

# What We Learned

## Two Generations Reflect on Tsimshian Education and the Day Schools

HELEN RAPTIS

WITH MEMBERS OF THE TSIMSHIAN NATION

The members of the Tsimshian Nation are  
Mildred Roberts, Wally Miller, Sam Lockerby, Verna Inkster,  
Clifford Bolton, Harvey Wing, Charlotte Guno,  
Don Roberts Junior, Steve Roberts, Richard Roberts,  
Carol Sam, and Jim Roberts



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# I

## A Class List and a Puzzle: Researching Indigenous Education

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WHEN TSIMSHIAN ELDER Verna Inkster (née Spalding) was growing up in Port Essington on the northwest coast of British Columbia during the first half of the twentieth century, her parents stressed the importance of self-reliance. Like many Tsimshian couples, Verna's parents regularly took their children out to camp in their traditional territories in order to teach them survival skills, such as preserving seafood and wildlife procured by fathers and uncles. Verna also learned to harvest berries and seaweed, which were dried in the sun and preserved in large oil cans. Verna's education, much like that of her Tsimshian ancestors, consisted of watching elders and learning the traditional skills and knowledge – passed down over the millennia – that would help her to assume a place in the community's social fabric. When not at camp, families resided at Port Essington, a town developed on a former autumn camping site that the Tsimshian people called Spaksuut (pronounced "Spokeshute"). Children attended the Methodist-run Port Essington Indian Day School. Verna generally enjoyed her four years at the school.

We did reading and writing. We learned about *Jack and Jill*. I think everyone memorized it. We did a lot of drawing for art ... We did lots of singing, and there were Christmas concerts where we sang songs such as "Silent Night." At recess and after lunch, we'd play outside, mostly baseball. We'd also go around and pick berries and eat them with our lunch.<sup>1</sup>

Verna's recollections offer a rare view into the two educational worlds in which the Aboriginal children of Port Essington manoeuvred in the early twentieth century: the traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle passed down through the generations and the formal day school, where children were "Anglicized." The differences between these two forms of education afford an important opportunity to examine educational developments within a context of crosscultural contact. As Métis scholar Emma LaRocque has pointed out, "living cultures do not remain fixed in time; they adapt and change as required over time."<sup>2</sup> This acknowledgment of inevitable adaptation and change raises several important questions about Indigenous education. How has Indigenous education evolved over time and place? What has remained stable and what has changed? What factors have prompted stability and change? How was education – both traditional and Western-style – experienced by the children who were being educated? What impacts have former pupils' educational experiences had on their adult lives overall?

Historians studying Indigenous education have tended to focus on the limited notion of formal schooling as opposed to the broader, more comprehensive concept of education, leading one historian to note that "residential schooling has become synonymous with the history of Aboriginal education."<sup>3</sup> Yet "more Indian children in Canada passed through seasonal or regular day schools than through the portals of the more impressive boarding facilities."<sup>4</sup> This book moves beyond residential schooling to explore the many, varied dimensions of education experienced by two generations of Tsimshian students between the 1930s and the 1970s at Port Essington and Terrace, British Columbia. In particular, it presents the recollections of seven elderly Tsimshian born during the 1930s and 1940s and of five middle-aged adults born during the 1950s and 1960s. All twelve students lived at Port Essington for part of their childhood, during which they found themselves transitioning from one world into another. The group of elders received a traditional Tsimshian education, provided by their families mainly while out at their traditional camping grounds. This group also experienced formal schooling at Port Essington Indian Day School and, after 1947, entered the public system by attending the integrated Port Essington Elementary School. Two of the students from this generation also attended residential school after completing elementary school. In contrast, the five participants from the younger generation were schooled entirely in integrated settings. Their experiences were more challenging as they made the difficult transition from the tranquil world of Port Essington, where they were surrounded

by extended family, to the reserve at Kitsumkalum, where the distance from schools in Terrace required them to travel daily by bus with unfamiliar populations.

Members of both generations note that both Western-style schooling and their broader Tsimshian education played important, albeit unequal, roles as they transitioned into their adult lives. Their narratives indicate that the elders were exposed to more of their Tsimshian traditions than were the younger generation. In many ways, members of the generation born after the Second World War have retained little of their Tsimshian language and culture. At the same time, after entering the workforce, they strove to retain their places in the mainstream economy, which shifted and changed around them due to global economic developments.

*What We Learned* offers readers a historical study of how these twelve former students from two different generations experienced educational change during a particularly dynamic period in Canadian history.<sup>5</sup> Archival documents and the elders' oral histories illustrate that they experienced both the broad, holistic notion of Tsimshian education as well as the more restricted Western concept of formal schooling at Port Essington Indian Day School. The stories of the younger generation, however, focus mainly on formal schooling, indicating that within one generation the broad Tsimshian notion of education gave way to a more limited concept of schooling. Their stories also evoke troubling themes: cultural loss, disconnection, and discrimination. Yet their narratives illustrate resilience and triumph, revealing the character of Tsimshian resistance and adaptation with respect to both formal schooling and entry into the paid labour force.

#### CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

The words "Aboriginal," "First Nations," "Indian," "Indigenous," and "Native" are used interchangeably throughout this book to reflect their common usage at various points in time. It is also important to explain the distinction between the words "schooling" and "education" in this study. Recently, a growing number of Indigenous scholars have asserted that schooling is a subcomponent of education, despite the fact that the two terms have become synonymous in common parlance. American researchers K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa McCarty illustrate the conflation of schooling and education like this: "Ask ten Americans to *describe* education, and nine times out of the ten you will hear about schooling ... Our everyday ideas about *education* are constrained by a narrow vision of

*schooling*, a thin slice out of the panoply of educational theories, strategies, and experiences developed over human history.”<sup>6</sup>

Whereas Western conceptions of education tend to focus on formal – mainly cognitive – aspects of schooling, education within Indigenous epistemology implies a broader, lifelong notion of experience “gleaned from interaction with one another, with all of nature (seen and unseen), as well as with all of the cosmos.”<sup>7</sup> Indigenous researchers are increasingly inviting scholars and educators to supplant the narrow concept of schooling with a more expansive view of education.<sup>8</sup> This distinction is fitting for this book, as the Tsimshian have no word for formal schooling. Instead, the word that is used for education is *suwilaawks*, meaning “to learn.”

#### A JOURNEY BEGINS: RESEARCH SOURCES AND APPROACHES

The impetus for this book was a 1947 class list from Port Essington Indian Day School that I (Helen), as the principal investigator of the project, found in the national archives while researching the genesis of the Canadian government’s 1951 policy shift from segregated to integrated schooling for Indigenous learners. The names on the list constituted the last group of children to attend the day school before it was closed and the students were integrated into Port Essington Elementary School. This list and the teacher’s note declaring the school’s closure were intriguing. How and why did the Tsimshian children of Port Essington integrate into a public school when there was no existing legislation in 1947 that would have enabled such a move? Were the people of Port Essington simply more enlightened, egalitarian citizens than other Canadians, or were there other factors at work? How did the former students of Port Essington experience the transition from segregated to integrated schooling? I made a copy of the class list and was determined to learn more about this educational change. When I secured funding from Canada’s Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, I began searching for more documents about the life of the day school.

The backbone of historical research has tended to be document analysis due, in part, to the wealth of written sources.<sup>9</sup> This is particularly true of the government sources recording almost every facet of Indigenous peoples’ lives in Canada. The search for background information about the closure of Port Essington Indian Day School began with official government files at the British Columbia Archives in Victoria and at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa. My research assistants and I found Department of

Indian Affairs files contained in Record Group 10, Volume 6407, to be the most useful. Throughout our investigations, I was awed by the Canadian government's meticulous recordkeeping. Indigenous peoples have been subjected to a level of surveillance surpassed only perhaps by incarcerated populations.<sup>10</sup>

Although these provincial and federal repositories were useful sources of statistics and community information about Port Essington, we were not able to learn much about classroom life at the day school. For this, we turned to the Prince Rupert City and Regional Archives, which had a very useful collection of materials documenting the community of Port Essington, as well as developments and events at both the public school and the day school. At the United Church of Canada's Bob Stewart Archives in Vancouver, we were able to retrieve immeasurably helpful information about the Methodist teachers who taught at the day school from the late 1800s to the mid-1940s. The Prince Rupert School District provided the 1947 minutes of board meetings at which the trustees discussed the integration of the Indigenous children into Port Essington's public school. To fill in gaps in the archival record, we relied on published sources, the most useful being Ernest A. Harris's local history titled *Spokeshute: Skeena River Memory*.

From the documents and published sources, we were able to piece together the comings and goings of the town of Port Essington and the Indian Day School over a period of approximately 100 years. We learned that Port Essington once sat on the northwest coast of British Columbia where the Skeena and Ecstall Rivers meet just south of Prince Rupert. It lay within the traditional territory of the Tsimshian peoples who once used the site in the autumn months before returning to their winter villages farther inland at Kitsumkalum and Kitselas near the present-day towns of Terrace and Kitimat.<sup>11</sup> In 1835 the Coast Tsimshian population of 8,500 occupied territory spanning from the coast to just east of what is now Smithers, north to the border of Alaska near Stewart, and south almost to Bella Bella.<sup>12</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Tsimshian population was seriously threatened by settler expansion and diseases such as smallpox.<sup>13</sup>

In 1871, when the discovery of gold created a rush inland to the Omineca region, Robert Cunningham and his partner Thomas Hankin received a land grant from the provincial government to establish a store at Port Essington that would sell mining supplies.<sup>14</sup> Others followed their lead, and Port Essington soon became a centre of trade and industry servicing the Skeena River region and the inland goldfields. In 1882, after the gold

rush had subsided, Cunningham built a cannery at Port Essington, followed by a sawmill farther south of the town, and encouraged the Tsimshian to settle there permanently. To ensure a steady supply of labour, he allocated a portion of his pre-empted land to establish a reserve.<sup>15</sup> With the growth of fish canning and logging industries during the 1870s, increasing numbers of Tsimshian opted to settle in the area. Many Tsimshian found employment in the fledgling industries and used canoes and their knowledge of the Skeena to transport supplies and travellers.<sup>16</sup> Settlers bought up the remainder of Cunningham's subdivided land.<sup>17</sup> By 1890



Port Essington, west of Terrace, on the southwest bank of the Skeena River, just south of Prince Rupert. *Map by Eric Leinberger.*



Port Essington Indian Reserve facing the Skeena River, 1888. *Courtesy of the University of British Columbia, Rare Books and Special Collections, BC, Historical Photos, B124.*

Port Essington had become the area's main docking site, with steamboats replacing canoes as the most common means of shuttling people and goods along the Skeena River and the BC coastline.<sup>18</sup> By 1898 Port Essington included three canneries (Skeena, British-American, and Skeena Commercial), numerous shops, a mill, and several cafés. Its population was ethnically mixed, consisting of “Indians, Whites, Japanese, Chinese, and new immigrants from Europe [particularly Finns],” but the reserve formed the heart of the town.<sup>19</sup> Despite its ethnic diversity, the town was segregated to a certain extent. The reserve occupied the centre front of the town, closest to the Skeena River. Japanese Canadians, who made up half of the town's population, resided northeast of the reserve. Another community, “dubbed Finntown,” was close to the Ecstall River, farther east of the Japanese area.<sup>20</sup> Not surprisingly, two school systems operated. Children of Native heritage attended Port Essington Indian Day School, and all the others enrolled in Port Essington Elementary School.<sup>21</sup>



brawling frequently halted the stream of people as they eddied around a struggling group.”<sup>25</sup>

Port Essington’s meteoric rise as an economic hub was followed by a slow but precipitous decline. In 1914 the transcontinental Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, connecting British Columbia to the province of Alberta, was completed, but its terminus was placed north of Port Essington at Prince Rupert. As train travel increasingly replaced sea and river travel, Port Essington began to stagnate. Once-busy passenger boats began to rot on the town’s shores, foreshadowing its destiny.<sup>26</sup>

Changes in the fishing industry also played a critical role in Port Essington’s decline. In 1929 ten canneries operated around the lower Skeena River – with three at Port Essington.<sup>27</sup> With the advent of refrigeration to transport fish across vast distances, canneries no longer needed to be located close to the fish runs. Fewer, larger canneries concentrated production closer to urban areas in the province’s southern region. Coupled with declining fish stocks, these changes squeezed many Skeena-area canneries out of production.<sup>28</sup> Port Essington’s last cannery closed its doors in the late 1930s, forcing many residents to leave.<sup>29</sup>



Skeena Commercial Cannery, Port Essington, circa 1910. *Courtesy of Royal BC Museum, Image C-04932 c, British Columbia Archives.*

The federal government's decision to remove Japanese Canadians from coastal areas also contributed to the town's declining vitality. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, Canada declared war on Japan, and by January 1942 anti-Japanese hysteria had swept the province. Responding to severe public pressure, the federal government initially relocated one hundred men of Japanese ancestry from coastal areas to work in camps in the province's interior. Soon, however, women and children were also interned. By the end of the war, the government had moved approximately 23,000 people of Japanese descent to interior settlements and had sold their property and belongings below market value.<sup>30</sup> The removal of Japanese families from coastal areas caused enrolment at Port Essington Elementary School to drop from forty-five in 1940 to thirteen in the spring of 1942.<sup>31</sup>

During the 1950s Port Essington witnessed the majority of residents boarding up their businesses and relocating to more central locations. For example, although long-time resident Jimmy Donaldson continued to operate the Ecstall Mill just east of Port Essington, he opened another at Georgetown near Port Simpson, eventually installing his family and business headquarters at Prince Rupert. Of the few families who remained in the area into the 1960s, most were First Nations. More often than not, the menfolk travelled to Prince Rupert or Port Edward for paid employment in fishing and logging industries while the women remained at Port Essington to tend to family, home, and garden.<sup>32</sup>

All but six adults and twenty-four children were away from Port Essington when a strong westerly wind fuelled the flames of a devastating fire that broke out in 1961. With an abundance of vacant buildings, it did not take long for the fire to ravage most of the town. Among the buildings claimed by the fire were a bank, a pool hall, a hotel, a café, a church, a community hall, a large store, and many houses. The Wesley, Brown, Lockerby, Brooks, Bolton, and Starr families were among those left homeless.<sup>33</sup> The following day, the *Vancouver Sun* newspaper reported that a "column of brown smoke lingered ... where only 24 hours before stood the sleepy little fishing village of Port Essington."<sup>34</sup> When a second fire struck on March 25, 1965, Port Essington ceased to exist. Most residents relocated to Prince Rupert or to Kitsumkalum, just outside of Terrace, where a burgeoning logging industry promised steady employment. According to local historian Norma Bennett, Port Essington is "remembered for its boom of prosperity, its winters of liquor, song and laughter, its many-nationed population and its rapid decline into oblivion and neglect."<sup>35</sup>

Archival documents and published historical sources reveal very little about the Indian Day School or the public school at Port Essington. There

is no account of how or why the day school closed in 1947, four years in advance of federal legislation that would enable it. Furthermore, despite the thoroughness of the published sources about Port Essington, most give little more than a brief mention of the town's Native occupants. In conducting research for this study, I was troubled by the documents' lack of Indigenous voices. As noted by so many Indigenous researchers, it seems that the Tsimshian were "objects, but not subjects" of their colonizers' narratives.

This observation brings to light that document analysis – like all research approaches – has its limitations. There is a "great gap between administrative record-keeping and people's actual lives" since the documents "chronicle events" but do not explain "how those events came about or how they were experienced by teachers or students."<sup>36</sup> Indeed, traditional historical source documents tend to ignore the views and experiences of regular people while favouring the voices of people in authority. This has been particularly striking in the treatment of Aboriginal peoples, who have tended to be "generalized as a mass ... continuously unidimensional and on the margins."<sup>37</sup> Oral history approaches seek to address such gaps<sup>38</sup> by bringing voices that have previously been marginalized into a central position.<sup>39</sup> Since oral history represents "the recollections of a single individual who participated in or was an observer of the events to which s/he testifies,"<sup>40</sup> it "is where people and history meet."<sup>41</sup> For that reason, this study looks beyond the documents and incorporates oral histories of former students themselves.

Historical scholarship has largely been silent on how to conduct research respectfully in collaboration with Indigenous communities. In preparing to work with former students from Port Essington and Terrace, my research assistants and I turned to the growing body of "indigenist" research contributed by Indigenous scholars such as Shawn Wilson, Cora Weber-Pillwax, and Margaret Kovach – to name but a few. The next section describes our journey as we prepared ourselves to conduct research respectfully with one Indigenous community. However, I acknowledge that our learning journey continues, rooted as it is in our lifelong struggle to decolonize ourselves as well as facets of the society that surrounds us.<sup>42</sup>

#### RESEARCHING RESPECTFULLY WITH FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

In the past two decades, researchers have come to recognize the many ways that scholarly inquiry has tended to disadvantage First Nations communities.

Traditional research approaches have bestowed “expert status” on non-Indigenous researchers while failing to acknowledge Indigenous expertise.<sup>43</sup> Until the 1990s researchers were able to enter Aboriginal communities and leave with information and artifacts that they did not own but from which they benefited through publication, sales, and heightened career status.<sup>44</sup> The individuals and communities whose knowledge and belongings had been taken seldom benefited in the same way as the researcher.

In recent years a shift has occurred toward more ethical, participatory research methods. Ethnohistorian Donald Fixico frames this shift in terms of three distinct phases in the evolution of American Indian history. The first phase focused on third-person descriptions of Indigenous peoples. The second phase included snippets of quotations from speeches of both colonized and colonizer pertaining to key events such as wars or treaties. The final phase has involved the recent shift toward giving centre stage to Native voices.<sup>45</sup> This shift has helped “to diffuse the power relations inherent in the production and dissemination of knowledge.”<sup>46</sup>

University boards of research ethics, journals, and publishing houses are much more vigilant about ensuring that proper community-centred research protocols have been followed before allowing research to proceed and manuscripts to be published. By adopting respectful research approaches, non-Indigenous research allies help to advance decolonization efforts, defined as the “deconstruction of ideological, legal, legislative, operational, textual and other institutionalized structures sustaining unequal and discursive relations of power between non-First Nations and First Nations citizenries.”<sup>47</sup>

Most of the literature on conducting research with and for – rather than about – Indigenous communities resides in disciplines other than history, such as anthropology, literary studies, and Indigenous studies. An excellent example is the most recent collaboration between anthropologist Leslie Robertson and the Kwagu’l Gixsam Clan. The focus of their 2012 book is Ga’axsta’las (Constance Jane Cook, 1870–1951), a Kwakwaka’wakw leader and activist immortalized through written accounts by anthropologists like Franz Boas. Such accounts of Ga’axsta’las present a story of “betrayal based on her support of the potlatch ban” and opposition to other traditional Indigenous practices.<sup>48</sup> Her resulting marginalization from her own people had far-reaching consequences for the well-being of her descendants, who were “publicly called down, told they couldn’t dance or shouldn’t wear regalia or that they didn’t understand what they were doing in the cultural realm.”<sup>49</sup> Robertson and the Kwagu’l Gixsam Clan collaborated

to contextualize Ga'axsta'las's actions and honour her memory by highlighting her advocacy for Indigenous rights, particularly those of women and children. In so doing, they established a positive social and cultural identity for formerly shunned family members, while illustrating the devastating consequences of written accounts that have traditionally eschewed the voices and interpretations of the researched in favour of those of the researchers.

Given researchers' historical legacies of disrespect, misrepresentation, and unwillingness to acknowledge Indigenous voices, the research literature now contains numerous guides that help non-Indigenous researchers to work respectfully with Indigenous communities. I was heartened by Cree scholar Shawn Wilson's belief that non-Indigenous researchers, such as myself, can work successfully with Indigenous communities by adopting an "indigenist" paradigm, the main tenet of which is the establishment of respectful relationships.<sup>50</sup> This process includes honouring the role of the Indigenous participants and recognizing that the information researched belongs to the individuals and communities from whom the material is collected.<sup>51</sup> This understanding is echoed by Cora Weber-Pillwax, who contends that "deconstruction and decolonizing discourses or practices on their own will not lead . . . Indigenous researchers to where [they] want to be."<sup>52</sup> Research practices must align with Indigenous values, such as the importance of establishing respectful relationships and working to serve the community within which the research occurs.

Working with the Māori in New Zealand, non-Indigenous researcher Augie Fleras has developed a cultural safety model for non-Māori researchers that stipulates two requirements. First, researchers must learn to be culturally self-aware in order to avoid the potential negative effects of their "unwitting imposition of their cultural beliefs, values and norms" on the research participants.<sup>53</sup> Second, researchers need to inform themselves about the cultural, historical, and structural circumstances of the participants. These two aspects of awareness allow researchers to "suspend values and assumptions in interpreting other people's culture or behavior" and to foster mutual respect by sharing in the production of knowledge.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, it is considered mandatory that the project informants participate in all decision making right from the start and that either memoranda of understanding or research protocols be drafted and signed before any information or artifacts are collected. Another foundational aspect of working respectfully with First Nations communities is enabling participants to review and correct transcripts and stories so that both re-

searcher and interviewee co-construct and mutually agree upon the knowledge to be used.<sup>55</sup>

To simply state that all of these prescriptive guidelines were followed for this project would be to understate greatly the intricacies of working respectfully with and for Indigenous communities. As a non-Indigenous researcher, I encountered more complexities than anticipated as my research assistants and I prepared for eventual contact with the former students by following the literature on working respectfully with and for First Nations communities.

As suggested by Fleras, we informed ourselves about the “cultural, historical and structural circumstances”<sup>56</sup> of the Tsimshian. We read extensively from the works of early twentieth-century anthropologists such as Diamond Jenness, Franz Boas, Marius Barbeau, and Viola Garfield, whose findings inform descriptions of traditional Tsimshian education contained in Chapter 2. We also consulted contemporary works, the most useful of which included Margaret Seguin Anderson and Tammy Anderson Blumhagen’s “Memories and Moments: Conversations and Recollections,” Kenneth Harris’s *Visitors Who Never Left: The Origin of the People of Damelahamid*, Kenneth Campbell’s *Persistence and Change: A History of the Tsimshian Nation*, James McDonald’s *People of the Robin: The Tsimshian of Kitsumkalum*, Jay Miller’s *Tsimshian Culture: A Light through the Ages*, and Christopher Roth’s *Becoming Tsimshian: The Social Life of Names*.<sup>57</sup> With a solid introduction to the “cultural, historical and structural circumstances”<sup>58</sup> of the Tsimshian of Port Essington, I reflected on my own cultural beliefs, values, and norms and wondered how I might refrain from unwittingly imposing these on my participants and their stories. Having been raised as a bicultural child of immigrants, I took some solace in knowing that my early exposure to multiple worldviews might be of help. Nevertheless, I still worried about whether the members of the Kitsumkalum community would accept me or my research proposal. Would they dismiss me and my research team as what Margaret Kovach calls “smash and grab” (i.e., self-serving) researchers who seek to benefit from others’ stories?<sup>59</sup> Why should they trust us? At the base of all these questions were the two most important ones: who is this research for, and why should it be done?

It would be disingenuous to argue that the purpose of this research was solely to benefit the community with which we wished to collaborate. Of course, as a university-based researcher, I was genuinely curious about the situation at Port Essington. For years, I have argued that historians have generally neglected the schooling of Indigenous pupils who attended

on-reserve day schools.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, most of the history of Indigenous education has focused on the horrors of the residential schools.<sup>61</sup> However, conflating residential schooling with Indigenous education is problematic since Indigenous children attended residential schools in lower numbers than they did day schools.<sup>62</sup> Equally problematic is the dearth of research investigating the transition that many Aboriginal children made from segregated, federally controlled day schools to integrated, provincial public schools in the decades following the Second World War. Narrowly historicizing Aboriginal education in terms of residential schooling tends to portray Native peoples as one monolithic culture resistant to change. At the outset of this study, then, the story of Tsimshian education at Port Essington and Terrace presented an opportunity to fill a legitimate research gap.

On a more personal level, I also acknowledge that as a citizen of Canada it is impossible to be ignorant of colonialism's tragic legacy for generations of Indigenous peoples. Here was my chance to be part of a reform movement that seeks to build bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. Could I learn to be an ally to Indigenous peoples, or was I destined to remain a perpetrator of the shameful legacy of colonialism?<sup>63</sup>

As I wrestled with my own motives, I had to face an even more difficult question: what did the former students of Port Essington stand to gain from such a research project? I concluded first and foremost that since histories of northwest British Columbia ignore the fact that the children of Port Essington integrated into public education prior to the laws that enabled such a move, the "grand narrative" about Canada's shift to integrated schooling fails to account for their experiences. Former students' stories have the potential to enhance a historical record that has not served Indigenous people well. Furthermore, local histories of the region have generally ignored Indigenous voices. As the research of James McDonald and others has indicated, the Tsimshian were important to the economic development of British Columbia's northwest coast largely through their participation in resource industries such as fishing, logging, and canning. Thus the research presented here benefits the participants by enabling them to take their rightful place within the province's social and economic history. As Indigenous law professor James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson has noted, reconstructing history through Aboriginal experiences is important for conceptualizing Indigenous realities.<sup>64</sup> In addition, I hope that former pupils' integration stories will provide inspiration and guidance to their offspring and future generations. Initially, I suspected that their stories

had been shared orally with younger generations, but I hoped that by recording and disseminating them more widely, a greater number of youngsters – both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – might be inspired. I later learned that their stories had not been shared either among members of their own generation or across generations of Tsimshian.

With some trepidation but clear motives, my assistants and I next tackled the task of locating the former pupils whose names appear on the 1947 class list. Having learned that Port Essington had been abandoned since the 1960s, we turned to Canada 411 to attempt to match the names on the list with names and addresses in towns surrounding Port Essington. With numerous matches, we concluded that many of the former day school pupils might reside either in Terrace or Prince Rupert. As noted above, Shawn Wilson argues that the foundation of working from an “indigenist” paradigm is the establishment of respectful relationships with Indigenous individuals and communities to whom information and artifacts belong.<sup>65</sup> Cognizant of this and aware that Western standards of research do not consider it appropriate to contact individuals on a class list directly, I knew we had to find another approach. So in the spring of 2009, I consulted my colleague Dr. Anne Marshall, who has spent decades working with Indigenous communities on the north coast of British Columbia. She suggested that we meet with her graduate student Judith (Edosdi) Thompson, who is Tahltan by ancestry but works at Northwest Community College in Terrace. We arranged a breakfast meeting at a local restaurant. After examining the class list, Edosdi confirmed that many of the former students resided at Kitsumkalum, west of Terrace. She gave me contact information for Dr. James (Jim) McDonald, an anthropologist at the University of Northern British Columbia who had been a researcher with the Tsimshian at Kitsumkalum since the 1970s. Jim passed away last spring. Along with the list, I sent a letter of introduction to Jim, who confirmed that most of the people on the class register did live at Kitsumkalum and would likely be amenable to an oral history project exploring their transition from the day school to public schools. Jim McDonald advised me to send a detailed letter of introduction to Kitsumkalum chief Don Roberts Junior and to band manager Steve Roberts. Jim also agreed to talk with them in advance about the project.

Several researchers have stressed the importance of “situating oneself” to establish respectful relationships with Indigenous communities. According to Margaret Kovach, Indigenous researchers almost intuitively adhere to the pan-Indigenous “protocol of introductions,” which pays respect to elders and enables the community to situate the researchers.<sup>66</sup> “When we

self-locate, we represent our own truths.”<sup>67</sup> This made sense to me and evoked one of my earliest crosscultural memories. When I was ten years old, my mother took me and my three siblings to Greece, her country of birth, to connect us more solidly to our language and heritage. We spent two and a half months in a small village where we were immediately recognized as outsiders.<sup>68</sup> My siblings and I quickly learned that in response to the question “whose are you?” we were to state our names and identify our parents and grandparents in addition to our current country of residence. At the time, I would mindlessly recite the words that my mother provided me: “My name is Helen Raptis, daughter of Theodore and Angela Raptis. My mother’s parents are John and Stavroula Laliotis, and we all live in Canada now.” It was only as an adult that I came to understand more fully the meaning of this exchange of words and the feelings that it evoked in my interlocutors, who would usually burst into emotion when they stated their relationship to my family and told me and my siblings who we resembled.<sup>69</sup>

My letter of introduction to Don and Steve contained quite a bit of detail in the hopes that “situating myself” would help me to establish a relationship with the people of Kitsumkalum. I described the trajectory of the research and how Anne Marshall, Judith (Edosdi) Thompson, and Jim McDonald had guided me in making contact with them. I then explained that I was interested in Indigenous history because, as a child, I had learned to walk in two worlds: the mainstream Canadian culture most significantly embodied by the schools that I attended and the Greek culture of my home life. I outlined my prior experiences with Indigenous peoples. The first was a close relationship with a high school friend whose father was not Indigenous but whose Haida mother had lost her status upon marrying him. Later, while living in Montreal, I became deeply troubled by the 1990 Oka Crisis and acknowledged then that my understanding of Indigenous “issues” was shallow at best. So in 1991, when one of my professors at McGill University asked me to teach at the Kahnawake Reserve near Montreal, I accepted the opportunity to enhance my understanding of Indigenous peoples.

I explained to Don and Steve that I had the financial support to undertake a research project probing the experiences of former Port Essington students and would very much appreciate the opportunity to discuss the idea with them further. In keeping with respectful approaches to working with Indigenous populations, I stated my preference that project participants be involved in all decision making from the start and my desire to create a protocol, or memorandum, of understanding prior to

any interviewing.<sup>70</sup> I finished the letter by indicating that I would call them both a few weeks hence to follow up.

My follow-up phone calls resulted first in a conversation with Steve, the band manager. From Steve, I learned that he, Jim, and Don had discussed the pros and cons of a research project of the kind that my letter proposed. Steve invited me to visit the reserve, and we secured plans for July 29 to August 2, 2009. As I waited apprehensively for my trip to Kitsumkalum, my husband received a phone call from his doctor's office indicating that the knee surgery for which he had been waiting years was being fast-tracked to July 28 due to a cancellation! I was elated for my husband but gripped by fear for my fledgling research project. How could his surgery have been rescheduled to the day before my planned departure? To leave so soon after my husband's surgery would be too hard on him and my children, aged ten and fourteen at the time. So I phoned Steve and explained the situation. Steve informed me that in preparation for my arrival, the Kitsumkalum Band Council had organized a reunion for former Port Essington residents, scheduled for July 30! Hundreds of people were slated to attend the day-long festivities at the Kitsumkalum Community Hall, with many arriving from across the province. As my hands turned cold, I remembered Jim McDonald's article indicating that community feasts, such as this upcoming reunion, were traditional Tsimshian vehicles for conducting community affairs ranging from the transfer of names within clans to the establishment of crosscommunity relationships.<sup>71</sup> What was I to do? Failing to show up for the reunion was definitely not an ideal approach to establishing a "good relationship" with the community. After a frank conversation with my husband, we both decided that I had to honour my travel plans. I left for Terrace on July 29.<sup>72</sup>

The next morning, I made my way to the Kitsumkalum Band Office. In keeping with the guidelines for respecting cultural knowledge, I arrived first at the office of Chief Don Roberts Junior. We spent a couple of hours together, during which he talked at length about his concerns over the dispossession of land, language, and culture experienced by his community. He also reminisced about his childhood, painting a picture of Port Essington as an idyllic place to grow up. Throughout his recollections, he wove in stories of key community members, past chiefs, and activists: Louis Starr, Mark Bolton, John Wesley, and others. He talked of the generations of Tsimshian who have struggled to regain control of their ancestral lands, culminating most recently in lengthy and frustrating treaty negotiations.

Don's memories were also peppered with episodes from his own school experiences, and he talked about his disillusionment with formal education, the details of which are fleshed out in Chapter 5. At one point, I felt tears welling up in my eyes and fought desperately to hold them back. Was the intense emotion I was feeling a response to Don's negative experiences, or was it a show of solidarity for all children – myself included – who had struggled to navigate the transition from the comfort of our home cultures to the foreign world of schooling? I was swamped with emotion and uncertainty. Should I suppress the tears? Should I allow them to flow? Would Don see them as an authentic show of sadness, or would he perceive them to be the inauthentic “cover” of someone attempting to secure a relationship with his community for personal gain? Deciding that I had to be true to myself and suffer the consequences of his possible judgment, I surrendered to my emotions and let the tears roll down my cheeks. After a moment of silence, Don asked me what I wanted to know and why I wanted to do the research. Against the backdrop of the concerns he had just described, my research plans seemed trite, and my throat tightened. Could anything I had to say strike Kitsumkalum's chief as worthy of his community's attention? After a moment, I stated that my concerns paled in comparison to those facing the community but added that the integration events at Port Essington were curious because they predated legislation that would enable Indian children to attend provincial schools. I explained that I was interested in learning from the former students' experiences how and why integration had occurred as early as it had in Port Essington. Understanding that Indigenous peoples “remain attached to an area of land over an extended period of time,”<sup>73</sup> I suggested that recording a slice of life at Port Essington might benefit the town's former residents and their offspring by highlighting the happenings of a place that is no longer regularly inhabited. As argued by the National Indian Brotherhood in their 1972 policy paper, *Indian Control of Indian Education*, “unless a child learns about the forces which shape him: the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being.”<sup>74</sup> I closed by reiterating that my interests were not as pressing as treaty negotiations, efforts to secure adequate housing, or concerns about students' educational achievement. I told him that I would understand completely if he decided not to proceed with the project.

Chief Roberts affirmed his interest but stated that a “slice” of life at Port Essington would not suit the needs of the community since it restricted

the experiences of one group of learners to a single point in time, which is contrary to the Tsimshian worldview, which conceives of an eternal cosmos without start or end.<sup>75</sup> He noted that Tsimshian ways of knowing were holistic and always acknowledged the continuity of time. In particular, he felt that it was important to include information about traditional Tsimshian learning from time immemorial alongside a discussion of the day school era and the later experiences of learners who first attended the schools of Terrace. I agreed that his request could certainly be accommodated. He then listed the names of contacts to whom I should begin speaking and said that I would find them at the festivities in the Community Hall. We agreed that I would not derive any financial benefit from the project and that at the end of our work together, all research materials would be turned over to the Kitsumkalum Treaty Office. We also agreed that it was appropriate to draft a written protocol to be approved and signed by the Kitsumkalum Band Council. Given that I had to return to Victoria so quickly, we agreed that I would make another trip to Kitsumkalum to work out the details at the earliest convenience of the council.<sup>76</sup>

After our conversation, Don led me to the Community Hall, where he formally introduced me to the reunion attendees and handed me a microphone. I introduced myself briefly and indicated that I looked forward to meeting people and hearing their recollections of life at Port Essington. For the remainder of the day, I circulated throughout the hall, looking at photographic displays, introducing myself, hearing peoples' stories, and asking whether they would be interested in participating in a formal research project. I was fascinated by the stories I was hearing and awed by the reunion attendees' willingness to share. At the same time, I was burdened by what Margaret Kovach calls the dilemma of "dual accountability to the Indigenous community and to mainstream Western research."<sup>77</sup> That is, to obtain ethical clearance from my university's Ethics Review Board, I needed to provide a copy of the research protocol co-constructed with the community. Since this had not yet been done, no "official" research could take place. I noted people's names, listened intently to their stories, and assured them that I would return to the community as soon as I could to record their stories "officially."

I then learned of the problem with attempting to "serve two masters": it cost the project valuable information. For instance, numerous people had suggested that I speak with someone whom I identify as "an elder." Many community members considered this elder to have been a leader during their school days. Although she was not at the reunion, I caught

up with her the next day. She freely shared her memories of Port Essington and the day school with me. Her stories were insightful, and if I had not been bound by my university's ethical guidelines, I could have recorded them. But being caught between two masters, I thanked the elder for her willingness to speak to me and assured her that I would return as soon as possible to capture her insights. In the summer of 2010, after signing a research protocol with the Band Council and securing ethical consent from my university, I returned to Kitsumkalum and contacted the people who had indicated their willingness to participate in the study.

Each participant – except this particular elder – read and signed a consent form prior to being interviewed. When I returned to Kitsumkalum and presented her with the form to sign, she told me that she no longer wished to participate since using such a form “was not the Tsimshian way.” I took this to mean that she had given her word verbally and did not recognize the authority of the university. I was deeply disappointed but did not press the matter. I told the elder that I appreciated her frankness and thanked her for teaching me a very good, but difficult, lesson. As I gathered my belongings and left her, I told myself that if respectful approaches to working with Indigenous communities meant that “the power lies with the research participant, the storyteller,”<sup>78</sup> then I had to accept what had just transpired. As sad as I felt about losing a key informant, I felt worse thinking that I had insulted this elder by essentially adhering to Western procedures in an attempt to “serve two masters.”

In addition to feeling sadness about the loss of the elder's insights and guilt for potentially having insulted her, I was also perplexed. Having read and adhered to prescriptions in the literature about working respectfully with First Nations communities, I had thought that I was proceeding in a good way. This incident caught me completely off guard. I had read and understood Margaret Kovach's statement that “engagement with Indigenous knowledges means engagement with Indigenous communities” and her advice about “taking direction from Indigenous communities”<sup>79</sup> at the moment when “tellers are prepared to share.”<sup>80</sup> But what did this mean in practice? Could I have disregarded the ethical guidelines that were approved by my university? Was it simply – as one of my colleagues suggested – a matter of amending the project's ethics approval? Would the elder have reconsidered if I had pressed the matter?

Although difficult, this elder's withdrawal from the project presented me with a good learning opportunity not only with regard to the question of researcher accountability. Her refusal to sign the ethical consent form highlighted for me that learning to research respectfully with Indigenous

communities is not a linear process – nor is it free of challenges. My research assistants and I found much written in the scholarly literature about best practices for working with and for Indigenous communities, but the terrain was bumpier than I had expected given the somewhat straightforward guidelines found in the relevant scholarship. What has become clear to me through this incident is that much about learning how to work respectfully with Indigenous communities inevitably takes place when researcher and participant first encounter one another in a crosscultural space, a moment that can evoke tension and emotion, while requiring careful, spontaneous decision making. Hopefully, in the future more non-Indigenous researchers who have sustained respectful research relationships with Indigenous communities will share their stories not only of successes but also of challenges encountered in order to help both Indigenous researchers and allies move to a better place.

#### PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

The project's contributors varied with regard to the extent of their participation. Some preferred to be tape-recorded, whereas others did not. Most participants requested that their stories be presented under their own names, with their words attributed to them directly, not blended into general thematic discussions, as is typically the case with academic writing. As historian Wendy Wickwire notes, research on Indigenous communities has been restrained by the "Boasian paradigm," which privileges the notion of single, communal accounts of Indigenous "life."<sup>81</sup> As Emma LaRocque points out, however, respectful approaches to conducting research with Aboriginal participants require that each voice be considered unique.<sup>82</sup> It would be highly unusual for an Indigenous person to speak on another's behalf, and people usually preface their stories with the proviso that "they are expressing only their own experiences and opinions."<sup>83</sup> For these reasons, the participants' stories of their educational experiences are presented under the names of each individual in Chapters 4 and 5.

Nevertheless, conventions of the academy dictate that scholarly inquiry include an interpretive component. I have achieved this dual accountability in two ways. First, the participants' stories are annotated in spots that were deemed necessary for academic elucidation but in ways that were considered acceptable by the speakers themselves. In some cases, annotation appears in the body of the texts; in others, additional details, explanations,