



B.C. Region, DIAND — Spring 1999

## IN THIS ISSUE:

## Restoring Sacred Graveyard

[Restoring Sacred Graveyard](#)

[Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations Invite You to Experience Yuquot](#)

[Elder Mary Skin](#)

[Gathering Strength Kiosk](#)

[Leadership Needed to Address HIV/AIDS in B.C's Aboriginal Communities](#)

[One Spirit Brings Healing to your Doorstep](#)

[Golden Opportunity](#)

[First Nations Mental Health from a First Nation Perspective](#)

[Oral History, Oral Traditions and the T'it'q'et Community](#)

[Turtle Island's Indigenous Village Getting Ready to Open](#)

[Osoyoos Community School](#)

[Credits](#)



Skin Tyee sacred graveyard on the Skins Lake Reserve.

*by Penny Gummerson, Cree/Métis*

The helicopter blades cut through blue skies. Below, the colourful face of fall. Splashes of gold, amber, orange and yellow. Glistening lakes. Winding rivers. Mountains and valleys. Suddenly, I see a patch of land with wooden crosses and brightly-painted miniature houses. It is called Natanlii, and it's on the outskirts of Burns Lake, B.C.

One of five Skin Tyee reserves, Natanlii is known today as The Skins Lake Reserve. One hundred and forty-five acres of land, Medanly boasts one of the few First Nations burial sites that was not flooded out as a result of the Alcan Spillway Dam Project in 1950. However, it was not always something to boast about.

Last summer, several Skin Tyee Elders revisited their homeland. For some, it was the first time they had been back in fifty years. They were shocked at what they found. Tall grasses, trees and brush had

taken over. "It was very sad," says Helen Michelle, acting Chief for the Skin Tyee. "Our Elders cried at the state of the land. The graveyard was nowhere to be seen."

With the financial assistance of Alcan, twelve Band members -- men and women alike -- used power saws, axes and picks and built a seven-mile road from Burns Lake into Natanlii. Working around the clock, they finished in less than a week so that the Skin Tyee Band was able to drive in. Traditional tiered grave houses were rebuilt and painted. Brown at the bottom to represent Mother Earth. Then green, and yellow, and finally blue on top to represent Father Sky.

It is custom with the Skin Tyee people to put their cemeteries on high ground. "Our ancestors get a better view higher up," explains Helen, pausing to look at the mountain. "See up there? My uncles used to use that big bump as a ski jump. They'd ski right down to the lake on birch bark skis.

"Before the flood, we lived in Natanlii year-round," Helen recalls. "We've got documents to prove that our people were here in the early 1900s." She smiles, more to herself than anyone else. "But really, we've always been here. Since the beginning of time."

The Band brought in local expert, Hoyt Burt, to find the missing gravesites. Using a wishbone-shaped willow branch, the well-known diviner discovered twelve of them within minutes. Much to the surprise of the Skin Tyee elders, he detected another forty-five gravesites before the day was through. Because the elders were unsure of whose bodies were buried beneath, they simply marked them with wooden crosses. There may well be hundreds of other gravesites scattered throughout the Skin Tyee reserve. Just how many is still uncertain. But the police have offered to help the Skin Tyee find out. That's our next project," Helen says, nodding eagerly.

Last August, over 250 people journeyed to Natanlii to take part in the ceremonial blessing of the graveyard. "It was very powerful," says Helen. "Many memories surfaced. You could feel the presence of our ancestors. The work brought us back to our homeland - - to be together in a good way. That's one memory I'll carry in my heart for a very long time."



[\[Publications\]](#) [\[Back to List\]](#) [\[Français\]](#)





# DREAMSPEAKER

B.C. Region, DIAND — Spring 1999

## **IN THIS ISSUE:**

[Restoring Sacred Graveyard](#)

[Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations Invite You to Experience Yuquot](#)

[Elder Mary Skin](#)

[Gathering Strength Kiosk](#)

[Leadership Needed to Address HIV/AIDS in B.C.'s Aboriginal Communities](#)

[One Spirit Brings Healing to your Doorstep](#)

[Golden Opportunity](#)

[First Nations Mental Health from a First Nation Perspective](#)

[Oral History, Oral Traditions and the T'it'q'et Community](#)

[Turtle Island's Indigenous Village Getting Ready to Open](#)

[Osoyoos Community School](#)

[Credits](#)

## Come to the Centre of the World —

### Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations Invite You to Experience Yuquot



*Beautiful Yuquot (a.k.a.. Friendly Cove), B.C., located on the southwestern tip of Nootka Island.*

*by Neil Rayner*

Over 4300 years ago, people came to magnificent Yuquot because of the rich sea life, gentle climate, and hospitable atmosphere. Today, after more than four millennia of human evolution, people are still drawn to Yuquot to listen to the same waves beat the shore, and to see the offspring of ancient whales rubbing on the beaches of the cove.

Over the last 15 years, the Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations have

embarked on an ambitious mission to bring people from all over the world to experience this magical place.

"We're really excited about our tourism project," says tour co-ordinator and Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations member Margarita James, "It's done a lot for our community, and Yuquot is such an amazing place, I could talk to people all day about it. There's so much here to see and experience."

Yuquot, known more commonly as Friendly Cove, is located on the southwestern tip of Nootka Island, a large island off the west coast of Vancouver Island. To the people who have made their home here for generations, Yuquot is considered "the centre of the world."

For hundreds of years, a great whaling society flourished in Yuquot -- a society which would produce one of the most culturally significant artifacts in Canada, the Whaling Shrine. The shrine currently resides in the American Museum of Natural History in New York. It depicts 92 carved human and whale figures and contains 16 human skulls. It was used in whaling rituals for centuries. The Mowachaht-Muchalaht are looking forward to having their shrine returned home.

Yuquot means "where the wind blows from all directions," and over the years, these winds have blown many visitors to the village. In 1774, Spanish explorer Juan Perez reached the cove, marking the first contact between the First Nations of British Columbia and European explorers. In 1778, Captain James Cook refitted his ships here to prepare for his voyage to the Hawaiian Islands and China. From 1789 to 1795, Yuquot was also the location of Spain's northernmost garrison in the Pacific, Fort San Miguel, the only Spanish fort established in Canada.

In 1992, the Spanish Ambassador to Canada, the British Consular General, and Hereditary Chief Ambrose Maquinna met at Yuquot to mark the bicentennial anniversary of the negotiations of the Nootka Convention. The purpose of the Nootka Convention was to resolve the dispute between Spain and Britain over which nation had claim to trading rights with the people of Yuquot. In 1792, Chief Maquinna facilitated the talks with Captain George Vancouver and Captain Juan Francisco de la Quadra.

For the past several years, the Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations have been working to develop the site into a world class tourist destination. "People come here for many different reasons. The historical significance of this place is incredible," says James. Members of the First Nations conduct history tours, provide accommodations in rustic cabins at the site, and arrange transportation. A tour of Yuquot includes a visit to the traditional

gathering places of the Mowachaht-Muchalaht, the site of San Miguel, and opportunities to see whales, otters, other marine life, and spectacular old growth forest.

Recently, Yuquot has become more accessible from the sea. In 1996, the existing dock was refurbished, and now the MV Uchuck, a 100-passenger coastal vessel, makes regular stops in the cove in July and August. "We receive visitors from all over the world," says James, "England, Japan, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Australia, you name it!"

A visit to Yuquot offers not only the best in West Coast beauty, First Nations cultural importance, and international historical significance, but also an opportunity to meet some of the friendliest, most hospitable people anywhere. Every August, the Mowachaht-Muchalaht pay tribute to all peoples' heritages with a traditional salmon barbecue and celebration.

"The spirit of Yuquot is very important to the people of this community. You can see why people selected this place to live," says James. "It's beautiful, protected, and rich." Few tourist destinations in the world can offer the amazing cultural, historical and natural experience waiting in Yuquot. Margarita James and the Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations are determined to show it to the world.

For more information about Yuquot, tours and reservations, contact Margarita James, Tour Co-ordinator and Director of Cultural and Heritage Resources for the Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations. Phone: (250) 283-2015; fax: (250) 283-2335; e-Mail: [mjames@online.bc.ca](mailto:mjames@online.bc.ca)

*Neil Rayner is a co-op student with the Federal Treaty Negotiation Office.*



[\[Publications\]](#) [\[Back to List\]](#) [\[Français\]](#)





B.C. Region, DIAND — Spring 1999

## IN THIS ISSUE:

[Restoring Sacred Graveyard](#)

[Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations Invite You to Experience Yuquot](#)

[Elder Mary Skin](#)

[Gathering Strength Kiosk](#)

[Leadership Needed to Address HIV/AIDS in B.C's Aboriginal Communities](#)

[One Spirit Brings Healing to your Doorstep](#)

[Golden Opportunity](#)

[First Nations Mental Health from a First Nation Perspective](#)

[Oral History, Oral Traditions and the T'it'q'et Community](#)

[Turtle Island's Indigenous Village Getting Ready to Open](#)

[Osoyoos Community School](#)

[Credits](#)

## Elder Mary Skin

by Penny Gummerson, Cree/Métis

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### *Elder Mary Skin*

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She built canoes out of birch bark. Felled pine trees with a crosscut saw. Skinned the logs by hand and built her family home. She provided for her children by hunting, trapping and fishing. She remembers the first Hudson Bay store, the first church, the first white person.

"There were hardly any white people around when I was growing up," recalls Mary. "They came slowly, one by one. When I was just a little girl, a man shows up at Natanlii. We all stare at him like he's a ghost," she laughs. "He was tired and hungry and had nowhere to go. So my Daddy took him in and looked after him for awhile."

Mary Skin was born and raised in Uncha Lake, B.C., near Burns Lake, the geographical centre of the province. She spent her teenage and adult years across the water at Natanlii. Today, the land is known as the Skins Lake Reserve. She learned to use a gun and set a trap at an age when most Native girls were learning to braid their hair. Mary remembers travelling with her father and mother by birch bark canoe to the east end of Ootsa Lake, at Naves Den Dai Mountain, trapping, tanning hides and chopping wood.

A tiny woman with a spirit bigger than Grandmother Moon, she now resides at The Pines Care Home in Burns Lake. As she recounts



colourful anecdotes of living off the land, Mary's keen sense of humour still shines through. "I was a good hunter and trapper," she says. "Set nets, too. Even in the wintertime. Under the ice."

As is the tradition in First Nation culture, it is our Elders who teach us to treat all living things and beings with great respect. Mary is no exception. "You can tell a lot about the land by the teeth of a fish," she points out. "If the teeth are black, it means there will be lots of berries in the summer. White teeth means no berries."

When it comes to hunting, Mary is the first one to tell you that patience is just as important as a keen eye and a steady hand. "This one time, I remember a moose swimming across Uncha Lake. I waited on shore for him to come closer. Then, boom! I shot him with my husband's '44." Mary pauses, chuckling to herself. "That gun was almost bigger than me!"

Along with her hunting and trapping skills, Mary was very involved with traditional women's activities. "We'd tie our hair with red willow," she recalls. "Peel it, warm it up and bend it in our hair to make nice curls." She also made birch bark baskets, bowls, skis and snowshoes. And tanned moose hides for sewing fringed dresses, jackets, moccasins and mitts. "In those days, if you were wearing a beautiful beaded jacket or gloves, and somebody liked it, you'd take it off and give it to them. That's the way of my people."

According to government records, Mary will turn ninety-nine this year. But in reality, because she wasn't registered until she was seven years old, she will be celebrating her one hundred and sixth birthday on May 10, 1999.

Respected hunter, trapper, mother, grandmother and teacher, Elder Mary Skin has been, and continues to be, an inspiration to many. Especially to her four surviving children, thirty-three grandchildren, seventy-five great-grandchildren and sixteen great-great-grandchildren. Thankfully, it is through these generations that her cultural traditions and teachings will live on.



[\[Publications\]](#) [\[Back to List\]](#) [\[Français\]](#)





B.C. Region, DIAND — Spring 1999

## IN THIS ISSUE:

## *Gathering Strength*

[Restoring Sacred Graveyard](#)

[Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations Invite You to Experience Yuquot](#)

[Elder Mary Skin](#)

[Gathering Strength Kiosk](#)

[Leadership Needed to Address HIV/AIDS in B.C.'s Aboriginal Communities](#)

[One Spirit Brings Healing to your Doorstep](#)

[Golden Opportunity](#)

[First Nations Mental Health from a First Nation Perspective](#)

[Oral History, Oral Traditions and the T'it'q'et Community](#)

[Turtle Island's Indigenous Village Getting Ready to Open](#)

[Osoyoos Community School](#)

[Credits](#)



DIAND B.C. Communications Manager Toni Timmermans flanks the first in a planned series of travelling Gathering Strength library displays focusing on specific First Nations. Each freestanding display



will feature one panel on *Gathering Strength* and two panels of text and graphics provided by the First Nation. This initial display will rotate through Vancouver-area public libraries for one year, after which it will become the property of the Musqueam Indian Band.

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[\[Publications\]](#) [\[Back to List\]](#) [\[Français\]](#)



B.C. Region, DIAND — Spring 1999

## IN THIS ISSUE:

[Restoring Sacred Graveyard](#)

[Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations Invite You to Experience Yuquot](#)

[Elder Mary Skin](#)

[Gathering Strength Kiosk](#)

[Leadership Needed to Address HIV/AIDS in B.C.'s Aboriginal Communities](#)

[One Spirit Brings Healing to your Doorstep](#)

[Golden Opportunity](#)

[First Nations Mental Health from a First Nation Perspective](#)

[Oral History, Oral Traditions and the T'it'q'et Community](#)

[Turtle Island's Indigenous Village Getting Ready to Open](#)

[Osoyoos Community School](#)

[Credits](#)

## Leadership needed to address HIV/AIDS in B.C.'s Aboriginal Communities

Elena Kanigan, (left) Director, HIV/AIDS Division, B.C. Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, accepts **The Red Road: Pathways to Wholeness** strategy document from Alex Archie, Co-Chair, B.C. Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Task Force at the 3rd Annual HIV/AIDS Conference held in Nanaimo, B.C., in February 1999.



*by Art Zoccole, Ojibway Nation*

The rate of HIV/AIDS infection among B.C.'s Aboriginal population is growing at an alarming rate. **The Red Road: Pathways to Wholeness**, an Aboriginal Strategy for HIV and AIDS in B.C. recently released by the B.C. Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Task Force, shows that Aboriginal people account for 16% of all new HIV cases, despite the fact that only 5% of the province's total population is Aboriginal.

**The Red Road: Pathways to Wholeness** also reveals that 40% of all new Aboriginal HIV infections are with women. This is a stark contrast to the non-Aboriginal community in which only 17% of new cases of HIV infection are with women. The high birth rate among Aboriginal women means HIV/AIDS has the potential to impact many families and communities.

"Our work has demonstrated that there is an urgent need for the



federal and provincial governments to take leadership on this issue," says Alex Archie, Co-Chair of the task force. "If the problem is not brought in check, the cost in human and financial terms will be very high. We need Prime Minister Chretien and Premier Clark to send a clear message that this issue is a priority," he continued.

The task force is calling for an immediate implementation of the National Action Plan on HIV/AIDS and injection drug use as well as greater collaboration among national, provincial and community-based HIV/AIDS service providers reaching Aboriginal people. The issue of HIV infections in Canada's prisons also needs immediate assessment and action.

Programs and services need to be culturally sensitive and recognize the lower levels of education and literacy rates within the Aboriginal population. The task force acknowledges the need to make HIV/AIDS awareness a priority within Aboriginal communities and emphasizes the role Elders and Chiefs need to play in improving awareness and understanding of the issue.

As part of its ongoing work, the task force has produced a resource guide to Aboriginal HIV/AIDS service and health care resources in B.C. The guide is directed at service and health care providers as well as Aboriginal leaders and community members who want to understand what services are currently available.

For more information on the B.C. Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Task Force and **The Red Road: Pathways to Wholeness**, contact task force Co-ordinator Art Zoccole at (604) 666-8475.



[\[Publications\]](#) [\[Back to List\]](#) [\[Français\]](#)



B.C. Region, DIAND — Spring 1999

## IN THIS ISSUE:

[Restoring Sacred Graveyard](#)

[Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations Invite You to Experience Yuquot](#)

[Elder Mary Skin](#)

[Gathering Strength Kiosk](#)

[Leadership Needed to Address HIV/AIDS in B.C's Aboriginal Communities](#)

[One Spirit Brings Healing to your Doorstep](#)

[Golden Opportunity](#)

[First Nations Mental Health from a First Nation Perspective](#)

[Oral History, Oral Traditions and the T'it'q'et Community](#)

[Turtle Island's Indigenous Village Getting Ready to Open](#)

[Osoyoos Community School](#)

[Credits](#)

## One Spirit Brings Healing to Your Doorstep

**One Spirit counsellor Brad "Wolftrack" Yates drumming and singing at a medicine wheel gathering in Mission, B.C.**

*by Penny Gummerson, Cree/Métis*

Sitting cross-legged in front of the fire, his hair in braids, 34-year-old Brad Yates leans forward and says, "The nature of counsellor training is very intense. A lot of the issues students learn about tend to touch very deep emotional chords.

Someone's taking a sexual abuse course and they have no idea that their whole life they've been sexually abused. All of a sudden this memory comes to them and they're in a big city and they don't know anyone. They need to be close to the people who love them and care about them. Family. Friends. People in their own community."

So, instead of students travelling to a campus in Vancouver, the Métis teacher and therapist decided to take counsellor training on the road, visiting communities across Canada and the United States. Yates' brainchild is called One Spirit Training Consultants and consists of a group of experienced, certified First Nations' addiction counsellors. Based on the idea of





holistic healing, One Spirit customizes its addiction counsellor-training curriculum to deal with specific issues and problems facing First Nations' communities. And, at one-third the cost of sending a student to a city campus. The curriculum, which comes from the Northwest Native Indian College in the state of Washington, was developed by First Nations people for First Nations people.

"First Nations communities have their own unique issues," explains Yates. "Some of the aftereffects of residential schools. The attempts by the government and the church to de-Indianize people. Because of that trauma, our people became survivors of abuse. And in order to kill that pain, we see generations and generations of addiction and abuse being passed on throughout families."

"First Nations people need to band together," he continues. "Educate and help ourselves to help our people. We're the only ones who can truly understand the culturally and spiritually sensitive issues our people face. The way we were raised. Our way of life."

That cultural understanding is apparent by the way Yates conducts business. "I like to meet with community leaders on a very casual basis," he says. "Health care workers, Band Chiefs, Band Council members and Elders. They're the ones who know what their community needs. We want to get to know them and them to know us. It's important to build that trust. They need to know they're putting their people in good hands."

The training program, which includes three levels of certification, runs anywhere from 14 to 28 weeks. Upon completion intern counsellors undergo a series of evaluations by the Chemical Dependency Specialist Certification Board in Washington. Comprising First Nations professionals, the board not only ensures that everyone is educated to the same level of skill acquisition, but also governs over counsellors' ethical standards. "It's not like you go to school, the board gives you a shingle and you go out there and practice," says Yates. "Your conduct as a helper is very important. If you're not ethically and personally responsible in your life and in the lives of your clients, these people [the board] can make sure that you never practice again."

One Spirit couldn't have come along at a better time. "It seems to me that this world is undergoing a huge spiritual reformation," Yates says, throwing another log on the fire.

"This is definitely a part of it. This is spiritual work. Not everybody has the gift to be a helper. I believe people are chosen to do this work."

If that's the case then "Wolftrack" Yates is obviously one of the chosen ones. Teacher, counselor, pipe carrier and sweat lodge pourer (the last two of which he doesn't mention, but that I happen to know personally), this man is passionate about helping others. He's equally as passionate about teaching them how to help others. "There's no greater feeling than sitting in a roomful of budding counselors," he says, a smile filling his face. "Watching them do their own healing. Listening to their unique ideas and concepts. Seeing people, who had no idea that they could help anyone, come alive." He pauses and stares into the fire. "To see the beauty come out of them is worth everything. A real gift."

For more information on One Spirit Training Consultants, call Sherry Crowhurst in Vancouver at (604) 540-8619 or check out their website at [www.onespirit.net](http://www.onespirit.net); e-mail at [info@onespirit.net](mailto:info@onespirit.net)



[\[Publications\]](#) [\[Back to List\]](#) [\[Français\]](#)





B.C. Region, DIAND — Spring 1999

## IN THIS ISSUE:

[Restoring Sacred Graveyard](#)

[Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations Invite You to Experience Yuquot](#)

[Elder Mary Skin](#)

[Gathering Strength Kiosk](#)

[Leadership Needed to Address HIV/AIDS in B.C.'s Aboriginal Communities](#)

[One Spirit Brings Healing to your Doorstep](#)

[Golden Opportunity](#)

[First Nations Mental Health from a First Nation Perspective](#)

[Oral History, Oral Traditions and the T'it'q'et Community](#)

[Turtle Island's Indigenous Village Getting Ready to Open](#)

[Osoyoos Community School](#)

[Credits](#)

# Golden Opportunity

by Julian F. Wilson, Saulteaux

*Michael Ross Jackson,  
All Stars right wing*

*Photo Credit -  
Deanna Cook*

When Spallumcheen First Nation member Michael Ross Jackson ("Mikey" to his friends) received a call last summer to play in the Super Series Challenge Cup in Prague, Czechoslovakia, for two weeks in August 1998, he knew it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. He didn't know how he was going to get there, but he knew that with the support of his parents, Mike Sr. and Trudy Jackson, he would be going.

The Spallumcheen First Nation community is located in the northern part of the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia, near Enderby and Armstrong, approximately 500 km (300 miles) from Vancouver. It's a place, Mike's father says, that has "good hunting, fishing and farmland."

Mike attends the ninth grade at Pleasant Valley Secondary School in Enderby and has played hockey for 10 years. When he's not at school, you'll likely find him playing or at hockey practice with the North Okanagan Bantam AA Kings. He plays right wing and during the summer helps out at the local hockey school.

Speaking of Mike, his father says with total admiration, "He's come a long way. He's a big strong kid. At 6'0" and 170 pounds, Mike has earned the reputation of 'policeman' on the ice. He's the biggest kid on the team and has a lot of ice time." Mike's mother Trudy couldn't agree more. She says, "he's a good kid. Not only does he play hockey well but it also reflects in his school work. He's one of the top in his class and is rarely absent." "When the tournament in Czechoslovakia came up last summer we knew it would be an excellent opportunity for him," says Mike Sr., "but financially, we couldn't have done it alone. I contacted Ron Christian who is on



Council for our Band."

Listening to Mike talk about the family's dilemma, Ron decided to submit a letter in support of Mike's opportunity to the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND). The chances of the department financing such a venture might be out of the question but the department might know of other agencies that would support such a proposal favourably. Fortunately, through its partnership initiative, *Gathering Strength - Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*, this was the case.

The first sponsor found was the Seventh Generation Club. Established in November 1997 by DIAND, Health Canada, BC Hydro and Orca Bay Sports and Entertainment, the Seventh Generation Club was formed to encourage First Nations children to make healthy choices, participate in sports and the community, and stay in school.

The Breakaway Hockey Foundation was the other sponsor. The foundation's mandate as noted by Executive Director Gregg Lindros, is "to assist young First Nations people achieve success as both a hockey player and a person while simultaneously improving relations between Canada's Aboriginal peoples and non-Native society."

Through the partnership of these two organizations, Mike was able to find support to go to the tournament. His parents provided the balance, and a dream came true.

Mike played for the Vancouver All Stars, representing Canada at the Super Series in Czechoslovakia. The bantam league players included teammates from Vancouver, Enderby, Logan Lake, Fort St. James, Abbotsford and Merritt, British Columbia, and Seattle, Washington.

In addition to the All Stars, the tournament had eleven other teams representing the countries of Czechoslovakia (5), Russia (3), Germany (1), Sweden (1) and Poland (1). In the six-game round robin tournament, the All Stars won five games and tied one. Overall, Mike made six goals and ten assists for the team and Canada took home the gold.

When asked what it takes to raise a child, Mike Sr. says, "Encouragement and support. If they want to try something, athletic or whatever, let them. You'll know if they like it or not, and then take it from there." Trudy agrees. "Financially, it's hard sometimes," she says, "there are a lot of low income single parents around here. A name or telephone number of any agencies that could help would be a start. Support your children's goals and ambitions." Mike Sr. says, "We could spend as much as \$20,000 a season for Mike to play hockey. That includes things like replacement of equipment, transportation, food, fees and accommodations. It begins to add up."

On the whole experience Mike adds, "I am proud to be a member of the Spallumcheen First Nation. This has been a chance of a lifetime and one which I will never forget. Without the people involved this dream would never have happened. I believe that staying positive and being consistent with my education will help me accomplish my goal to play in the NHL. I would like to thank Joel Chan from Indian Affairs, Band Councillor Ron Christian, family friends Deanna Cook and Carol Mackenzie, and especially my parents."

Mike's dream is just one of many that we, as parents, organizers, chaperones, coaches, educators, leaders and agency representatives



can help come true in partnership through our daily association with First Nations young people.

For more information on the Seventh Generation, contact the First Nations Schools Association at (604) 990-9939. For information on the Breakaway Hockey Foundation, phone (250) 374-5383.

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[\[Publications\]](#) [\[Back to List\]](#) [\[Français\]](#)



B.C. Region, DIAND — Spring 1999

## IN THIS ISSUE:

[Restoring Sacred Graveyard](#)

[Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations Invite You to Experience Yuquot](#)

[Elder Mary Skin](#)

[Gathering Strength Kiosk](#)

[Leadership Needed to Address HIV/AIDS in B.C's Aboriginal Communities](#)

[One Spirit Brings Healing to your Doorstep](#)

[Golden Opportunity](#)

[First Nations Mental Health from a First Nation Perspective](#)

[Oral History, Oral Traditions and the T'it'q'et Community](#)

[Turtle Island's Indigenous Village Getting Ready to Open](#)

[Osoyoos Community School](#)

[Credits](#)

## First Nations Mental Health from a First Nation Perspective

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**Perry Omeasoo**

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*by Perry Omeasoo, Cree*

Tansi (Hello). My name is Perry Omeasoo (O-mee-ah-sue) and I am a 39-year-old Cree man from Hobbema, Alberta. I come from a strong spiritual and cultural background which still plays a significant role in my life today. I am currently employed as a First Nations Mental Health Liaison Worker for a one-year term position with the Greater Vancouver Mental Health Service (GVMHS). This position is funded, in part, by the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board and the Vancouver Foundation.



The Greater Vancouver Mental Health Service's mandate is to provide education, treatment and care for people with serious mental illness. The GVMHS is committed to building the relationship between the mental health service and the Native community. The position I am filling is intended to help bridge the gap between non-Natives and Natives -- a role I find both challenging and fulfilling.

Historically, First Nations have not had a good or positive experience with non-Native services, so it is very understandable that we will be a little hesitant about going to another non-Native institution or organization. The purpose of this program is to help the Native community to become more open to using the services of organizations like the GVMHSS and to accept the fact that we have



First Nations people with mental illnesses, such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. We all know of people in the community who have mental illnesses but, because we have such a strong negative stigma against mental illness, we are willing not to do anything. I mean, let's face it, if the client or family member is not harming him/herself or other family members or destroying property, then we will not encourage him/her to go to mainstream society to get help.

There are four parts to my job: education, consultation, referrals and some counselling. I approach all these areas with the best possible, culturally sensitive delivery that is available. Under educational activities, I, together with staff of the GVMHSS and other non-Native health professional providers such as doctors and social workers, look at providing education to the Native community as a whole, as well as to the professionals or Native counsellors in the community. The content and the format for education training activities depends on the audience. I will cover topics such as mental illnesses, treatment alternatives, how to get a client into service, and some of the barriers around the community, whether it be Native or non-Native.

Cultural case consultations are offered to mental health professionals and to First Nations agencies and other human services organizations. As for doing referrals, I try to connect clients with services that they need, such as drug and alcohol counselling or a sexual abuse therapist, or maybe helping the client find some sort of spiritual connection through activities such as sweats, longhouse ceremonies, or pipe ceremonies.

Having a good knowledge of traditional and non-traditional methods to treatment and having a good understanding of the Native community as a whole is a definite asset. I can be contacted at Strathcona Mental Health Team, phone (604) 253-4401.



[\[Publications\]](#) [\[Back to List\]](#) [\[Français\]](#)



B.C. Region, DIAND — Spring 1999

## IN THIS ISSUE:

[Restoring Sacred Graveyard](#)

[Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations Invite You to Experience Yuquot](#)

[Elder Mary Skin](#)

[Gathering Strength Kiosk](#)

[Leadership Needed to Address HIV/AIDS in B.C.'s Aboriginal Communities](#)

[One Spirit Brings Healing to your Doorstep](#)

[Golden Opportunity](#)

[First Nations Mental Health from a First Nation Perspective](#)

[Oral History, Oral Traditions and the T'it'q'et Community](#)

[Turtle Island's Indigenous Village Getting Ready to Open](#)

[Osoyoos Community School](#)

[Credits](#)

## Oral History, Oral Traditions and the T'it'q'et Community.

*T'it'q'et*



*community members portraying a scene in their production, Oral Traditions: Building a Constitutional Framework: (left to right) Vince Barney, Laureen Weget, Virginia Scotchman, Adam Lingor (lying down) and Sam Copeland.*

*by Renae Morriseau, Saulteau/Cree*

Oral histories passed down through stories and myth, and traditions that affirm respect for the land, are the main cultural forces the T'it'q'et community is using to revise its political structure. Located within the St'at'imc Nation and adjacent to Lillooet, British Columbia, the T'it'q'et community is documenting its traditional governing system and researching contemporary governing structures for its revised constitutional framework.

The T'it'q'et Elders became organized as the self-government steering committee and a working committee of four to assist the



Elders was established. Helen Copeland, one of the four, knows that the research into family trees, personal interviews, and organized cultural gatherings made a positive impact on her community. Her work with the steering committee has allowed her to search for meaningful and creative ways to educate her community on its history and for the development of a revised government structure. She looked towards theatre. "I have worked with theatre in university and I know that it can be a powerful way to look at some serious and complex issues yet still have fun," states Copeland. The T'it'q'et produced a popular theatre production called *Oral Traditions: Building a Constitutional Framework*.

The use of popular theatre for social change is not new. It was developed by Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal, whose theories and ideas grew out of the forces of oppression and political corruption in Brazil throughout the '50s and '60s. In 1979 his book *Theatre of the Oppressed* was released; it changed the stage of modern theatre. Today popular theatre, in its various forms and techniques, is designed to teach people how to take an active role in their community. The T'it'q'et did just that. Their 10-minute skit allowed the audience to see how traditional values and laws can complement the contemporary.

The group, made up mostly of Elders and youth, were encouraged to search their own lives for stories to be reenacted for the community the next day. Many of the thirty participants had limited knowledge of constitutions and self-government, yet the parallels between oral traditions and self-government were made. Oral traditions and histories transmitted by word of mouth, or recollections of individuals who had personal experiences with events, are important factors to consider when new documents of history are required. However, Mike Leach, T'it'q'et Tribal Chief believes that their self-government initiatives are not new.

"Our self-government process was affirmed many years ago when our ancestors signed the *Declaration of the Lillooet Tribe* on May 10, 1911. This is the historical written claim to our inherent title and rights," he states.

We were told by one of the Elder participants, Edward Napoleon, that oral traditions were "their way of life" and each person in the community had a responsibility. However, government initiatives undermined the Family Head System. "Oral traditions and histories that were passed down through the generations," he said, "have been, to a great extent, interrupted by the *Indian Act* and residential schools."

Yet, Napoleon and many other Elders present for the popular theatre workshop, could remember the stories that were told to them. Through their stories, scenes were created that depicted how their community would deal with a justice issue and how ultimately the situation would be resolved.

As a result of the community's documentation and research over the last year, Copeland states that approximately nine major families groups could be part of a decision-making council to be established. Each family would have a spokesperson who would sit on a family council, providing guidance on community needs and issues. "This process will ensure that each family has an opportunity to participate in the design and future our governing structure," says Copeland.

The theatre process also allowed other pressing issues to come to light. "There are other families in our community who have come from other areas of B.C. The membership committee is looking at how these families will participate in this process." says Copeland, "They'll be going through the difficult task of membership determination."

The skit provided the community with the understanding of what it means to be self-governing. "A lot of our people don't know what self-government means, let alone what a constitution is. It's a social, political and spiritual process that must begin with the knowledge that derives from our Elders." Copeland states. "The process of doing the skit was just as important as the end product. I had a community member say to me that he now has an idea of what self-government means. Before he saw the skit he thought self-government was all money and lawyers. Now he understands it as a way of living."

The community's hope is to have a draft constitution by the year 2000. In the meantime, the T'it'q'et will continue with their workshops and cultural gatherings to ensure that the next generation will move creatively and productively towards the new millennium where traditional values merge with contemporary ones.



[\[Publications\]](#) [\[Back to List\]](#) [\[Français\]](#)





B.C. Region, DIAND — Spring 1999

## IN THIS ISSUE:

[Restoring Sacred Graveyard](#)

[Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations Invite You to Experience Yuquot](#)

[Elder Mary Skin](#)

[Gathering Strength Kiosk](#)

[Leadership Needed to Address HIV/AIDS in B.C.'s Aboriginal Communities](#)

[One Spirit Brings Healing to your Doorstep](#)

[Golden Opportunity](#)

[First Nations Mental Health from a First Nation Perspective](#)

[Oral History, Oral Traditions and the T'it'q'et Community](#)

[Turtle Island's Indigenous Village Getting Ready to Open](#)

[Osoyoos Community School](#)

[Credits](#)

## Turtle Island's Indigenous Village Getting Ready to Open

**Chief Robert Charlie**

*by Penny Gummerson, Cree/Métis*

"You've got to be innovative," says Burns Lake Band Chief Robert Charlie, whose latest innovation is the International Indigenous Village of Turtle Island.

The Burns Lake Band, a mere fifty-strong, already owns a motel, a gas station, and an arts-and-crafts store. But the International Indigenous Village (IIV) is its biggest undertaking to date. The village will consist of traditional houses from different nations. Tipis, hogomis, mud huts, wigwams and cedar long houses, as well as 20 RV sites. "We're Wet'suwet'en-based," explains the Chief. "But there's a whole other world out there, other nations with good aspects to the way they live. It will be a fun adventure, all right."

The property, which was going to be logged before the Burns Lake Band purchased it, for half a million dollars, encompasses eighty acres of forest land, located steps from Burns Lake.

Visitors will camp out on dirt floors. Sleep on spruce bows. Eat smoked salmon and bannock. There'll be a botanical and medicinal



garden on site to educate people about the power of natural healing medicines. Traditional canoes, built from the large cottonwoods that surround the village, will once again grace the waters of Burns Lake. Visitors will be able to go after "the big one" with experienced First Nations fishing guides and learn about indigenous traditions and customs. It is hoped that the International Indigenous Village of Turtle Island will be ready to receive visitors in the summer of '99.

Meanwhile, the first Native-owned and operated arts-and-crafts store in Burns Lake, the Tipi Creeper, continues to thrive. Located along Burns Lake's main street, it houses hides and moccasins, beadwork and paintings. Medicine Wheels. Carvings. And much, much more. Eventually Chief Charlie plans to move the tiny building to the Village site. There are also plans to add on a café, so people can watch the artists in action.

"Financially, we're becoming more secure," admits Chief Charlie. "Now we can be a part of the decision-making process in this community." He takes a long moment and looks out over the lake. It is peaceful and serene. "We're connecting back to the land, back to ourselves, back to a way of life as it should be. We've spent the last three generations being oppressed - - religiously, politically, economically and socially. Some say they were mistakes. I say they were lessons. We're bringing our culture back," he says, proudly. "Educating ourselves, and, in turn, we are educating others."



[\[Publications\]](#) [\[Back to List\]](#) [\[Français\]](#)





B.C. Region, DIAND — Spring 1999

## IN THIS ISSUE:

# Osoyoos School

[Restoring Sacred Graveyard](#)

[Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations Invite You to Experience Yuquot](#)

[Elder Mary Skin](#)

[Gathering Strength Kiosk](#)

[Leadership Needed to Address HIV/AIDS in B.C.'s Aboriginal Communities](#)

[One Spirit Brings Healing to your Doorstep](#)

[Golden Opportunity](#)

[First Nations Mental Health from a First Nation Perspective](#)

[Oral History, Oral Traditions and the T'it'q'et Community](#)

[Turtle Island's Indigenous Village Getting Ready to Open](#)

[Osoyoos Community School](#)

[Credits](#)

The Osoyoos Indian Band recently celebrated the opening of its new community school complex located on reserve land, in the natural desert landscape above the town of Oliver, by Osoyoos Lake. The school was designed by Ib G. Hansen Architect Ltd. of North Vancouver, B.C., in close consultation with the Osoyoos Indian Band and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. The new Band school and recreation complex contains facilities for kindergarten to grade 12 students, community daycare, community gymnasium and fitness areas.



[\[Publications\]](#) [\[Back to List\]](#) [\[Français\]](#)



# DREAMSPEAKER

B.C. Region, DIAND — Spring 1999

## IN THIS ISSUE:

[Restoring Sacred Graveyard](#)

[Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nations Invite You to Experience Yuquot](#)

[Elder Mary Skin](#)

[Gathering Strength Kiosk](#)

[Leadership Needed to Address HIV/AIDS in B.C.'s Aboriginal Communities](#)

[One Spirit Brings Healing to your Doorstep](#)

[Golden Opportunity](#)

[First Nations Mental Health from a First Nation Perspective](#)

[Oral History, Oral Traditions and the T'it'q'et Community](#)

[Turtle Island's Indigenous Village Getting Ready to Open](#)

[Osoyoos Community School](#)

[Credits](#)

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[\[Publications\]](#) [\[Back to List\]](#) [\[Français\]](#)