

INDIGENOUS CULTURES UTILIZING MULTI-MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT

Introduction:

Since European contact, the First Nations people of Canada have been faced with the challenge of maintaining our culture and traditions. Our ancestors were faced with imprisonment and persecution when they refused assimilation and abolishment of our culture and traditions. First Nations of Canada were prohibited by law through federal and provincial legislation from participating in the construction of our country, the very country that we had occupied since before recorded history.

Today, we are still challenged by, and are still struggling with, the consequences of the past suppression. However, we remain optimistic that we will be able to continue to thrive as distinct peoples. The fact that the Indigenous peoples of Canada have sustained our culture and traditions despite the atrocities of the past two hundred years is a testament to the tenacity and strength of our people.

Among the various assaults on First Nations identities, culture and values were:

- The legislated prohibition of First Nations voting rights on both the provincial and federal levels of Canadian Government,
- The imprisonment of men and woman both elderly and young for practicing our culture traditions,
- The unilateral taking of our land,
- The systemic denial of access to our resources,
- The abhorrent removal of our children
- The placing of the children in residential schools,
- The subsequent sexual, physical, mental and emotional abuse to those children.

This degradation of our culture and our wealth was compounded with the system is destruction of our traditional systems of Governance and the imposition of models and forms of government upon us by a parliament and a legislature that knew nothing about us. We were not consulted or advised on this colonial approach to our relationship with the governments of Canada and BC and as a consequence were subsequently denied our human and aboriginal rights through acts of this government. In fact, legislation even prohibited First Nations from obtaining lawyers to advise us and offend us in this assault.

For the sake of historical perspective , it must be understood that these acts were not in the far distant past. The last residential school was not closed until 1972. To this day certain aspects of the current Indian Act date back to the 1880's and reflect a racist and colonial mind set.

In spite of this dark period in our history, the First Nations people of Canada are thriving in a resurgence of traditional ways and we are pursuing preservations and communication of our culture and traditions while utilizing modern forms of communication and tech. To preserve the values that are most fundamental to us.. For the last few decades we have been making our best effort to “catch up” and make up for the time that was stolen from us. This has not been easy. We were faced with the challenge of rediscovering who we were in the past, figuring who we are presently and who we want to become in the future. This was a challenge that had us in a holding pattern of sorts for some time. Today, however, we are certain of our past, and we are taking a firm grip on the present and are, now, more prepared than ever before to move into the future and create who we want to become. We shall not forget the past hurts, past tragedies and wrong doings but we have resolved to claim our rights as equal members of the human race and embrace the unique gifts we have to offer this world.

We are resolute in our intent to leave the legacy and knowledge of who we are and where we come from by recording the traditional teachings of our ancestors to pass on the knowledge to future generations by using all available tools in order to document and sustain our traditions and culture. It is time for First Nations people of Canada to stand up and take our place in the world.

Squamish Nation:

The Squamish First Nation resides on the southern part of the west coast of British Columbia, Canada. The Squamish Nation has occupied and governed our territory since beyond recorded history. The total area of Squamish Nation Traditional Territory is 6,732 sq. km. (673,540 hectares). The Squamish Nation consists of 23

Global Forum on Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society and the World Summit on the Information Society
villages encompassing 28.28 sq. Km. (S,849 hectares). As a result of federal and provincial initiatives our people were removed from our traditional territories and placed on "Indian res." Which totaled 1/2 of one % or our original land holdings.

In 1923, 16 Squamish speaking tribes decided to amalgamate in recognition of the fact that we were a single people united by language, culture, history and family ties. We were, in fact, the Squamish Nation. From these original sixteen villages we have our present day sixteen hereditary chiefs.

Through our Squamish Nation Government we have been able to construct an administration center housing a rang of programs and public servants, a community hall, a library, a cultural center, a resource center, two traditional longhouses, two multi-purpose gymnasium, a kindergarten school and nursery school, a learning center.

Over the past or 30 years the Squamish leadership have been focusing on building solid, healthy communities for our people using government funds combined with the revenues from our leased lands and own businesses. The main source of revenue is derived from leases and Squamish owned business'. Some of the Nation' seventy leases include: The Park Royal Shopping Centre, The International Plaza, The Greater Vancouver Sewage Plant, The Capilano Trailer Park, The Marina, The Driving Range, and The Gas Bar.

At the present time Squamish is seeking a resolution to the long standing claim to our traditional territories. We are in negotiations with both the provincial and federal governments regarding our aboriginal title and the right to our traditional lands and resources. These negotiations have been going on in one form or another since European settlement. What makes our negotiations in British Columbia unique is that the First Nations people of BC have never negotiated treaties with the government. Squamish Nation's Statement of Intent to negotiate was accepted by the British Columbia Treaty Commission December 1993. This is the first of six stages of the British Columbia Treaty Commission's process. Presently, Squamish Nation is in the third stage, which is called the Framework Agreement stage, of the process.

Beginning a New Communication Era

The nature of the challenges we face today are diverse and complex. Some of the obstacles in our communities are of a social nature such as, different levels of education, low literacy levels and lack of life skills. Other challenges are logistical, for example, we have some members living in rural settings and the majority living in an urban setting which affects their accessibility to services and programs. One of the challenge for us is how can we best provide information regarding current issues and ensure that all members who have different levels of education and ability will understand the issues at hand so that they will be able to make informed decisions concerning these complex issues. We began to meet this challenge by sending out written material setting out the necessary information and to hold information meetings. However, we found that that this was not always enough, particularly on the most important issues since these issues are often the most complex. The varying levels of literacy, in addition to social difficulties like substance abuse, have meant that some of our people were not willing or were in a position to attend information meetings. In our desire to inform and educate our membership, we decided to utilize multi media and other modern ways of communicating.

For example, in the year 2000 Squamish had a land claims issue that had been in trial for over 3 years. Ultimately, the federal government offered to settle the case but required a community referendum. It was an important land claim issue and it was imperative that our membership fully understood what was at stake before they cast their vote. A membership vote in favor would mean that the settlement our land claims chief negotiator, Chief Joe Mathias had negotiated would be accepted. Chief Joe Mathias and my production company proposed that we make a video that broke down the issue into simple understandable terms. The video was distributed to each household. Chiefs and council approved the project to ensure that the membership understood the terms negotiated on their behalf. They realized that not all our members have a computers and access to the Internet or the Nation's website or have attended meetings, but they all have TVs and VCRs. So, my company produced an information video that put the complex issues and concepts within the settlement and put the legal issues in layman's terms. We made certain that it was straightforward enough so that the level of education was not an obstacle, at the same time ensuring that the integrity of the material was intact. It was not an easy task, but we were able to accomplish what we wanted with it and the feedback from the community was fantastic and it was

effective. Our membership voted overwhelmingly in favor and the community settled a long-standing issue with the two of governments.

Next Exit Pictures Inc.:

Since the above project, my company has produced various other information videos for different Aboriginal companies and organizations on important and complex issues concerning First Nations people in Canada. Next Exit Pictures produced a short video for Aboriginal Business Canada on their Youth Entrepreneur program that featured three young First Nations people who had received funds. We also produced an information video on the fiscal relations between First Nations and the Canadian government. The latter was also very effective in communicating a difficult and controversial issue.

I incorporated my production company with the intent of not only producing information videos and documentaries, but to also to produce films that give voice to our stories. I use film and video to reach out to the hearts and minds of both indigenous people and non-indigenous people. I see modern technology and information as tools, as an extension to our traditional ways of communicating and sharing information. Our ancestors were intelligent and resourceful people who would use whatever tools were available to them. I believe that they most certainly would choose whatever communication tools proved to be the most effective and useful to them and more importantly, make their communications successful.

The film industry provides one of modern society's most powerful, useful and effective methods for reaching people. When used effectively, multi media and the film industry can touch our people and peoples from many other cultures. We now have the ability and opportunity to communicate and share our cultures and traditions with each other and with non-indigenous people by using the available technology to inspire and take on the challenge of creating understanding and meaning to our culture's stories of sorrow and joy. We now, have the resources and are gaining the knowledge to challenge the existing stereotypes. Technology provides us with the potential to increase our capacity to expand our communication field of influence and to insure the survival of our culture and identity.

Summary:

Much like those who came before me, this generation still uses the traditional longhouse to share traditional ways and to listen to our elders elegantly orate our stories and history. Today, we live in a world that is governed by new technology and fast paced development, a changing world that embraces new information and development.

The children of today are being born into this world, into the present, not the past. We absolutely must learn to communicate to this generation and to the generations that follow in a language that they understand and the language they understand today is embedded in today's global information society.

The old ways and the old teachings of the indigenous people of this planet are valid and important; they are integral to our being and to our very souls. Our children, our grandchildren, our grandchildren's children all deserve to know who they are and where they come from. This knowledge is what has sustained us thus far and it is what will sustain us forever more.

This generation has the opportunity and the means to explore technology and how it can best serve us in making our unique contribution to world and to ensure our participation in this global information society.

To show that we, as indigenous peoples, are more than stereo types and we are no longer accepting Invisibility, we have a voice and a presence, it was never silenced, it has been there all the while preparing itself for this new time called the information society and this new age of the rapid growth of technology. I believe that participation in our global information society is not only worthwhile but also imperative for the survival of indigenous cultures in the rapid changing world we live in today.

Hych-ka siyam, Thank you. I am honored and humbled to be a part of such a tremendous and essential movement towards a greater involvement and presence in the world and society we live in today. And I thank each and every one of you in our way, the Longhouse way, by holding my hands up to you to thank you for your time and patience, for allowing me to share with you today at this great event. On behalf of the Squamish Nation I hold my hands up in thanks and honor.