as I would have liked to be able to chart the trees in a manner more aligned with working with the matrilineal lines the Nisga'a people follow. A sample of the first two generations is as follows:

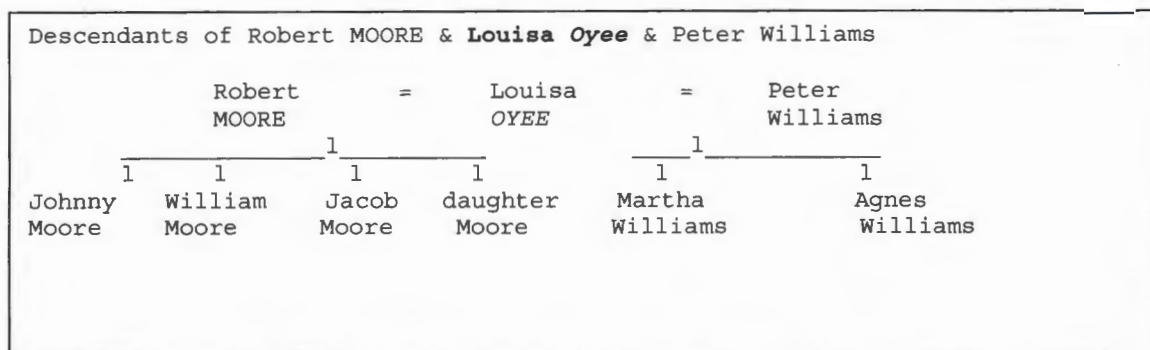


Figure 2: Descendant Chart of Louisa *Oyee*, her 1st and 2nd husbands and her children.

Researching someone else's family can be very frustrating. As much as one can have support, one can also have road blocks. Some of these road blocks will be shared within this chapter. As I began to work on Louisa's family tree many years ago, it was more to understand my husband's family and to be able to teach my children their heritage. I wanted them to be proud of their father's family line and to know who they were related to.

In the beginning, I asked immediate family about information relating to full names, birth dates and other significant details. Everyone was fine and shared what they knew willingly. I began by writing on any kind of paper; pages of blank paper, lined paper, note pads, post-it notes, scraps of paper, even placemats and napkins! Whenever someone would share something I was more than willing to write it down. It is interesting because I met a university professor who is also studying genealogy and when I shared some family information with him in a restaurant, he immediately pulled a small notebook from his side pocket and jotted down some notes.

As I was new at doing genealogy, I did not have any idea as to the right or the wrong way. For many years I just wrote down and collected information. Some was from people who were directly related – others from people who “remembered” details. All of this information was important, either to the people who shared it, or to me for future reference. I found that I did not write down every source and this has created difficulties when someone would ask me “where did you hear that?” As a researcher this is critical in collecting data and I encourage anyone that works on family trees. The information that I had collected was phenomenal. I was now fascinated and hooked on genealogy!

I connected with the BC Archives through the internet and began to collect names that I recognized from the Nisga’a Nation. I wrote them down and formulated mini family trees. I began more searches and asked questions of the people I knew. I printed page after page of deaths and marriages of people from the Nass area. I searched by recognized surnames or place times. One of the search criteria in the BC Archives is where the “event” happened.

The online tools allowed me to enter for example "Canyon City" and no names and every event that happened in Canyon City would show up. If the search criteria stated "match any words" with "Canyon City", searches would come where they had listed extra words like "Canyon City Reserve". This enables the search to not be specific and it may give more answers.

Whenever I had the opportunity to be in Victoria, all my spare time was allocated to rushing over to the BC Archives and hiding out in the corner room accessing all the microfilms. There were times when I was prepared and had the microfilm numbers ready to search for specific individuals. Other times I just scrolled through the entire roll looking for records from the northern areas. I printed many of these documents and brought them home to add to my research and often shared with those that were related to my find. The Freedom of Information Act speaks to who may access records in both governmental data bases and Church databases. All birth records must be a hundred years old, marriage records must be seventy-five years old and death records must be twenty years old. These records are then available to the general public.

A few years later I came across information that the archival microfilm was also housed at the Vancouver Public Library and I began to access it when ever I was in Vancouver. When you search on line, you only get the names, date/event place and an age if it were a death and the microfilm information as well. By viewing or printing the document I was able to get additional information about the individual such as parents' names, birth dates and birth place. By having this documentation, I could then sit with a family member and verify the accuracy.

Vital Event Death Registration	
Name:	Jacob Andrew Moore
Event Date:	1926 5 1 (Yr/Mo/Day)
Age:	41
Gender:	male
Event Place:	Fishery Bay
Reg. Number:	1926-09-010361
B.C. Archives Microfilm Number:	B13360
GSU Microfilm Number:	1983210

Figure 3: Sample from the BC Archives on-line search of Jacob Moore, son of Louisa Oyee.

I have purchased many books, ordered books from the library to peruse, bought magazines and down- loaded articles from the internet. Everything possible that I could find on genealogy I had to have. There is definitely lots of information that has been written and published and each one has its own merits as to being the best. I tried to access writings specific to researching First Nations and found that this was more difficult to do. There are articles written about research for American Indians from the United States but not much from Canada.

Researching First Nations is an art unto itself. When it comes to documentation, for many Canadian First Nations the main documents would be with Indian Affairs and the Churches that were in their communities. This information was not always accurate as non-native people wrote what they thought they heard for the most part. Native names were not written well, people could not understand the questions being asked therefore the data that may have been entered would not necessarily be correct. I have found this to be true with the Church records whereby names are spelt incorrectly and ages may be wrong.

I visited the archives of the Anglican Synod of the Diocese of Caledonia in Prince Rupert. This archive contains baptism, confirmation and marriage registers and service registers (a recording of the services that were held in each Church) that sometimes could confirm the information in the other records. The archivist at the time was eager to help me in finding the names that I was searching for. She was knowledgeable in knowing many of the family names in the area and would then provide solutions to accessing the various registers from the possible community.

The Freedom of Information Act is followed by the Church and it is similar to that of the BC Archives whereby, one must have permission to do the research by the family (related to) or the records as follows: birth – must be 100 years ago or more; marriage – must be 75 years ago or more; and death – must be 20 years ago or more. This allows for the security of information so that the privacy of individuals is protected. This is the same information that I relayed earlier in the BC Archives research.

Sitting with family members and having them tell you their stories is invaluable. People often have photo albums, loose pictures and old documents that could be very useful to add to this collection. I was given the opportunity to look through a photo album recently and within this album, found photos and various documents relating to the family of Louisa *Oyee*. This album contained items that verified family information and it assists in keeping this information alive for the generations to come I have been copying the photos and documents to save them for that purpose. Often pictures are not recognized by the generations of today and this is sad as the faces mean nothing without a name added. By giving people this

information I hope it will inspire them to begin to collect things that are lying around their homes.

"Promise unto the Lord your God, and keep it." - Psalm lxxvi. 11.

I Hereby Certify

that Agnes Moore.

was confirmed in St. Peter's Ch: Fishery Bay

on Easter Day, April 12: 1914

by me, F. H. DuRoi
Bishop of Caledonia

THE CHURCH BOOK ROOM LIMITED

Figure 4: Copy of the Confirmation of Agnes Moore (Williams), daughter of Louisa Oyee.



Figure 5: Copy of actual marriage certificate for Peter Nice (NYCE) and Agnes Williams

Another area where I was able to find information was to walk through the various graveyards in the valley and in Prince Rupert. The tombstones that are lying on the graves are often full of inscriptions that can tell the story of a life in itself. Nisga'a people will order these stones for each member of their family as a way of fulfilling their responsibility for commemorating the life of the deceased. This has become a recognized tradition since Christianity came to the villages. Dr. Richard Garvin, an Anthropology professor at the University of British Columbia in the Okanagan, has a project entitled "The Northwest Native Cemeteries Project" which has been on-going since 1994. He has researched the Kincolith graveyard and with the assistance of Kincolith politicians and community

members, he has mapped and taken photos of all the gravesites and monuments that could be found.

I have not been as inspired as Garvin, but whenever I get a chance and the weather is right, I will walk through a graveyard armed with my digital camera and take pictures. I often will take pictures of any stone that has a name that sounds like it comes from the Nisga'a nation. These pictures are then down-loaded and added to my collection. There are still sites that I have not yet accessed and still hope that one day I can get to them. Garvin keeps in touch with me as he comes to the Nass and one day I hope to be able to work directly with him in his studies.



Figure 6: William Moore, son of Louisa *Oyee*. Tombstone in the graveyard of Gitwinksihlkw, B.C. Canada

Another research method that has been most helpful is attending cultural events in any one of the Nisga'a villages. An event such as a Settlement Feast over the death of an individual or the Stone Moving Feast for the placement of a tombstone on a grave is full of information relating to families. As stated in an earlier chapter, I have several journals that I take with me and enter the basic details of who the event is for, the date, the reasons for the event and family details as they are discussed. As these are public cultural events, this information is shared with all the people in the hall as witnesses to the event. Many of these feasts have assisted my research.

The Memorial Services of a deceased individual will relay details about one's life. I have collected the eulogies of family and again this information is important. This information, as in all information, must be corroborated with other data in order to validate. I have included a sample of the eulogy of the late Dorothy Doolan, who was one of the last *Sigidimhaanak'* (matriarch) of her generation in the *wilp* of *Baxk'ap*. Her family attempted to capture the essence of her life and some her predecessors through her eulogy.

In the chapters that follow I will attempt to show the reader how the culture is structured with the Nisga'a people. From birth to marriage to death, there were reasons for everything that happened around the maternal and paternal families. Each person had a role to play and as a child grew up; he knew what his role was. A child knew who was responsible for looking after him and why. This is still being practiced although there are adaptations to the mainstream society whether it is from the Christian practices or the society as a whole.

Chapter Six

Nisga'a Marriages

One of the most important institutions among the Nisga'a of the pre-contact period and even today is the institution of marriage. This was especially important in the noble status of Chieftains, as marriages had political significance. Marriage was a bond of two lineages, two *huwilp* (plural of *wilp*) of the Nisga'a people. Each group had many important ceremonial duties to perform from the day a child was born until the day of the wedding and even further into the lives of the young couple as husband and wife.

In this chapter you will see how each of these duties was carried out in pre-contact times and in today's society. This discussion is based on information from anthropological studies such as Stephen A. McNeary's publication Where Fire Came Down: Social and Economic Life of the Nisga'a and supplemented by information from other research, Nisga'a Society-Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study Volume III and Nisga'a Marriage from the School District #92 research. These references are documented at the end of this project.

As Nisga'a society is divided into tribes or *pdeek*, each person belongs to one *pdeek*. It was strictly forbidden or taboo for one to marry someone from within their own *pdeek*. To breach this was called *k'aats*. A woman's children followed in her *pdeek*, so that if she was *Laxgibuu*, then her children would also be *Laxgibuu*. She could marry anyone in any of the other three *pdeek*, but not from her own *pdeek*. This taboo was known throughout the Nisga'a Nation and even extended to other nations within the Northwest Coast. "This ban extended beyond the Nass Valley (i.e. a Nisga'a Wolf, for instance, could not marry a Wolf *pdeek*

member of the Gitksan of the Coast Tsimshian). A couple breaking this rule was driven from the village. It was believed that their offspring would be mentally and physically disformed.”¹⁸

In earlier times, because of the political significance of high status marriages, many chiefs would make sure that marriages were arranged. This may have been done with cousins marrying cross cousins so that the “strategy of maintaining links between previously related houses to 'keep the wealth' or 'keep the knowledge of house histories' within a small circle of interrelated nobles.”¹⁹ Another preference would be for the chief to want his daughter to marry the heir to his name. Some marriages were arranged when the two individuals were very young and when they were old enough they were married. But more customary were the rituals between two houses uniting a specific individual to be joined with their offspring.

In preparation for marriage, there were many duties to perform in order for the match to be accepted. The first was the “*haxlinalgax*” (the means of speaking), which was when the groom's people asked for the consent for the girl with her *pdeek* by bringing gifts to her *wilp*. The gifts reflected the high rank of the man's side and also on how much this union meant to them.

On both sides, the oldest maternal uncle was usually the one to speak on behalf of the immediate families. The gifts were brought to the house of the woman in question and speeches were begun. It was customary for the man's mother to bring a gift of *mi'awst* (red

¹⁸ Cultural Infusion Resource School District 92 (Nisgaha). *Nisga'a Marriage*. Totem Press Terrace Ltd., 1982. pg 2

¹⁹ McNeary, Stephen A. *Where fire came down: social and economic life of the Nisga'a*. Ph.D. Dissertation Bryn Mawr. (Reprinted by Wilp Wiloxo'oskwhl Nisga'a, 1994). pg 162

ochre) as this was a highly valued gift item. Because the woman's family was concerned for her welfare, they would look over the young man to be sure that he showed signs of being a hard worker and that his family was of a similar stature. It was not uncommon for the woman's family to *gwilkstl'ee'e* (*decline*) the gifts of the suitor. This formality would show that the woman's family was very serious about the suggested union and the suitors would return with more gifts. "This gift might be repeated several times as the boy's relatives awaited a decision. If the final decision was negative, the preliminary gifts were returned".²⁰

If the match was accepted by the woman's family, then the next important step was the giving of the bride wealth or *hanaks* (the means of marriage). These were elaborate gifts gathered by the family and given to every member of the woman's *pdeek*. These gifts reflected the wealth and value of the union and could include canoes, blankets, carvings, etc. It was at this time when the man's maternal uncle and both his parents spoke on behalf of the marriage-to-be. The dates were also set for the upcoming union.

In the days preceding the feast, the woman's family would make return gifts called *luuginam*. This would be similar to a dowry, but was usually foods for the feast. The value was less than that of the bride wealth because they were already giving something to the man's family that was very valuable, their daughter.

The night before the feast, another smaller feast was held. This was for the tribe of the man and was hosted by his family. It was a meeting to finish off the formalities of the following day. It was called a *liligidim pdeek* (tribal feast). The bride's mother, sisters and maternal

²⁰ *ibid.* pg 165

aunts would give gifts called *x̣ts'ihlnak'amskw* to the guests. This was to prepay them for all the work that was to be done by them the next day. These gifts were practical everyday items for each individual.

The wedding feast was called the *liligim wil naks* (feast of marriage). This feast was held in the house of the groom's maternal uncle. The bride's *pdeek* presented a major gift to the *wilp* of the father of the groom to finalize the union. *Xgal'ink* (emptying of the boxes) was gifts of cedar chests or boxes. This gift was to honour the groom's father's *wilp* for cooking the food and collecting the wood for the fire. In these *gal* (empty) *ink* (box(es)), was divided all the food left from the wedding or any other feast.

At the feast the women of the groom's *wilp* would make a presentation to the bride. This would be in the form of necessary items for her future life as a wife. In response to these gifts, the women of the bride's *wilp* would return gifts to the women of the groom's *wilp*. This was called *x̣k'ayhl*. Some exquisite gifts were also given to the groom's senior uncles at the same time. Traditionally the marriage feast lasted for several days or more.

During the feast, the family of the bride may give permission for the groom to share in the use of a hunting territory or fishing grounds. This did not always happen and depended upon the individual families to make the choice. Many of these decisions were made for the couple because the families would be concerned that the children of this union would need to be taken care of. Often the father of the groom did not want his son to be dependent on the bride's family and he might grant his son permission to utilize a fishing spot or hunting area as well.

After the wedding feast was over, the newly wed couple might go back to his family's house and start their life together. This was where the man had rights as this was his maternal home. But it was also customary for the groom to do "bride-service" for his wife's family for one or two years. This was called *gink'askw* and he would pack wood, hunt, etc., for the time they spent there with his wife's family.

During the lifetime of being a married couple, the wife will always remain a member of her own house, but her responsibility will also be with her husband and his tribe. She will be very aware of the obligations of being his wife and will keep the knowledge of his affairs in case he was to die before her. When she lives with her husband in his family's house, she would be supervised by her husband's maternal uncle's wife.

To this day, the Nisga'a maintain many of the rituals and traditional marriage customs of the past. These have been adapted to suit their needs and the economic changes in life today. Some rituals no longer happen but the feelings of the people towards the responsibility of each house or tribe remains the same. It is still looked down upon when two people fall in love if they are in the same *pdeek*, no matter where they come from. Marriage is still an important institution in Nisga'a society and the genealogies of the past and present reflect this.

Chapter Seven

Passing of a Loved One

The life cycle within the Nisga'a culture is very complex. The people have strong beliefs and values that are still practiced today. From the time a baby is conceived the path has been chosen. There are automatically people who will play a role in the child's life, as to who will look after him, who will guide him, who will be there throughout his milestones in life, right up until his death. In this chapter, I hope to show how some of these customs have been practised since time immemorial and how many of them have evolved through time. I will attempt to show the important tasks that have been followed from the time of death through to the time of burial. I will be emphasising the *yuukw* (settlement feast). This feast is very much alive today and although there have been adaptations, it closely resembles the old ways.

I will walk you through the real life experience as one who participated in the rites of passage of a young Nisga'a man, who was lost to our family. His mother and grandmother have given permission for this story to be told. These vignettes will guide you through this process and try to show the beliefs that are still practised today. These experiences came from my own observations and duties as one of his undertakers as would have happened in long ago days. It validates the importance of family and how this knowledge assists right up until a person is buried.

It came as a complete shock to everyone when we found that Jason our nephew was taken from us. He was a young man who came home from work and suddenly collapsed. The family had tried unsuccessfully along with the Gitwinksihlkw First Responders to revive him. As they brought him to the Diagnostic and Treatment

Centre, he was unconscious and even the expertise of nurses and doctors could not save him. (Sally Nyce, notes)

Right from the moment I heard of Jason's death, I immediately began the role of caretaker and undertaker. It was the job of the *wilp* of *Baxk'ap* to comfort the *wilp* of *Hleek* in their time of mourning for the passing of this young man. As I am a member of this *wilp*, it was our job to perform the duties of the funeral. My nephew belonged to the house of *Hleek*, a *pdeek* known as the *Ts'imilx* or Beaver. The *Lax Ts'imilx* is also referred to as the *Laxsgiik* although they claim the *Ts'imilx* as their primary crest. This family is well known throughout the *Nisga'a* nation and still practice their culture strongly.

Traditionally, Jason's father's *pdeek* would guide and nurture him throughout his lifetime and at his death his family would return thanks as this is the way to honour the *pdeek* of your father. Jason's father, although from another nation, was also adopted into *Baxk'ap*'s *wilp*. His father was adopted by Agnes Nyce, the mother of his father-in-law, when he married into the family so they were his *wilksibakws* (paternal relatives).

Immediately following the birth of a baby there was an exchange of goods and services done between the baby's father's *pdeek* and his or her mother's *pdeek*. The term *wilksiwiltkw* (relative on paternal side) literally translates into "where one comes from" and refers to the father's *pdeek*. This is the beginning of a child's relationship to his *wilksibakws* or *wilksilaks* (plural of *wilksiwiltkw*) which was intimate and very respectful. Today the father's sisters and aunts would host a baby shower for the child. This is their responsibility and they show the mother that they are there for the baby and this is only the beginning of the relationship.

As a child grows, his father and paternal relatives are expected to be there to guide in his daily life. When a specific service was performed then the maternal family would reciprocate and give non-returnable gifts to them which are referred to as *xk'ayhl*. An example would be the naming of the child. Children's names are referred to as *wamts'uusk*. The paternal family takes part in this by calling out the name of the child and in turn they receive *xk'ayhl*. Names are always liked to the paternal relatives. So if your father was of the *Laxgibuu*, your name would reference the *Laxgibuu pdeek* in some way.

This formal exchange continues into adult life. The Late Dorothy Doolan was the matriarch in the *wilp* of *Baxk'ap*²¹ and described this clearly, "If anything happens to us, it is the responsibility of the paternal uncles (*wilksilaks*) to look after us, and take care of funeral expenses. This is called *t'il huulak'*, undertakers."²²

Our tribal family was at the home when Jason collapsed and followed the family immediately to the clinic. We stood by and comforted each member, holding them, bringing tissue to wipe their tears, bringing them a much-needed glass of water. The older members guided us in what to do and not to do. As Jason was pronounced, we had to help the family through this, not to allow them to touch his body and to give them some time to say goodbye. All tissue had to be collected together as the belief is that we keep the grief in one place and not let it wander. These tissues (tears) will be burned at a later time. (ibid)

I asked an elder why the immediate family were not allowed to touch the deceased and was given this explanation: "Your secretions on your hands or your tears go onto the body and would be buried with the body. If this happened then another death would happen soon in your family."²³ She explained that this is why the clothing worn by the deceased at the time

²¹ Mrs. Doolan passed away in 2004.

²² Nisga'a Tribal Council, Nisga'a. *Society, Ayuukhl Nisga'a: Study Volume III*. Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Publications: 1995. Pg 54

²³ Peggy Nyce, Gitwinksihlkw Eagle Matriarch

of death be burned and the person that burns them should bath so as to make sure all that all possible signs of bodily fluids are removed.

Once the family had moved from the area where Jason lay, three of us were chosen to remain in the room. The doors were closed, a basin of warm, soapy water was provided and we performed the task of washing the body. When asking why we do this, I was told that there are traces of tears that needed to be removed from the body before burial. The women of the father's tribe always did this. (ibid)

If my nephew had been married, two widowed women would be chosen from his wife's paternal *pdeek* would have looked after her during the mourning time. She would have been kept away from the people, encouraged to fast and drink only small amounts of water. She was told not to look up at people, not to talk to anyone and a shawl would be kept over her head. This custom was for four days following the death of your spouse.

According to Dr. E. T. Hyde, "After a death occurred the relatives of the deceased, have their hair cut short and blacken their faces with charcoal, and put old or ragged mats on the head, and walked four times around the body, no speech was indulged in, only the simple answering of necessary questions being allowed, and until the body was eaten, and that late at night."²⁴

The Hebrew word for widow translates into "Silent Woman". The Nisga'a belief was "to prevent the ghost or spirit of the departed from doing the survivor an injury by hearing her voice."²⁵ Taboos were not taken lightly amongst the people. Everything had a reason and could be related to some memory from the past. Many of these taboos are still practised but

²⁴ Dr. E.T. Hyde, compiled by, Notes on the Nass Indians s. Bureau American Ethnology, Washington, D.C. pg 42

²⁵ Ibid, pg 54

there are some that the elders have a hard time remembering the purpose of; only that it was so.

The family gathered at the senior uncle's home in New Aiyansh. The arrangements had to be made as soon as possible. The body of the deceased is usually kept for four days before burial. This was time enough for the casket to be ordered and the grieving process to begin. A date was set for the memorial service followed by the burial service the following day. (ibid)

The immediate family will gather and make arrangements for the coming days. It is their duty to adhere to all traditions and make sure that nothing is missed. One important task is for the maternal uncles to invite all the people in the valley to attend the settlement of a funeral. By attending the feast, they witness the passing of names and the settlement of the estate.

Other decisions were to be made as to who the undertakers would be? People were chosen to buy the casket and look after the deceased until burial. Some were to buy the clothes for the deceased to be buried in, to clean the home of the deceased and to transport the casket and family members from Terrace to Gitwinksihlkw. There were decisions about the memorial service itself, which would perform the service, who would the pallbearers be. (ibid)

The *Sim'ooGit* of the *wilp* calls the *pdeek* together on the day prior to the funeral for what is called the *liligidim pdeek* (tribal feast). This would include the immediate family as well as the tribal membership. The purpose of this feast was to allow the chiefs and nephews a chance to discuss the plans that have been set out for the main feast. It is at this time that the elders speak their wisdom in how things were done in the past and how they would like to be able to follow customs as closely as possible.

A *liligidim pdeek* or tribal feast was arranged for the afternoon prior to the memorial service. This feast was put on by the hosts, who were Jason's uncles, his mother's brothers. The feast was an organizational meeting to discuss the plans for the main settlement feast which would take place the next day after the body was buried. At this tribal feast, women married to the men of this particular Eagle house, would give blankets, towels, socks, handkerchiefs, aprons and other sundries to Eagle members.

This is called *x̣ts'ihlniinaḳ*, which literally means aprons for cooking. The gifts that these women give out are a payment for the work that is to be performed the next day. (ibid)

The *pdeeḳ* is told their *adaawaḳ* (stories) that relate to their *wilp* by their *Simgigat* (Chiefs). This helps them to validate their rights to claim crests, territories and songs. For the young people sitting around in this feast, they can look around and see whom they are related to, for it is taboo to marry into your own tribe. It helps each individual to acknowledge his matrilineal family, to know who the chiefs and matriarchs are.

The hosting chief or his nephews provide the food for the meal. The term for this was *mihla'am hoon* (burnt fish). In the old days this is what they would eat at a feast such as this. Now it can be a smorgasbord of many different foods, both traditional and contemporary. At some tribal feasts, the wives of the men in this tribe give out token presents to members of the tribe. *X̣ts'ihlniinaḳ'amskw* (the act of giving these gifts) represented the strength of the family. These small gifts were given in advance of all the work that had to be done over the next few days. Today, they only practice this at the Stonemoving event and many people say that economics has changed this practice. The immediate belongings of the deceased were also distributed to members of the tribe. This was called *yeeḳ*.

Because of the importance of the paternal family, specific members were chosen to do different tasks. With my nephew's arrangements, four or five of the higher ranking men (*Bax̣k'ap's* house) were chosen to purchase the casket. Nowadays, this is bought through a local funeral home instead of hiring someone to build a box or casket. At least one matriarch was included in the casket buying. Two women were chosen to buy new clothing for the

deceased to be buried in as everything had to be new before he entered the world of ghosts. This, as explained earlier, was important so that nothing from the past could disrupt his passing or it would bring more grief to the family. One or two women bought flowers to be given out at the burial site, and it was usually the same women that made sure that tissue was always on hand for the grieving family. The used tissues were collected during the course of the day and burnt quietly each evening so that the tears would not be left lying around.

The other decisions that remained were about the Christian memorial service and burial. The *pdeek* gathered money for the purchase of the food and supplies for the main feast. Whoever was the main host would make sure that a large portion of this money was from him. In the old days, it was the *Sim'oogit*'s responsibility with his immediate family to provide the goods for a feast. This was his way of gaining stature for his name in the Nation.

The settlement feast entailed gathering the food, choosing the cooks, the bull cooks, and the society to set the tables. There were men chosen to prepare the gravesite and bury the casket. So many decisions and yet within a few short hours, this family belonging to the *wilp* of *Hleek* of the *Lax Ts'imilx* had planned a very traditional funeral that encompasses so much of their culture mixed together with the new traditions that they had inherited from the white man's ways. (ibid)

There have been many changes as to how the feast happens. The Nisga'a still serve "Nisga'a stew", which has been served for many generations. If at all possible it is made with moose meat, but can be substituted with beef. A typical menu looks as follows: Nisga'a stew, buns, crackers, dessert, juice and coffee. The *wilsibakws* are chosen from the hosts' family to cook for them. They would choose one head cook and several cooks to help her, along with two bull cooks, men to help with the heavy pots.

Traditionally people gathered at the home of the deceased from the time the casket is brought home until the evening of the memorial. They would sing the mourning songs that belonged to the deceased house. These were sung in hopes that the family would feel uplifted.

Nowadays they would sing songs of comfort from their Christian beliefs. The church groups and the Band (musical) take the place of the traditional mourners.

When the casket was brought home *t'il luulak'* would stay with it at all times. According to my adopted sister Irene, this was because in the old days there was sorcery happening. They had to protect the body from any witchcraft that might hinder the deceased from making the journey into the after life or other people in their immediate family. In the evening, they would take all the used tissue and make a plate of food and take this outside to burn. This was an offering to the deceased for his journey. *Nisga'a* people believe in life after death, in the reincarnation of their dead. (ibid)

The term *haldawgit* refers to someone who is a sorcerer. The *Nisga'a* believed in this practice and was adamant that someone be with the body at all times. If there was someone who wanted to do harm to a family, he or she only needed to access the personal effects of the deceased. Therefore people were diligent in following this tradition.

An elder recalled the death of a *Sim'oogit* in Gitwinksihlkw. Her mother-in-law was very strict about the arrangements. She had four men sit at the four corners of the house every night. These men had a signal that they would use if necessary to warn the others of danger. Every night they heard a wolf howl and saw a dark animal crawling out from under the community hall. They thought it was a bear or a wolf. Once the *Sim'oogit* was buried they were asked to stay at the gravesite for the first night. That night they saw an animal crawling around the graveyard. It came from the direction of another community. They tried to signal each other to shoot it, but they never found it. When I asked the elder more about this, she could only remember that if the person doing the witchcraft was able to walk around the

grave four times, then he could put a curse on the family and they would lose another member soon to death.²⁶

We also had to clean our nephew's bedroom. All his personal belongings were gathered and his mother gave some of his items to his siblings, and then gave the rest away to the *t'il luulak'*. If there was anything left, it was to be burned along with the clothing that he was wearing when he died. We burned the bedding from his bed, his dirty laundry and all personal cleansing items. This was to ensure that there was no bad luck carried on in either lifetime. (ibid)

This is very much the same procedure that was practised in the old ways. The burning was to prevent others from performing witchcraft on the family. I have also been told that it is to send items to Jason to assist him in the ghost world. We burned food each evening for him and offered tobacco as he enjoyed his cigarettes. His eye glasses were also burned so that he could see as well.

The memorial services and the funeral services of today follow the culture of the white society that play a part in the Christian movement that was bestowed upon the Nisga'a people when the missionaries emerged. In the old days the body was never buried in the ground, but cremated. This seldom happens anymore, as internment became the custom. This is just another way at how customs were integrated into the cultures. (ibid)

The preparation of the food is done the night before the settlement feast. All the *Lax Ts'imilx* ladies cut meat, potatoes, carrots, celery and onions. The men set up the hall. The cooks assist to make sure things are prepared in the way that they want it. In the morning ladies from both the *Lax Ts'imilx* and *Laxsgiik* from the community come to the hall and set the tables with their best dishes. This has been a custom to the nation for as long as many can remember. People who come to eat are treated as special guests.

²⁶ Peggy Nyce, Interview

The *Lax Ts'imilx Sim'oogit* sits at the door with younger members of the *pdeek*. He gives guidance to them in how they greet each individual at the entrance to the hall. This is performed with drumming and enthusiasm. There are young men stationed around the hall and as each guest is announced at the door, he or she is escorted to a certain chair in the hall. This is called *wanimskw*. The high ranking *Simgigat* from the other *pdeek* are seated at the head of the hall, followed by those of lesser rank. The *Sigidimhaanak'* are seated similarly and the undertakers are all seated together. The members of the *Lax Ts'imilx/Laxsgiik* do not sit down as they are the hosts and only if there is room, will they sit down to eat.

Men from the tribe take turns getting up and making a speech that asks the guests to relax, enjoy themselves and to take their time in eating. After the meal, the financial part of the feast is begun. The collection and distribution of wealth is made public to those present. In Jason's feast, his parents and his siblings went up first and gave in their money. His grandparents, and aunts and uncles then followed this from his tribe. After they went, all the matrilineal society, all those who were Eagles demonstrated their solidarity of their tribe. This is called *hawal*. (ibid)

As people are enjoying their meal, the master of ceremony begins with his opening remarks which explain the purpose of the feast which is to settle the estate. He then asks for someone to give blessings on the food. After the people have begun to eat, several younger men in the *pdeek* will stand up before the crowd and say "*Hagwil ditxooxkwsim*." This is to ask people to enjoy themselves and to eat slowly.

The money contribution begins after the people have finished their stew. The first money to be put in the pot is *golkskw*, the money of the deceased. This is followed by his parents, his siblings and then by the head of his maternal family and followed down the line until the host family has finished. Then the rest of the members of the *Lax Ts'imilx/Laxsgiik pdeek* put their money into the pot (*hawaal*).

In honour of their father's tribe, all that whose father was or is a *Lax Ts'imilx/Laxsgiik*, would also give in money. This is called *hakotsgiis*, which is a symbol of mourning, otherwise known as a haircut. A custom long ago was to cut one's hair after the death of a loved one so that no more bad luck would come to the family of the deceased, as the deceased may have touched your hair. The last people to give in money were the spouses of the *Lax Ts'imilx/Laxsgiik*. (ibid)

And the final people to give in money are the spouses of the host tribe, which is called *ant'imhaanak* or *andemnak*. This refers to a dance that was traditionally performed for the mourning family. This is now done at the stone moving feast where they would dress up in funny costumes and entertain the family.

A designated group from another tribe counts all the money. Then the senior men of the *Lax Ts'imilx/Laxsgiik* would sit down and distribute the money to pay all the people from the *Laxgibuu* or other tribes who have played a role in the burial of their kin. The first people to be paid were the undertakers. The entire amount that they spent on the casket and the clothes was to be returned to each person and some extra as well. They call it *xkayhl*, which means on top.

After this then the gravediggers, the cooks, the bull cooks etc., etc. would be paid. Societies who took part in any way, churches, band councils and any other organization would also receive some payment. The individual people would also receive items such as clothes, trunks, blankets and other items that the women from the *Lax Ts'imilx/Laxsgiik* had gathered. This would go on until nothing remains in the pot. The evening would proceed with individuals receiving Nisga'a names. Those that call the names would receive gifts of money and material goods. Only those belonging to the *Hleek's wilp* would be able to receive names at this time. (ibid)

It is the responsibility of the host to pay for his own cooks out of his pocket. He usually has special items included in the *xmalk'askw* (dry goods) for each of his cooks as do some of the family members for the undertakers who have lovingly looked after their loved one. The money is distributed until there is an empty pot and they would then hold it upside down for all to see.

The naming ceremony (*idim wamhlkw*) follows the payments. Only those from *Hleek's wilp* would receive names and many *pdeek* only give out male names on the death of a male and the same with a female. When "names were passed on and privileges were publicly validated,

served and maintained a shared evaluation of status”.²⁷ These sacred names have a tie to the land and are taken from the *adaawaḱ* the stories or legends that belong to the tribe.

If your father is a member of the *Laxgibuu*, then members of this *pdeek* would be called upon to call out your name. If you are male, then two paternal men and one woman would be called upon. If you are female, then one paternal man and two women would call your name. This is referred to as a proclamation- “*Deem am’ayees Gwin wilaaks*”- which literally means “Be it known that *Gwin Wilaaks* will hold this name”.²⁸ The person receiving the name would give a small gift as thanks to the name callers.

The entire evening would come to a close with the recipients of the gifts standing up and giving verbal thanks to the hosts. Then the chiefs would get up to speak. I found that all in all this whole week long procedure showed the family that they were not alone. That there were many people out there that showed that their love and kinship would always be there. It was also a public demonstration of the networking of the tribal system. This was to show whom you could call on for assistance again and that these would be the people for whom you would watch out in their time of need and give back in some way. (ibid)

The feast was coming to a close. The men who hosted the feast have their final speech to the witnesses. They give thanks for all those who have participated since the death of their loved one. They wish each and every traveller a safe journey home. Then speeches are made by those who have received payments from the host tribe. They give thanks to the family. The evening is then closed with a prayer.

²⁷ Cultural Infusion Resource School District 92 (Nisgha). *The Treasured Legacy of the Nisgha*, Totem Press Terrace Ltd., 1982. Pg 37

²⁸ The name given to myself at a feast in 1977.

In summary, I hope that this chapter has given you a synopsis of what happens when a Nisga'a individual dies. It is very difficult to relate every detail of the death practices, as different families will use different rituals. This is only because of the assimilation that the nation has endured as not all families remember the right or same protocol. It was also problematic for me to find a lot of written material on death and funeral practices of the Nisga'a as there is not very much out there. One writing that I did discover was Potlatch at Gitsegukla: William Beynon's 1945 Field Notes.²⁹ This entire book is based on Beynon's witnessing a traditional Gitksan feast. The Gitksan are neighbours to the *Nisga'a* and do share many similarities to that of the feasting ceremonies. Many terms referenced had the same name although the spelling and pronunciation was different. Stephen A. McNeary³⁰ also recorded several feasts which he had written about in his book. I relied on my memories from twenty plus years of experiences living in the Nass Valley. I had great teachers and know that I will still be learning new things twenty years from now. Practices are still strong and even though we are an oral society, the memories of our elders are such a treasured part of the culture. It is my wish that people will continue to ask questions and find out how we can combine the old traditions with the new traditions.

²⁹ Margaret Anderson and Marjorie Halpin, edited by, Potlatch at Gitsegukla: William Beynon's 1945 Field Notes, UBC Press, Vancouver, BC

³⁰ McNeary, Stephen A. Where fire came down: social and economic life of the Nisga'a. Ph.D. Dissertation Bryn Mawr. (Reprinted by Wilp Wiloxo'oskwhl Nisga'a, 1994)

Summary

The project that I have compiled is by no means a completed project. Gathering family tree information or genealogy is always ongoing. I hope that the project will be able to answer questions that individuals have in relation to their family. The writing that you have just read is only a synopsis of what I want people to understand about genealogy and the Nisga'a through their traditions. I am by no means an expert in this area and have so much more to learn.

Louisa may not have left written stories or photos to remember her by, but her extended family believes that she left a legacy which is far more important. When the *wilp* of *Baxk'ap* can visualize their family tree and see how those roots spread out over the Nation and beyond, only then will they understand some of the dynamics of knowing their family. I am still talking to people who do not know their relations and it is with satisfaction and pride that this genealogy is compiled.

The genealogies and research that goes with it will be a start of a long process that other members can add to. Studying and collecting data is always going to be a part of my life and I hope that someone will want to take this responsibility for their own family. My father and I have struggled to piece his genealogy together and when I talk to him, he is sharing the stories and names with great pride. I anticipate that people will take this information on Louisa *Oyee's* genealogy and enjoy it.

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Appendix 1

Samples of Eulogies

In Loving Memory of
"Jason Barry Kirk Gillis"

Born on October 4, 1971 in Terrace, B.C.

Passed away suddenly on September 23, 1995 in New Aiyansh, B.C.

Jason moved with his family to Vancouver in 1972 at the age of one. While he lived in Vancouver, he attended the Florence Nightengale Elementary School. He was a member of the Kivan Boys and Girls Club, with which he played indoor soccer and floor hockey.

He moved with his family back to Gitwinksihlkw in 1983 at the age of twelve. In 1989 he was dedicated at Gitwinksihlkw Salvation Army Church. His God parents were Dennis and Natalie Nyce, of which was his own choice. He attended *Nisga'a* Elementary Secondary School until he graduated in June of 1992.

Jason joined the Gitwinksihlkw Volunteer Fire Department and the Search and Rescue Team. He was always available to lend a helping hand whether it be an emergency or a fundraiser. He competed for the Stoney Creek Fire Fighters at the Fort St. James competition when they were short handed. His last search and rescue mission was going up the mountain behind our village to assist in the rescue of Lisa Smith.

Jason was an intelligent young man. He brought laughter to many with his shy sense of humour, however on the other hand, he wasn't afraid to show his emotions if he disliked something. One thing that Jason enjoyed was going out early in the morning to water his lawn! He always had a good laugh when he would see his Dad changing the channels on the T.V. with his Indian remote control (two oolichan sticks taped together)!

His pet peeves were: -mushroom picking (which he thought he wasn't good at), he rarely went unless his Mom or Dad took him, -and playing the boxing game on the Nintendo (the family always knew when he was trying to play because they could hear his foot stomping on the floor).

Jason got along well with the family. To all of us, he was known as "BUBBA". Jason was a friendly young man who will be missed dearly by those who knew and loved him. Bubba will never be forgotten, his warmth and big smile will remain close in our hearts forever.

Jason was predeceased by Great-Grandparents: (Envoy) Eli and Mary, (Envoy) Peter and Agnes and Grandparents Bert and Emily.

He is survived by his parents- Gary & Alice, his brothers-Clifford & Christopher and his sister Farrah, his Grandparents Jacob & Peggy, his uncles- Stephen, Chester (Ethel), Arthur (Sally), Dennis (Natalie), his aunties- Debbie (Alan), Cynthia (Ken), Tina (Steve), Annette (Ralph) and his cousin/auntie Sue (Dean). Also by numerous cousins and two nephews Jalen-Dean and Quinn.

Hluulux ts'im tsimay

From the

House of Hleek.³¹

Eulogy of "Jason Barry Kirk Gillis, 1995.

Eulogy of the Late

ALISIM XSGAAK

Sigidimnak' ahl Wilps Baxk'ap

Dorothy was lovingly known as "Mamma Dah."

She was born on October 5, 1915 at Mill Bay Cannery.

Predeceased by:

Her parents: Henry and Martha Azak,

Her brothers: Henry Jr., Fred Moore, Edward, William, Ernest, Percy, Joshua, Roy, Henry, Maurice Nyce, Jacob and an unnamed son who was miscarried.

Her sisters: Louisa, Cora Bolton, Lillian and Lena

Her stepdaughter: Winnifred Nahanee (nee Azak)

Her sons: Freddy, Henry, Johnny, Max

Her daughters: Gretta and daughter lost by miscarriage

Her great granddaughter: Tiffany Anne Louise Smith

Her first husband: Simon Peter Calder

Her second husband: Solomon Doolan

Dorothy's mother Martha, was awarded the Coronation Medal from Queen Elizabeth. She was awarded the medal as the matriarch of the village. In the citation the Queen states that the village was the most progressive one in the Skeena-Nass Agency. The Queen further commended the village for their industry.

Gitwinksihlkw was well known at that time for their boat building and high line fishermen.

Mamma Dah is survived by her sister, Christine Nelson (Charles) and brother Jacob Nyce (Peggy), the last remaining children of sisters Martha Azak and Agnes Nyce. Martha Azak, Agnes Nyce, Jacob, William and Johnny Moore were the children of Louisa Oyea, who is commemorated by the memorial pole in front of our community hall.

She is also survived by: daughter Dianna Smith (Danny), her adopted children (raised with Simon Calder); Bruce Haldane (Mary-Ann), Brian Azak and Judy Azak, (Brian Wyksik). Step-children (with Solomon Doolan): daughters Arbutus Stewart (Paul), Marietta Lincoln (Vince), Jennifer Watts (Roger), Darlene Wilson (Taylor), Dale Baxter (Melvin), Josephine Morrison (Darryl), Paula Lincoln (Leonard) and Charlotte; and sons, Fred Doolan (Rose), Steven Doolan (Winnie), Stuart Doolan (Cheryl) and Henry Doolan (Alura).

Mammah Dah is also survived by her grandchildren:

Dianna's children: Martha Azak (William), Lisa (Tim Friesen), Peter (Cynthia Kennedy).

Great grandchildren: (Martha's children) – Simon Calder (Marleyna), Natasha, Charmaine, Raymond, Torri and Bailey; (Lisa's) – Skye Friesen; (Peter's) – Hannah and William also known as PopEye Willi.

Great great grandchildren: (Simon's), Alycia Starlynn and (Natasha's), Summer Paige.

(Bruce Haldane's) – 3 grandsons and 3 great grandchildren. (Judy Azak's) – 2 grandsons.
(Late Winnie Nahanee) – 1 grandson, 1 granddaughter, 2 great grandchildren.

She had many grandchildren and great grandchildren from her extended family and godchildren. There is just too many to list here but she knew and loved each and every one.

Mamma Dah and her family moved to Gitwinksihlkw from Underleaf in 1917 when the whole village migrated.

Her first marriage was an arranged marriage. She married Simon Calder in 1936. She had 7 children and only Dianna survived. Mamma Dah took up residence in Greenville with her husband and migrated with him to the coast for fishing season. She worked at several canneries: Claxton, Mill Bay, Arandale and North Pacific, where she worked for 40 years as a netwoman.

After her first husband passed away in 1967, she moved back to Gitwinksihlkw. She remarried in 1968 to Solomon Doolan and moved to Kincolith. When her second husband passed away in 1979, she again moved back to Gitwinksihlkw. She loved her stepchildren very much but felt she had to return to her home in Gitwinksihlkw.

Mamma Dah was not a person to sit back, she believed in being an active part of the community. In Gitwinksihlkw she was active in Native Daughters and Home League and was Home League Secretary. She was also a member of the Gitwinksihlkw Four Crest Dancers. As our matriarch she performed at the Commonwealth Games in Victoria, she travelled to Ottawa to perform at the Museum of Man and she performed at the Hawaiian Cultural Centre.

While living in the communities of Greenville and Kincolith she took an active part in all societies. She once held the position of president of the Greenville Anglican Church Women.

She went to Vancouver to visit her children and ended up moving there for several years. She was active there also. She travelled with the elders all across Canada on a trip that lasted a month. Mamma Dah was continually promoting her language, culture, songs and traditional medicine. She taught these to students at BCIT and UBC. She was featured in a book "Our Elders Speak".

She moved back to Gitwinksihlkw in 1988 and remained here until her failing health forced her to move to Terrace. When she was well she moved back to the place she loved so much but again her health forced her to move back to Terrace to be close to her doctor. In Terrace she became well enough to be known by all the merchants.

Mamma Dah became ill on August 14, 2004 and suffered a severe stroke on August 20th. The family wishes to acknowledge the staff at Mill Memorial Hospital who cared for her since August. They made Mamma Dah as comfortable as possible and gave her extra care and attention. She especially adored her male nurses who always managed to make her smile.

Mamma Dah was deeply spiritual person and communed with her creator daily. She leaves a message for all her children, great grandchildren, great, great grandchildren and her people.

*"Plant your seed of faith **TODAY** and expect many miracles."*

"There is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, it sprouts again, and grows tender new branches."

Appendix 2

Letter of Permission

September 24, 2003

To Whom It May Concern:

We, the Chiefs, Matriarchs and tribal members are writing a letter in support of the research that Sally Nyce is conducting. We acknowledge that she is doing this research as a project for the process of gaining her Master's Degree in First nations Studies with the University of Northern British Columbia.

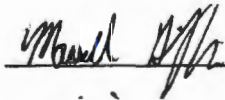
We are in agreement with her developing a comprehensive **Family Tree of the House of Baxkap**. IT is our understanding that she is going to trace the descendants of our Late Matriarch Louisa Oyee. Involved in this research will be names, events (birth, baptism, marriage, death and burial), photos and stories that relate the history of this family. She will be verifying the information that she gathers with different family members and consent will be given individually based on each of their terms.

We are asking that the finished research project in its' entirety belong to the House of *Baxkap* and that access be only granted with our permission. This is a wonderful project but may contain sensitive information that family may not want publicly released. We will allow a copy to be housed in the archives of both UNBC and WVN with this in mind.

With regards,

The House of *Baxkap*.

A-



Please note, scanner skipped bottom signatures and the original letter will be in the project files.

Appendix 3

Annotated Bibliography

Blyth, Gladys Young. Salmon Canneries. Lantzville: Oolichan Books, 1991.

A very enjoyable book of the history of the salmon canneries along the northwest coast. Blyth gave an account of the salmon industry and how each of the canneries came into being. Lots of information on how First Nations people became employed through the canneries and stories of how cannery life became an important part of their lives and livelihood. Before talking about each cannery, Blyth explores the different types of commercial fishing such as gillnet, troll and seine fishing. She devotes chapters on the process of canning, how cans were made and the changes that each new year brought with new technology. She writes of thirty-eight different canneries in the area with maps to show each site.

Cybulski, Jerome S. A Greenville Burial Ground. Canada: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1992.

During the month of July 1981, the Nisga'a community of Greenville unearthed the remains of human bones during a construction project. This find was reported to officials of the Archeology Branch for the Province of British Columbia by the Band Council. From this report a complete investigation was started, in which this book covers the details from beginning to end. They go through the excavation of the area and from this reports and findings are documented. The book discovers the historical context of the movement of the people that lived in the area, possible causes of why individuals died and how they survived as a group.

Davis, George T.B. Metlakahtla, A True Narrative of the Red Man. Seattle: Shorey Book Store, 1964. Reprint.

This is an old book first written in 1904. It is an account of some of the first encounters of the warships traveling through the Pacific Northwest. It particularly details the stories of William Duncan with the Tsimshian people. It does not tell us where the information was obtained and who the author was. Maybe he took all the information recorded at the time and compiled what he saw as a story. After reading the book, I did recognize different areas that are documented in other findings. I was not that impressed with this book as I felt the racism throughout its pages. It did offer a few names of individuals who can be traced with other sources. This book was reprinted for the fifth time in 1974.

Duff, Wilson. The Indian History of British Columbia: Volume 1. British Columbia: Royal British Columbia Museum, 1997.

This is the new-format edition of Wilson Duff's original work on the study of First Nations people and their interaction with the white man. Duff was the Curator of Anthropology at the British Columbia Provincial Museum in the 1960's and had prepared this work as part of a series of handbooks. This particular volume covers the post contact or historic period within

British Columbia. He has classified the First Nation tribes and bands, summarized their population trends and given accounts on the ways in which they have had to adjust their livelihood in order to keep their culture alive. I like the way Duff presents the information which gives the reader both important anthropological and historical events that enables one to have an idea of life back then.

Hacking, Norman. Captain William Moore. Surrey: Heritage House Publishing Company Ltd., 1993.

This is about a pioneer in British Columbia who lived during the 1800's known as Captain William Moore. This name is of particular interest to me as a matriarch in the research of my husband's family was first married to a Robert Moore of Victoria. Captain Moore lived from 1803-1850 and based his family in Victoria, BC. He spent many years traveling throughout BC through the great waterways. He came during the Gold Rush days of 1852 and followed the stampedes through out the years. Wherever the gold was, he was soon to be traveling as well. He raised his sons in the wilderness with him and became well known amongst many. I want to check out the family history of Captain Moore to see if there is any connection to the Robert Moore that I am researching.

Latham, William and Higgins, Cindy. How To Find Your Family Roots and Write Your Family History, United States: Santa Monica Press LLC, 2000.

A great introduction to putting your family tree together. This book is full of ideas that can be as simple as doing an ancestral chart to as complicated as writing an entire autobiography. The authors have explained the process of beginning to end- organizing your research material, looking at the background of names, relationships and dates, interviewing the people close to you such as grandparents, aunts and uncles. They have given references for using computers with the introduction of the world wide web, how to use libraries, church records, local records, federal government and overseas documentation. This book is an asset to anyone searching for their roots.

Lillard, Charles, ed. Warriors of the North Pacific. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1984.

Charles Lillard gives us a detailed account of the lives of four gentlemen who came into the north west. Lillard has taken written documentation from Rev. J. S. Green, Thomas Crosby, Charles Harrison and William Ridley. These men were all missionaries who in one way or another changed the lives of those around them. He wanted to provide his works that would entice a "widely scattered international audience" (p.24). He did not want to see his book hidden away in a collection somewhere, but hoped that it would interest many. He provides the Christianity aspect for those who choose to study how the missionaries came and tried to change lifestyles. The most important aspect that Lillard wants his readers to feel is that personal account of the four men and not of the others who try to capture their journeys. A good read.

Lillard, Charles, ed., Collision, William Henry. In the Wake of the War Canoe. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1981.

This book records the memoirs of a missionary who journeyed to the Pacific Northwest and spent over forty years working amongst the First Nations People. William Henry Collison spent time at places like: Masset, Skidegate, Skeena River, the Kitlope and Southeastern Alaska. This led him to encounters with the Tsimshian, Haida, Nishga, Gitksan and even tribes that may no longer exist today. Collison's recounts provide many facts that are helpful to researchers like me, who are seeking names of individuals of an era where few facts were documented. He recorded many place names that the Nishga inhabited and also of territories where they traveled on a yearly basis. Although his accounts are in his own words, by doing research one finds many similarities in stories that are told. An excellent reference.

McNeary, Stephen A. Where Fire Came Down: Social and Economic Life of the Nisga'a. Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a, 1994.

This dissertation was done by Stephen McNeary. It was an attempt to "describe the traditional economic and social life of the Niska Indians..." This book came into my possession during my studies at Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a for my bachelor's degree. I found this book full of valuable information relating to the lifestyles of Nisga'a peoples. McNeary talks about traditional life, post contact, the land, resources, material culture, subsistence, society, life cycles, and new customs. The last few chapters dealing with lifestyles is very useful in my studies with genealogy as he tells how the matrilineal lineage was kept, how they passed on names and the entire life cycle around birth, marriage and death. I have utilized this resource many times over the years and it still continues to provide new information.

Raunet, Daniel. without surrender without consent, A history of the Nisga'a land claims. Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996.

This is a wonderful account of the Nisga'a Nations struggle to fight their land claim battle. It gives quotes from many of the Nisga'a who saw first hand these struggles and who heard it from their ancestors. Daniel Raunet first came to the Nass in the spring of 1981. He attended a Nishga Tribal Council Convention and was escorted by the "Late Roy Azak" who held the chieftain name *Baxkap* of the *Laxgibuu pdeek* at the time. This is of interest to me as this is the family to which I have married into and subsequently adopted by. Raunet gives a detailed account from the beginning, back in 1778 when the first white men arrived on the west coast of Vancouver Island. He tracks the history of the contact through to present day trials and tribulations. A very good book to read.

Riley, Linda, ed. Marius Barbeau's Photographic Collection: The Nass River. National Museums of Canada, 1988.

This book presents a major photographic collection of Anthropologist Marius Barbeau. The pictures depict that of the Nass Valley as it was in his day. Riley has set it up with sections on villages, houses, poles, grave monuments, petroglyph, economics, and social activities. She also presents Barbeau's collection of photographs of the material culture which is the regalia,

carvings, etc that the Nisga'a made. The part that was of most interest to me was the individual portraits and the groups of people that he caught on film. Barbeau kept a fairly descriptive account of their names, *Nisga'a* names, which tribe they belonged to and sometimes the years that they lived. This is crucial to my studies on genealogy.

Veillette, John, White, Gary. Early Indian Village Churches. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977.

A great inventory of churches covering the majority of British Columbia Indian villages. The book begins with three chapters from different authors explaining the missionary development within the First Nations' communities. Each of these chapters depicts a specialized area, such as: Robin Fisher's account of the missionaries encounters with the Indians of BC. He explains the objectives and techniques that were utilized by the missionaries to try to convert the Indians. Warren Sommer talks about the sites that were chosen and the architectural styles that were built in the communities. It is amazing to see the European structures being built in the middle of no where. The two authors of this book tell of the villages and the churches that remain in them today. The main section of the book provides a pictorial documentation of early church buildings throughout BC, which is divided it into eight specific areas.

Whitehead, Margaret. Now you are my brothers. Missionaries in British Columbia. Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1981

An interesting account of the missionaries who endured the hardships of life in uncivilized areas of British Columbia. Margaret Whitehead covers an area spanning the late 1800's through to the early part of the 1900's. One of the individuals included was Robert Tomlinson, who spent nine years in Kincolith, and created Minskinisht, both Native communities. She tells us of the life of Father Frances Marie Thomas who preached in the Cariboo/Chilcotin country and also of Sister Patricia who served in the Sechelt area. Whitehead gives an account of Lillooet born Mary Englund, born in 1904; she remembers life as a child of residential school. This book looks at history not only from the eyes of outsiders, but also that of the native people who lived there as well.

Young, Terry Ann. Researching the History of Aboriginal Peoples in British Columbia. BC Lands, 1992.

Young has compiled a detailed list the resources available at the BC Archives and Records Service and BC Lands. All of these resources relate to the history of Aboriginal people within British Columbia. Young put this together in view of the large numbers of individuals who study and research documentation in order to accompany the issues around the land question. The resources cover the time period from 1849 to 1938. She gives not only specific areas in which to search, but also "how-to" tips and where to find other resources. A must guide for anyone beginning to do research about First Nations'.

The following collection of books was compiled by the *Ayuukhl Nisga'a* Project. It consists of eight volumes, of which I have the first four: Volume I- Origins; Volume II- *Pdeek* Histories; Volume III- Nisga'a Society and Volume IV- Lands and Resources. It was written in the words of our elders about their beliefs around what is important to them and their understanding in regards to the question of land claims. Elders were interviewed during the time from November 1982 to September of 1983. Everything was conducted in the *Nisga'a* language then translated from the tapes. There were approximately 156 interviews completed. This information is a most valuable documentation in relation to the history of the Nisga'a.

Nisga'a Tribal Council. Nisga'a Origins, "In the Beginning..." *Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study*, Volume 1. Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Publications, 1995.

This is a collection of the Creation stories of the Nisga'a. It has been recorded by the elders and only by those who have the authority to share the *adawaak*. It starts with the Creation and continues with many vignettes of why things came to be. I find it very useful in understanding the values and beliefs of the Nisga'a.

Nisga'a Tribal Council. *Nisga'a Pdeek Histories, Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study, Volume II*. Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Publications, 1995.

This is a collection of *adaawaks* from the history of the Nisga'a. It has been broken down into four individual groups of the *pdeeks* or tribes. The Wolf, the Eagle, the Killer whale, and the Raven. The stories that have been related are specific to each tribe and are told usually by the holders of the particular *adaawak*. This book helps to have an understanding of the crests that can be used by each of the tribes. It helps to put each tribe into perspective and provides an identity to each.

Nisga'a Tribal Council. *Nisga'a Society, Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study, Volume III*. Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Publications, 1995.

This book is valuable to the research that I am endeavoring. It contains sections of names that are related to each individual tribe. It talks about the system of an individual's life from birth through to death. I find it helpful in talking about how names were passed down, the territories that followed the Chiefs, the numerous ceremonies that follow in a person's life. The book speaks to the different feasts and rituals in every day life. This book provides so much information on the Nisga'a society in general to be able to understand the culture.

Nisga'a Tribal Council. *The Land and Resources: Traditional Nisga'a Systems of Land Use and Ownership, Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study, Volume IV*. Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Publications, 1995.

The land and its ownership and use are the mainstay of the *Nisga'a* people. In this collection, they have tried to capture all aspects of the land. It is divided into seven chapters. In a brief description, they are as follows: The Laws of Land Ownership and Land Use; The Riches: The Nature of Nisga'a Resources; Using the Land: The Traditional Nisga'a Year; The Ecology of Residency and Harvests; From the Land, Sea & River to the Table: the

production & distribution of food and materials - Harvesting, Preserving and Distributing; and lastly, a most important aspect - Connectedness and Management.

The following is a collection of books that were developed as resources for students and teachers at School District #92 (NISGHA). They are fairly self-explanatory in that each book gives the reader a chance to understand the particular aspect of the culture. They are written in simplistic terms so that they can be used throughout the school grades.

Nisgha Cultural Infusion Resource School District 92 (Nisgha). Am'ugithl Nisga'a: Nisga'a Clothing. Terrace: Totem Press Terrace Ltd. 1981.

Nisgha Cultural Infusion Resource School District 92 (Nisgha). Wila Niinikskwhl Nisga'a: Nisga'a Marriage. Terrace: Totem Press Terrace Ltd. 1981.

Nisgha Cultural Infusion Resource School District 92 (Nisgha). Lip Hli Gandaxgathl Nisga'a: The People of K'amligihahlhaahl. Terrace: Totem Press Terrace Ltd. 1981.

Nisgha Cultural Infusion Resource School District 92 (Nisgha). Lip Hli Gandaxgathl Nisga'a: Nisgha in Combat. Terrace: Totem Press Terrace Ltd. 1981.

Community Resources

Ayuukhl Nisga'a Department, Nisga'a Lisims Government, New Aiyansh, B.C.

This program is under the Program and Services of the Nisga'a Lisims Government. It has a staff of two individuals: Gary Tait, Manager and Nita Morven, Researcher. This department is there to protect, preserve and promote Nisga'a language, culture and history. Although I have yet to check out their resources, I am told that they have the following items: Nisga'a culture and history files, oral histories, *Delgamuukw* transcripts, and collections of Marius Barbeau, John Corsiglia, Rod Robinson and Gary Fiegehen. They also have many projects that are in various stages of development. Some of these include: territorial binders, traditional name repository, genealogy, artifacts repatriation, academic research requests. The department is in the new building of the Nisga'a Lisims Government and will be a wealth of resources to go through.

British Columbia Vital Events Indexes, British Columbia Archives, 655 Belleville Street, Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

I have utilized this resource for many years. They have a web site in which one can do research from home on the computer. They carry the microfilms of the following: Deaths Registration Index (1872-1979); Marriage Registration Index (1872-1924) and Birth Registration Index (1854-1899). These are being updated annually on the internet. The web site is: <http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca> with the highlighted link for Historical Vital Events Indexes. It is a fascinating web site where you can get the basics such as name, date, event place and the microfilm number and registration number. From this you have to actually have access to the original microfilm and follow through to the registration number.

Here you will find the actual document that can carry the bare minimum of details to a wealth of information. This is probably my favourite resource to use.

Diocese of Caledonia, Anglican Church, Prince Rupert, B.C.

Within the offices of the Diocese, is a collection of the archives of all the Anglican Churches within the area. They have baptismal records, marriage records and burial records dating back to the late 1800's. Not every church was able to submit these to the archives, due to floods and fires within the communities. In order to do research there, you would have to first choose a community and begin within a certain time period. From here one would have to start at the beginning of a book and just manually search for the names that you are looking for. There are different modes of information in these records such as: name, parents, dates, places, cause of death, etc. The archivist, Cliff Armstrong is very helpful and he alone carries a wealth of information.

Salvation Army, Gitwinksihlkw, B.C.

This is the church that stayed in the community of Gitwinksihlkw, formerly Canyon City. The church would carry many records pertaining to the dedications, marriages and burials of people from this community. The older records would have to access through the Territorial Division for the Salvation Army. I have yet to contact this resource and will be doing so, as many of the people that I am searching for come from this area.

Nisga'a Elders

There are many Elders within the Nation that would provide much of the information that I am seeking in this genealogical study. Many times an Elder will forget names and when I begin to sit with them and talk, they begin to remember situations and names, thus providing clarification to information that I may already have or validating new information. The Elders love to have someone to talk and share with and over the past thirty plus years living with the Nisga'a Nation, I have developed a rapport with many of them. They are also asking that I put together family trees for them so that they can pass this on to future generations. I have included only a few names of Elders as examples.

1. *Baxk'ap* - Jacob Nyce- my father-in-law, Hereditary Chief of the Wolf Tribe. Jacob is the grandson of Louisa Williams (Oyee) and son of Agnes Nyce.
2. Hlgu Wilksihlgum Hlbin - Emma Nyce- matriarch- Eagle, House of Hleek. Emma's father was Wii Gadim Xsgaak, Wolf Chief and her mother was a granddaughter of Louisa Williams (Oyeh). Emma, being the oldest daughter also carries the privilege of knowledge of stories, etc. from both sides of her family.
3. Nox Ween -Peggy Nyce – matriarch – Eagle, House of Hleek. Peggy's father was Wii Gadim Xsgaak, Wolf Chief and her mother was a granddaughter of Louisa Williams (Oyee). Peggy is my mother-in-law and has been an inspiration to my collection of materials. She

assists me whenever I approach her and always has knowledgeable information about both her own House and that of her husband's.

4. Alice Azak - Matriarch – Eagle, House of Gwiix Maaw. Alice is the wife of the late Jacob Azak, son of Martha and Henry Azak. Martha was the daughter of Louisa and Peter Williams. Alice has been a great resource for me and has a tremendous amount of knowledge as was expected of a wife.

Other Resources

Anderson, Margaret, Halpin, Marjorie. Potlatch at Gitsegukla. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000.

Cassidy, Maureen, Cassidy, Frank. Proud Past: A History of the Wet'suwet'en of Moricetown, BC. Moricetown, BC: Moricetown Band, 1980.

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