



Uyid'Ynji Tl'äku

“I let it go now”

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Published by:



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Bert Perry (front cover image of Yukon Hall); Fritz Mueller (Judy Gingell, p. iii); John Mickle (p. 2, p. 21); Gord Loverlin (p. 26); Jennifer Ellis (all other photos).

Additional funding for this publication was provided by Health Canada and Indian & Northern Affairs Canada. Kwanlin Dün would also like to acknowledge Northern Native Broadcasting Yukon for broadcasting the *UyidYnji Tl'äkä* keynote speakers live on CHON-FM.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the residential school survivors and family members who have found the courage to share stories of their healing journey with their families and community members.

Your leadership continues to help others find their own path to healing.



Thank You!

The *UyidYnji Tl'äku* Steering Committee would like to thank the many First Nations, government agencies, non-profit organizations and individual volunteers who helped make *UyidYnji Tl'äku* a tremendous success.



Steering Committee: Dianne Smith, Nyla Klugie-Migwans, Darlene Smith, Jeanie Dendys, Carmen Gibbons and Judy Gingell. Missing: Glenna Tetlich.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Message from Chief Mike Smith	2
Keynote Speakers	
I'm moving on...and letting go! by Andy Nieman	4
We can be healthy, we can be whole by Robert Joseph	10
Our survival is our resistance by Terri Brown	15
The Dugout Canoe Project	20
Intergenerational Panel	
Talk to your children by Nyla Klugie-Migwans	22
Don't be afraid to talk to us by Duane Gastant' Aucoin	25
My journey home by Victoria Fred	28

And a special thank you!

The K'änächá Scrapbook 30

Self-care Panel

Make a plan
by Jeanie Dendys 32

Reach out
by Roger Ellis 33

What to look for in a counsellor
by Megan Cohoon 34

Four steps to healing
by Bill Stuart 36

Aftercare 38

What I learned... 39

Reach out! 40

We would like to thank Elders Annie Smith and Irene Smith for choosing the name of *UyidYnji Tl'äku* for the gathering and Linda Harvey for providing the translation, "I let it go now."



Annie Smith, Irene Smith and Linda Harvey



Judy Gingell

We also thank Judy Gingell for being the Master of Ceremonies for the *UyidYnji Tl'äku* gathering and celebration. Her leadership helped us get through three full and demanding days. Thank you also to Shirley Adamson for helping to MC the celebration potlatch.

Introduction

This book is based on presentations made at *UyidYnji Tl'äku* ("I let it go now"), a three-day healing gathering and celebration potlatch held November 2009 in Whitehorse, Yukon. This event was hosted by Kwanlin Dün First Nation to commemorate the demolition of Yukon Hall, one of a number of residential schools that First Nation people from the Yukon and North BC were made to attend.

Hundreds of residential school survivors and family members from the Yukon and North BC attended *UyidYnji Tl'äku*.

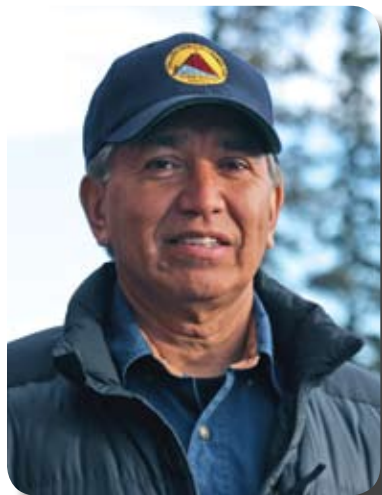
On the first morning, people gathered around a sacred fire at the site where Yukon Hall once stood. The sacred fire was then moved to Kwanlin Dün's NaKwa Ta Ku Potlatch

House where people shared stories, gained knowledge and tools, and supported each other on their healing journeys. On the last afternoon, hundreds more gathered for a celebration potlatch which featured culturally rich performances and traditional foods. The potlatch demonstrated the ongoing strength and vitality of First Nations culture in the north.

It is our hope that this book will continue to inspire survivors and family members to share their stories and move forward on their healing journey, to learn how to "let it go now."

As Andy Nieman said at the event, "Start out by taking baby steps that build trust, in your way, with whom you choose, and in your time! The sooner you start, the sooner you'll heal!"

Message from Chief Mike Smith



We all came together at UyyidYnji Tl'äku ("I let it go now") for a very important and special time. We came together to put aside some of the hurts and pain that we have endured.

We are all survivors. We have endured for many years. As First Nations people throughout the world, we have endured pain for over 500 years of European colonization.

We still struggle on because one day we hope our children will be totally free. We hope that there is a future for our children, and that the language we speak and the land we live on, will still continue.

We want to apologize to our children. I feel for the children because those of us who went to residential school learned some very bad things and we practiced those bad things. We are truly sorry for the harm we may have done. We know you are also survivors. That is the message we also have to carry on.

We want to put this hurt behind us. We must move on. I know we will never forget the pain that we have always endured. I know that it will always be there but we will learn how to deal with it in a positive way so that, as we heal our spirit, we will again be strong. Thankfully, we have come a long way.

Kwanlin Dün is pleased that so many came a long way to UyiḁYnji Tl'äku to gather and celebrate with us on our land. We are pleased people came together to enjoy and celebrate, to have a happy time, and to put aside the hurt and anger that has been holding us back.

Shäw Níthän

Chief Mike Smith

Kwanlin Dün First Nation

I'm moving on...and letting go!

Andy Nieman



I won't go into all the gory details of what they did to us at the schools. Suffice it to say they tried to break our minds, bodies and spirits. But they did not succeed!

I want to touch on a couple of very important steps to healing from residential school. They are two of the greatest stumbling blocks. Yet they are two of the greatest healing steps we can take in becoming sober, healthy, happy and honourable!

Those two things are shame and forgiveness.

Shame

If you can overcome shame, and if you can create genuine forgiveness in your heart for those who hurt you, you will truly be an outstanding, courageous, fulfilled individual.

Many seeds of anger, hostility, rage and shame were planted in our young, innocent minds. And the way we were raised as children is the way that we tried *not* to raise our children. The sad part is, the majority of us wound up doing it anyway without even realizing it. Not everybody, but most.

At the school we were bombarded every single day with very shameful, disgusting put-downs and very hurtful

messages. So much so, that after awhile there was no choice but to believe them. And we left there with a view of ourselves based on shame.

Ashamed to be Indian.

Ashamed to be with Indians.

Ashamed of our Indian parents.

Ashamed to eat Indian food.

Ashamed to admit that we had an Indian name.

Ashamed to come back to our Indian communities.

And ashamed to even dare to whisper that we had been abused.

And the place where shame became the biggest stumbling block was in this—we were ashamed to ask for help.

And because we hated the shame so much, we became very afraid to

make even the tiniest, most innocent, smallest mistake. At the school we were punished for any mistakes we made. We would do anything—absolutely anything—to keep from looking like a dirty, stupid Indian (as they called us back then)!

So, when we left the school, we kept our houses spic n' span. We made sure the ashtrays were always spotless! We made sure everything was in its proper place! And as soon as something appeared to get dirty, into the wash basin it went! Quickly! Before anybody saw it! It became a phobia with us and we didn't even know we were doing it! Until it was pointed out to us.

Toxic shame can do that to you! Shame will either be your biggest stumbling block, or it will be one of your biggest

“...put your false pride to the side, let it slide and let a humble attitude abide in its place! “

"I am talking about real, true, genuine forgiveness. Not the kind where I bury the hatchet in the sand and leave the handle sticking out so I can pick it back up anytime I want! "

and greatest steps on your road to recovery.

To overcome it you will need to put your false pride to the side, let it slide and let a humble attitude abide in its place!

And ask for help! I encourage you, my friends, ask for help!

Forgiveness

Our number two biggest stumbling block, our biggest step to healing, is forgiveness.

Ah...forgiveness! Easy to say, it just kind of rolls off the tip of tongue so effortlessly. But is it easy to do?

You know why it's *not* so easy to do? It's not so easy to do because it is so powerful!

I am talking about real, true, genuine forgiveness. Not the kind where I bury the hatchet in the sand and leave the handle sticking out so I can pick it back up anytime I want!

I am talking about the kind where, if my abuser sat totally helpless before me, and I could do anything to him or her without any consequences.... I'd say "No, you can go free. I have nothing against you."

Genuine forgiveness is so powerful that it can set you free!

Free from anger! Free from rage! Free from resentment! Revenge! Suicidal thinking! Depression! Regret! Bitterness! Jealousy! Mistrust! Shame! Ulcers and other sickness!

Forgiveness is the sweet fragrance the flower leaves on the foot that trampled

on it. Forgiveness truly is one of (if not the most) powerful steps in finding true freedom and real peace from abuse.

So how do I get it? The reality is, we don't "get" it anywhere! We can't rent it or borrow it. It's not there for us to just come and get it.

The secret is...you have to create it! You are the only one who can create forgiveness in your heart!

Here is one of the beautiful things about forgiveness. You decide what it will look like! You decide who will receive it! You decide how it will take place! And you decide when it will happen.

Let me let you in on another little secret: the sooner you start creating forgiveness, the sooner you'll start finding freedom.

Here are some ways you can create forgiveness.

First of all, forgiveness starts with a decision to forgive.

- Then, it may come in the form of a letter (if your abuser is dead or alive).
- It may mean connecting with a professional counsellor.
- It could start by talking to someone who's "been there".
- It could start with a prayer for the person and for yourself.
- You might want to talk to an elder you respect.
- You might want to create your own ceremony of forgiveness.
- It could start by sharing in a self-help group.

"The sooner you start creating forgiveness, the sooner you'll start finding freedom."

*"I am still
standing, and
you are still
standing!
I am not who
they said I am.
I am who I say
I am!"*

- You might connect with someone who has great mediation skills.

But the real key to starting, *is* starting.

Once you start, by deciding that you do want to go all the way, the answers will come. They will come on your terms, from your heart, in your way, and in your time!

If you deal with and overcome shame, and are willing to forgive, my friend you will be well on your way to honour, health and happiness!

Moving on and letting go

Now, when we let something go from our lives, we've got to take hold of something positive, something good that will fill the place of what we let go. I've had garbage in my past—and so have you—but right now we will be moving on and letting go!

I'm letting go and I am taking hold of my culture! I'm letting go and I am taking hold of my family! My artwork! My music! Jesus! A professional counsellor! The land! My stories! My children! My future! My sense of humour! My courage! My humbleness! My sports! My job! My two-step shuffle! My smile! My jokes! My integrity!

I'm moving on and letting go and I'm taking hold of YOU!

No matter what age you are, or what your circumstances might be, you are still someone who is very special! And you have something very special to offer that no one else can: your story, your experiences, your point of view and your smile! What hasn't killed you, has made you stronger!

Now listen: you've been kicked, you've been punched, you've been slapped and you've been hurt. But now, right now, you have come back! You have withstood the attack. And you ain't never, ever, going back!

I am not damaged goods...you are not damaged goods! They did not kill me, they did not kill you! I am still standing and you are still standing! I am not who they said I am. I am who I say I am!

You know what the solution is. Start out by taking baby steps that build trust. In your way, with whom you choose and in your time! The sooner you start, the sooner you'll heal! The past is a good place to learn from but a lousy place to live!

I'm going to let some fresh air into my soul! I'm going to let some sunlight into my mind! I'm going to get a spring back in my step, a smile back on my face, and a new song in my heart!

I let it go now

by Andy Nieman

Well I went to Res School, ya' know I did my time,
When I went to the table, food was fit for swine.
Ain't no eggs upon the table, ain't no bacon in the pan,
So we snared our rabbits, and ate 'em on the land!

I am someone special, I have a love to shine,
I let it go now, I put the past behind

They tried to beat me senseless, tried to steal my pride,
They only made me stronger, to share my great big smile,
I have friends and family, I have a kind heart too,
When times get lonely.... I'll make it through!

I am someone special, I have a love to shine,
I let it go now, I put the past behind

You can call me a number, even call me a name,
But ya' know I'm free now, there's no more shame!
People say I'm crazy, they don't understand,
I'm going to make it, I know where I stand!

I am someone special, I have a love to shine,
I let it go now, I put the past behind

We can be healthy, we can be whole

Chief Robert Joseph



I feel the excitement and I sense the hope that we can create the kind of future that will inspire our children and our grandchildren. They are our real purpose.

But first we are going to struggle with ourselves and our experiences. Every person has the opportunity to make a difference, to change the way things are.

It starts with you of course. No one else. It starts with you.

You were the child in those schools, whose power was taken away, whose sense of belonging was stripped away, whose sense of connectedness, of being loved and cherished, was taken away.

But I don't talk about those things to get sad. I talk about it to remind you of your resilience, of your strength that is embedded in all of our history, our language and our culture. These are the elements of our being that can empower us to be responsible for ourselves and for others.

Imagine that! We *can* be healthy. We *can* be whole after 120 years of people saying, "You have no value, you have no worth. You can't be whole unless you are like us."

But we won't be like them. We will be like us! Always!

I am 70 years old. When I went to that school, as a little six year old, I didn't

know any English, only my own language Kwak'wala. And every time I tried to speak it, I'd get cuffed and sent to some room to serve penance. I couldn't understand that as a little guy. How come I was in such a foreign place? Everyone was a stranger. Nobody said for one moon, "I love you." Nobody even cared.

During those first few years at school, I would cry until I was too tired to cry. I would fantasize about being home with my grandparents, with people I liked. I couldn't figure it out.

And so, for the course of my lifetime, of growing up and afterwards, I questioned my value and my place for a long, long time. Demons carried me for so long. I was suicidal for a while, addicted to alcohol for a long time.

There were times when I didn't want to live or die.

Nobody, not one child, should grow up like that.

And that is why we are here today, because we are going to make sure that not one of our children ever grows up like that. They should loved and nourished and cheerful. When they spread their wings, they should go out into the world with hope and inspiration, wanting to do good.

To be free

To be free starts with you. To be absolutely free, absolutely starts with you.

I was at a meeting in Vancouver talking about forgiveness and there was this old guy that asked, "How can you even

"To be free starts with you. To be absolutely free, absolutely starts with you."

“I know if I shut the door on my healing, then my kids will still inherit the mess I was part of. And then my grandchild will inherit it.”

think about forgiving these people for all of the harm they have done to you and your people?” It threw me. I had no answer for this big question. All I had was this: “It begins and ends with me.”

What I have learned is that the more I heal, the more the notion of forgiveness becomes a reality in my mind. I know if I shut the door on forgiveness, then I shut the door on my healing. And I know if I shut the door on my healing, then my kids will inherit the mess I was part of. And then my grandchild will inherit it.

If we are going to make progress, we have to be inclusive, as hard as it is. We have to engage other people to create the kind of world that we want for our children.

Letting go is not easy. But we are going to be letting go because if it isn't us, it will be passed to the next generation.

As hard as our own hearts become sometimes from our anger, resentment and hostility, things can change.

You can change! What a powerful suggestion that is – that everybody can change. We can, and we will, make this place a better place.

I was sitting with elders in my home territory one day and we were talking about residential schools and how we could recover from the experience.

We talked about what we have within our grasp, within our history, within our knowledge base, and within our medicine to heal.

As I was listening to them I thought I was getting sleepy. But as I was staring,

I started to see that the whole centre of the circle I was sitting in was a huge whirlpool spinning. And I saw you and me in there. There were women and children. Some were ankle deep, some were waist deep, some you could only see their hands.

When the circle closed, I went to my room and asked the creator to explain what it was I just saw. I went to sleep and, first thing in the morning, the answers were clearer.

The first recognition of that vision was that we survivors would heal through our own circles. The power and the knowledge, the medicine, has always been here.

The next thing that I realized was that there would be many tears, like a river flowing clean.

A friend of mine told me a long time ago that every tear was like a universe, it reminds you of something else, of an emotion, an experience, a person. Sometimes it is painful, sometimes it is joyful. But it becomes a tool in our recovery.

So as we move forward there are going to be many more tears. But embrace it, cherish it, as there is nothing to be ashamed of. When I have cried I know I have released the toxic inheritance of residential schools.

The most important aspect of dealing with the issue of Indian residential schools is finding our spiritual essence, finding our power, finding our will and desire, and reaching out to others to begin to move forward.

“As we move forward there are going to be many more tears. But embrace it, cherish it, as there is nothing to be ashamed of.”



Viola Papequash and Lacey Scarff (above) and Starr Drynock (right) were some of the singers at the UyidYnji Tl'äky celebration

potlatch. The potlatch demonstrated the strong and resilient culture of First Nations people.



We have got to transform our relationships. That is what the Truth Commission is about, it's about transforming our hearts and our minds. We have to treat each other with dignity. The new covenant we have to treat each other with is more spiritual than legal. It incites you and I at the deepest core of our being to create new relationships.

No matter how much we have been angry, it is more hopeful than before.

I want to end by saying that this moment is the most important moment of our lives. We all have it within our grasp and our power to make a difference. Let's find ways to do that! Let's use our history, our language, western medicine, everything! Let's use it for the sake of ourselves and our children.

I want to thank your ancestors and my ancestors who brought us to this moment and bow to our history and everything about them to remind us that we are spiritual beings, that we can move beyond the deepest things, beyond the hardest challenges.

Our survival is our resistance

Terri Brown

The first year I admitted I went to residential school was when I was asked to speak at a conference. I had buried it deeply.

But I went home to my children and told them that I had been to residential school. They didn't know what that was. When they learned more, they were surprised that I had not shared my story with them before. That was a turning point in my life.

I admitted that I was a survivor and I spoke about it to 500 people for 15 minutes. It was like torture. It was the hardest thing I had ever done. When I left the stage, I said I would never again do something like that.

But it is important that people prepare their stories to tell so it will be forever recorded in our history, so people will never forget what happened to us.

It is important we do that, and we are strong enough. We have survived the greatest assault on any nation. We are survivors, we are resilient.

All of you have your coping mechanisms to make sure that our nations survive. If we hadn't survived, our nations would not be here. But we did go back to our communities. We had our families and did what we had to do. We may not have done it in the best way possible, but we didn't have the best tools either. We didn't have



“What is different for me today is that it doesn’t control me. I don’t think about it every day. Some memories come and I let them.”

the parenting tools. We didn’t have the communication skills. We were angry. We hated the world. We hated ourselves.

What is different for me today is it doesn’t control me. I don’t think about it every day. Some memories come and I let them.

It was so lonely at the school. For my survival, I daydreamed a lot. I tried to be very good, thinking that if I did what people wanted, I could go home.

By the time I went home at Christmas, things had changed. I saw my mother and thought “What does she know. We are just Indians. She doesn’t know anything.” It is quite amazing that I could go from having my mother be the centre of my universe to that kind of attitude in just three months.

My mother and I did resolve things later. I asked her why she let me go. My parents had separated and the Indian Agent came and said she couldn’t take care of her kids. She begged to be allowed to keep my youngest sister, and they let her, but my brother and I were sent off.

After hearing that I decided in my heart that I loved my mother again. My mother is very important in my life.

Think about the people back in the communities, the people that had their children taken. Can you imagine the pain and the hurt? Someone in Fort MacPherson went back and asked the elders why they let the children go and the elders said they didn’t have a choice, the children were taken. It was so quiet when the children went, even

the dogs didn't bark—they too grieved the loss of the children.

How did we survive that great assault? It affects us today but we have the choice to do things differently.

What we did to survive is that we projected ourselves into the future. We put ourselves 10-20 years ahead. We weren't living in the pain because we couldn't live where we were. Maybe we were the first time travelers!

We were born with the gift of vision. Vision doesn't come to all nations of the world. It comes to our elders, our parents, our grandparents. They somehow taught us that without words. We lived a life so close to the land we were one with the land.

On a very deep, personal level, I want to share with you this: to survive as

a child, as a person, you don't need a whole team of experts. You don't need that. If you have one person in your life who treats you well, who loves you unconditionally, who makes you feel special, makes you feel smart and honours you, that one person makes a difference between life and death. Many children died of a broken heart.

I was loved by one person and I thought about that all the time. That person is my oldest sister. She was always in my corner. Even when I did wrong, I was right. Can you imagine? Doing all kinds of things wrong and you are never thought of as wrong? She was always there through my entire life.

Today we are proud members of our nations, aren't we! Our survival is our resistance, the resistance of nations.

“Our survival is our resistance, the resistance of nations. That is their slap in the face, when we can say, ‘Look at me, look at how happy I am.’ Colonize that cowboy!”



Robert Joseph had a good laugh when 'Gramma Susie' sat on his knee at the celebration potlatch. Humour can play an important role in healing.

That is their slap in the face, when we can say, "Look at me, look at how happy I am". Colonize that cowboy!

The survival and thriving of our intergenerational survivors is paramount and critical. We absolutely have to get in touch with them and tell them what happened so they understand.

My kids didn't know. Some survivors who married people who didn't go to school said their partners wondered why they were making the bed before we even got out of it! It was ingrained in us! Make your bed and do it properly!

To the intergenerational survivors

I want to talk to you. My dear people, my dear friends. You are one with us. What happened to us, happened to you. We cannot draw a line between the people who lived in the schools and the

people who came after. If you didn't survive, our nations wouldn't survive either. If you didn't find happiness and love, our nations would not have made it.

As parents to you, you don't owe us anything. That is what my mom told me. She said "Live your life. Dance like nobody's watching."

Enjoy it because we didn't. We want you to have everything we didn't have. We want the best for you. We give you our love. We give you our hope and dreams. Do the things that we couldn't do as kids.

That is our resistance. You are our resistance.

Love is the greatest thing on earth. If you have love, you have everything. Find that love.

If we have an open heart and an open mind, we can change anything. We will find the courage to make the change that is necessary. We are no longer a number, we have a name now!

We are not supposed to be here. They did not wish us well. We had the resilience and the heart to survive. Many did not.

That is why I like the term survivor. When I hear that word, in my heart I remember that there are many who didn't survive, their spirits gave up and they couldn't stay with us on this earth.

We survived because we were strong enough. Remember that.

"Love is the greatest thing on earth. If you have love, you have everything. Find that love. If we have an open heart and an open mind, we can change anything."



The Dugout Canoe Project

Sundog Carvers

Presented by Brian James, Duran Henry, Wayne Price and William Callaghan

In the summer of 2009, master carver Wayne Price and 19 youth went to a Yukon River island to carve a 13,000 pound red cedar log into a 30 foot dugout canoe.

Wayne, a Tlingit from Haines, Alaska, had started his own healing journey more than six years earlier. At that time, he had a vision in a sweat lodge that directed him to share his carving knowledge with youth and to show them how good it could be to be free of alcohol and drugs.

He eventually found himself visiting the Sundog carving program in Whitehorse. Soon after, his vision of a dugout canoe project became a reality.

For ten weeks, Wayne and the youth stayed on the island, without alcohol and drugs, and carved, and carved, and carved. They also had healing circles and sweat lodges. They sang traditional songs and were visited by elders and dance groups. They lived without the distraction of TVs, radios, IPODs or cellphones.

“I learned how to quiet my mind. I learned how to listen and watch,” said Duran Henry, one of the carvers.

The log was a challenge to carve, with rot in the middle and the need for a lot of patching and care. Wayne told the students, “This log has damage, just like us. We have to fix it, as we fix our own lives.”

And the students did it – they created a canoe faster than any canoe project Wayne had worked on before.

Before setting the canoe in the water and paddling it to Whitehorse, the carvers gathered all of the wood chips and burned them in four fires, set in the four directions. “In my vision I asked what makes this a healing dugout compared to the other dugouts I have done. The creator

told me that every wood chip that comes off of this dugout canoe represents a First Nation life we have lost to alcohol and drugs,” explained Wayne. The fires were a way of honouring these lost lives.

The canoe will be housed in the new Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre being built in Whitehorse.



Intergenerational Panel

Children of residential school survivors



Victoria Fred, Duane Gastant' Aucoin and Nyla Klugie-Migwans

Talk to your children

Nyla Klugie-Migwans

Just like survivors, we had our own addictions, our alcohol or drug addictions. We lashed out in anger in different ways. We were unable to trust people. And, like some who were in the schools, we were abused too.

But we have to overcome it, and face our truths of who we are. And we have to be honest and truthful about what we feel as intergenerational survivors.

When I was growing up nobody talked about what it was like to be sober. I never even heard the word 'sobriety' until I was older. I am 41 years old and half of my life was about addictions. But I have been clean and sober for eight years.

And through my sobriety, I had special people who helped me through the sweat lodge, through the ceremonies. I never believed in ceremonies before, I didn't understand what they were, but I had special people in my life guide me to that spiritual part of who I am.

I believe everyone of us has a gift and we have to start teaching our children and grandchildren about that spirituality.

I believe everyone of us has that seed in us, and that we were given that seed by the creator. It is important to put that seed in our children.

We have to support our children by telling them everyday that we love them. As an intergenerational survivor, I hardly ever heard the word 'love' growing up. I was barely hugged

or tucked into bed and told stories. What I saw most of my childhood was alcoholism.

It took me a long time to understand what it was all about. I grew up wondering what was wrong with me, what did I do? I never asked to be emotionally and mentally scarred.

Those wounds are still there. It has taken me a long time to understand why I was treated the way I was treated.

Survivors, you need to talk to your children about what you went through. No matter if it was a good experience or a bad one, you need to tell them the truth about what happened to you in the schools. And you need to love them.

I challenge everyone to tell your children how much you love them, about how important they are in your

"I challenge everyone to tell your children how much you love them, about how important they are in your life. We need that affection. We need that love."

“We want to be able to walk this path with you, to be by your side and help you through your journey, because we need to heal together as a family.”

life. We need that affection. We need that love. We need to know that we are going to be nurtured from this day forward.

That is all we ever wanted from our parents, to see that love and that appreciation for one another as a family.

We know there are so many sufferings of our survivors. We are patient, we have patience. We are starting to learn and understand.

We want to be able to walk this path with you, to be by your side and help you through your journey, because we need to heal together as a family.

We need to bring our families together. We need to talk. We should no longer be angry at each other and resentful

about what happened to us. We need to come together in a circle and talk about what happened to us. We need to feel your feelings, and you need to feel our feelings.

That is the only way we are going to heal as families, the only way we will heal as communities. We can no longer afford to shove this issue under the carpet in our families. The truth needs to be told.

Like others have said, ask for help!

We need all of our men and our women in the communities to be helping individuals. We need to come together.

Like the saying goes, it takes a whole community to raise a child. Well, it probably takes a whole community to raise a survivor.

Don't be afraid to talk to us

Duane Gastant' Aucoin

Even though I did not go to Lower Post Residential School, I am still a survivor of Lower Post.

Most of my life I had no idea of the baggage I was carrying around. I didn't know what it was or why I did things the way I did.

It wasn't until I went to a residential school conference a few years ago that it first clicked. They were listing the symptoms that survivors experienced and I was checking them off for myself...I got an A+.

That got me thinking about why I had all of this baggage. My mom would never talk about it. You just didn't talk about it! You were supposed to suppress it and sweep under the rug.

But the rug was getting so high we were tripping on it all of the time!

Finally, I got to the point of understanding what it meant to have intergenerational residential school syndrome. I started to understand how well they programmed my mom to bring home what she was programmed to do.

That is when I started understanding my own story of how I was also a survivor of residential school.

My mom is my hero. She has so much courage that they couldn't beat out of her in Lower Post, that my father couldn't beat out of her later. She had that strength to be able to sit down with me, to talk to me.

"I understood how well they programmed my mom to bring home to her home what she was programmed to do."



Duane Gastant' Aucoin and his mom, Vicky Bob.

She told me what she had survived in Lower Post. It was the first time I had heard this. As her son, it helped me understand her more, about what she brought home and about what she put me through. It helped melt my heart, that understanding.

I had carried around a lot of anger towards my mother because I didn't know – I had to blame someone. I had some anger towards my dad, but more towards my mom.

I asked why did she choose to put me through this? Why did she choose my father? Why? Why? Why? Now I finally had my answer.

But it didn't stop there. It had to be a conversation of healing. I got to hear from her, but she had to sit and listen to me, from my mouth, about what she had put me through. It takes courage to listen.

She got it out. She was able to tell me "This is what I put you through".

I got it out, I got to say "This is what you put me through."

And then I got to hear from her, "I'm sorry".

Hearing the words from her, "I am sorry," was such a gift that I

have been blessed with. I finally got to let it go. I finally got to forgive her, and understand her.

It also helped me to be honest with myself. I raised two kids and the biggest fear of every parent is to make the same mistakes that were done to us. I put my kids through their own Lower Post because I didn't know any better. My mom did it to me because she didn't know any better.

But despite that domino of pain, my mom started the domino effect of healing. She sat down with me and talked about what she put me through and said "I am sorry."

Because of that, I sat with my kids and said "This is why I put you through and I am sorry." When I see them with their kids, they are doing a way better job

with their kids than I did with them, or my mom did with me.

And that is the story of healing. Healing has to start somewhere. It has to start with us. We have to have the courage to get out what we need to get out, but to do it in a good way, to do it in a healthy way.

I know that you, the survivors, know what you put us through. And that is a big heavy cross to carry. But us children are wanting to forgive you. We love you. Don't be afraid to talk to us. That is the only way we are going to be able to leave this behind.

Once we start being honest, we can recognize the good and the bad, and make good come out of everything.

"...us children are wanting to forgive you. We love you. Don't be afraid to talk to us. That is the only way we are going to be able to leave this behind."

“My message is to reach out to us, to connect with us, and not let our history stand in the way of our future.”

My journey home

Victoria Fred

My journey is of coming home.

I have memories of going to different foster homes at an early age. My earliest memories of my mother are of her getting out of a social worker’s car. I was about 5 or 6 years old and it was in Edmonton, Alberta.

When I saw my mom get out of the car, I didn’t know who she was. She came into the house and was at the table. Later it became clear she was my biological mother and she was preparing to take me home.

When we went back to Whitehorse there was a long period of time I was in a state of confusion as I didn’t know who I was or what was going on. We

started living in the village and as I grew up I faced a lot of discrimination. I went to the Catholic school.

I remember growing up and being ashamed of who I was and not being able to go to a space or place to find those answers in my own home.

My story is similar to many around here. We have stories of feeling detached. We have stories of not knowing who we are, what our identity is about. But my message today is that I am very thankful about where I am at.

I am thankful to my Aunt Judy who recognized the importance of family, who was beside my mother to fight for us, to bring us home.

I am thankful for my Auntie Doris. When I was growing up, trying to find out who I was, Doris was there to help us remember the songs.

Most importantly, I am thankful for my mother who had the courage to face her fears and had the recognition of the importance of bringing her children home and trying to raise us the best she could. She was a single mother.

She had gone to the Whitehorse Baptist Mission School. Our stories are similar, of growing up in an environment of abuse, alcoholism and identity loss. It was a struggle.

But I am really thankful for one of the greatest gifts in my life which

helped me change my life. That is my daughter Sabrina.

My message for you is to have hope that we will overcome—and it is our children who will help us move forward.

It is because of my daughter that I am 26 years clean and sober. It is because of my daughter that I live a good life, a life of purpose. I live a life that makes me realize that our children are the most important gift we can ever be given.

I am also really thankful for my culture and for the ability and the space to be able to learn my language and to learn my song.

I am thankful to be able to raise my daughter to not be afraid of who she is but to embrace her culture, to embrace her identity. That is her strength and that will give her the best ability to be a good person.

We need to create an environment for all of our children to grow up in where they can be proud, where they can overcome the obstacles that society and insecure people put in the way.

So my message is to reach out to your children, to connect with us, and not let our history stand in the way of our future.

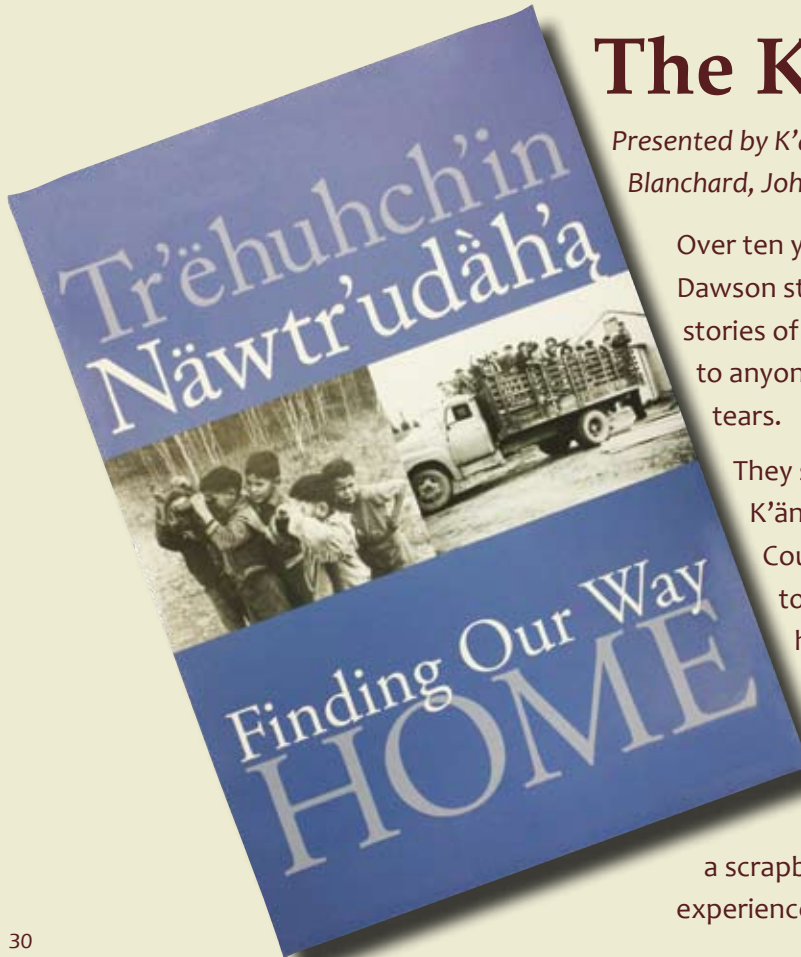
The K'änächá Scrapbook

Presented by K'änächá members Julia Morberg, Ronald Johnson, Frank Blanchard, John Semple, Kathleen Bullen and counsellor Sharon Moore

Over ten years ago, a group of residential school survivors in Dawson started gathering at Dot Roberts' house and sharing stories of their childhood. They shared things they hadn't talked to anyone about before. There was a lot of laughter and many tears.

They soon formed a support circle and called themselves the K'änächá Group which means "taking care of ourselves". Counsellors and support workers in Dawson were asked to help the group's members as they started out on their healing journey.

At one meeting, Frank Blanchard brought some photos of students at residential schools that he'd found at the Archives. The photos generated many stories and, in turn, led to the idea of creating a scrapbook of memories that would document people's experiences at residential school.



“It was scary to think about sharing outside of our group but we wanted to educate people. We wanted our people to start to understand us better,” said a member of K’änächá.

People researched the history of residential schools, collecting more documents and photos. Other people in the community also got involved.

Sharon Moore provided support to the K’änächá Group as they worked on the scrapbook.

“What impressed me the most was their courage and willingness to keep moving down that difficult path, and how infectious that was for the rest of the community. Others saw the group members on their journey and saw the possibility of that happening for themselves. There are still lots of people in the community who are just taking their first steps. Having these K’änächá leaders is a great resource for the community.”

The Dänojà Zho Cultural Centre in Dawson asked the group to do an exhibit in May 2007 about residential

schools. A “Welcoming Home” ceremony was held at the same time to honour the survivors and symbolically welcome people back to the heart of their home community.

In the book’s introduction, Kathleen Bullen highlights the project’s impact:

“What did we learn from making this book? We learned a history that we didn’t know about... all the government and church decisions that affected our lives. We learned, and came to understand, why our parents and family were hurting back then, and why our people’s culture and language were lost. We learned that our memories would always be a part of us, but that the pain from our memories could be healed. We learned that we were not alone, that the effects of residential school had been impacting many people for a long time.”

Self-care Panel

Learning how to heal and take care of yourself



Make a plan

by Jeanie Dendys

To help heal, make a plan for yourself. Make a plan everyday if you have to. Say what you are going to do to take care of yourself, your family, your community. You can do one thing every day, every week.

We need to do things in the best way that we can. And we need to reach out to one another. We need to use whatever we can, whatever works for us.

It might be our songs, culture, family, friends, community, sharing circles, sewing, or counseling. It might be going out on the land. Everything has value.

Your plan is about you. It is not about what I do or what someone else does—it's about what is going to work for you.

Reach out

by Roger Ellis

I have been sober for over 20 years. It was tough for me but I had good counsellors and others that helped me on my journey.

That is why I encourage others to reach out and ask for help. There is nothing better than having a good support person or family member with you on your journey.

I don't plan things too far ahead, just one day at a time. Outreach workers and front line workers like me have to take care of ourselves too. If we don't look after ourselves, we will burn out. And how can you look after others if you are not healthy!

I look after myself a lot because I want to be there for others! I get very tired

too, so my priority is to have a hot shower when I go home and to go to bed and get lots of rest. And I have a nice hot meal.

Family is so important too. My daughters are very supportive of me, they are always there, worried about me. Although they are in Vancouver, we always keep in contact and tell each other we love each other.

My girls have taught me a lot. They asked me "How come you don't hug? How come you don't say I love you?" I told them I was never taught that.

But now I can't do enough loving now with my kids, especially as they taught me. I exercise it a lot!



What to look for in a counsellor

Megan Cohoon



One of the difficulties people seem to face when asking for help is they are not sure what “help” means.

Where do you go for help? How do you know the person you are sitting down with is going to be helpful? And why would you open your heart to a total stranger? These are very big questions.

When looking for help, I invite you to think about what is important to you when you are on the receiving end of the love that your grandmother, grandfather, auntie, uncle or others have given you at some point in the past. What qualities did you look for? What made you feel good in the course of that conversation? What is it they have done for you?

Those are the same qualities that you look for in a professional.

If you decide to seek professional help, ask yourself if the person you meet with would be a good grandmother, grandfather, auntie or uncle? That is a good starting point.

Professional qualifications also matter because there is a lot of skill and knowledge involved in helping somebody professionally. Health Canada has made sure that everyone on their list has met minimum standards.

When you are looking for a counsellor, ask them where they went to school. Ask them if they have done their own therapy. Ask them what they would do in certain circumstances.

You might want to think about it like this: “I am going to hire you to do a really important job so you have to convince me that you are going to do a good job.”

Don’t be afraid to be in the driver’s seat and let that person know that they need to earn your respect, to earn the privilege of working with you.

Ask yourself if the person can really listen to what you are saying. Will they listen to what you want or are they going to try to inflict their values on you?

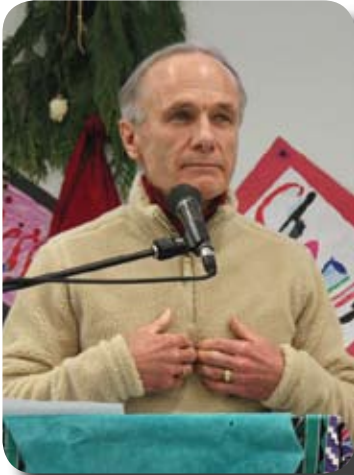
And respect what is going on inside your own body. Listen to what your gut tells you. If you can’t find someone that is a good fit for you, keep looking.

After all, if you were looking for a mechanic to fix the best snowmobile you’ve ever had, are you going to take it to just anybody? No, you are going to take it to someone who knows what they are doing. Do the same for yourself.

“Respect what is going on inside your own body. Listen to what your gut tells you. If you can’t find someone that is a good fit for you, keep looking.”

Four steps to healing

Bill Stuart



I had the privilege of sitting in a residential school hearing with a man who had been very hurt in residential school and had shame in his heart. There was no cell in his heart that hadn't been touched by shame.

This is a man who hasn't worked much in his life. This is a man who won't even come into town to buy food, he feels so ashamed.

But he went into the hearing and told this amazing story. Basically, he told the adjudicator, the person the government hired to make big decisions about this man's claim, about how to heal.

I would like to share the four steps to healing he spoke about.

Before describing his four steps, however, it is important to note that not everybody is at the place he was at then. Some might be earlier in the process and that is okay. You can only be where you are.

First Step

The first step, he says, is that you have to acknowledge to yourself what happened to you and how it affected you. You need to open up to the truth, in technicolour. You have to remember the details. It is not about forgetting – it is about remembering.

When you are a little person, you don't have a lot of skills for coping. And at residential school you didn't have much support. You were all by yourself.

Because of the way the brain works you came to the conclusion that there must be something wrong with you.

And you concluded that the only way to manage the pain was by forgetting, not remembering. But this guy says you must remember *and* you must recognize how it has affected you in your life.

Second Step

Once you have done this remembering and recognizing of the impacts, the second step is to find someone to share it with. You need someone who can witness what happened.

The person you open up to needs to do two things. They have to really listen. They also have to honour your pain, to honour how you have been touched by this.

Third Step

The third step is to forgive. This man said he has to forgive, not for the sake of the person that caused the pain, but for himself. He said you have to let go of the anger and the need for revenge. We all have been at a place where we want to take our anger and lash out. But he said you have to forgive.

Fourth Step

The fourth step, is to change. And the changes he spoke of aren't about

moving forward, they are about moving back, back to his culture.

He wasn't talking about giving up the duct tape. He was talking about remembering the values, the ceremonies, the rights and rituals of connecting with other people.

And as he talked about change, he said he wanted to help his children understand what had happened to him. For the first time in his life, he realized he had to go tell his children his story so they could understand their own pain and understand the process of healing.

This was his wisdom. I think he speaks the wisdom of many people.

Aftercare

What is aftercare?

Aftercare is what we do after an event or difficult time to take care of ourselves.

When we participate in events like a healing gathering or read stories about residential school, past memories and emotions might come up.

When past memories or emotions are triggered, we need to be kind to ourselves and others.

At those times, we may not feel like ourselves, so it is sometimes helpful to have a plan of how to take care of ourselves.

Honour who you are and take care of yourself.

Some ideas for aftercare:

- Talk to someone, don't keep it to yourself
- Visit with an Elder or a close friend who cares about you
- Spend time with family, children and grandchildren
- Go out on the land
- Look at pictures of good memories
- Write about what you are thinking or feeling in a journal
- Think of a memory that makes you laugh
- Limit alcohol or other drugs if you are feeling stressed or emotional
- Read a book that helps you feel inspired or grounded (like a meditation book, a book about spirituality or the Bible)
- Eat properly
- Pray
- Talk with a counsellor or a support person
- Write a letter to yourself or to someone important to you
- Cut back on coffee, pop and caffeine
- Practice coping skills that you have learned from workshops or programs.

What I learned...

In their evaluations, UyidYnji Tl'äky participants wrote about one thing they learned at the gathering, something they will take home with them. This is a sample of what people said:

To laugh and be happy, and not be afraid to do it.

I am special, unique, one of a kind.

To forgive the ones that hurt me and to forgive myself.

TO LEARN TO FORGIVE AND TO GET AWAY FROM ANGER.

To make connections, to forgive.

I am not alone with the abuse and we can teach each other about survival and love.

No matter what "those" people did, and are still doing, to our people, we will not be colonized. We are one, we are strong.

There are a lot of people going through the same thing as me.

I can let it go if I allow myself to remember.

I know that our parents aren't mad at us, it's not their fault, and it's not our fault.

To laugh more and tell people I love them more.

I learned that I'm free, that I could let go of my hurt, tears, pity and fear. I will always look back and know it's there, the hurt and pain, and will walk forward to a better future for me and my kids.

*To show my children love, respect and affection!
To break that cycle!*

You are not alone when you feel alone.

To start my healing journey.

Letting go, when I am ready.

Reach out!

There are many people available to talk to, people who can help you find your way on your healing journey. Whether you are at the beginning or have been travelling this path for a long time, we all need to connect and share.

As a starting place, here are some numbers to call to find help.

First Nations in BC (area code 250)

Daylu Dena Council: 779-3161

Dease River First Nation: 239-3000

Fort Nelson First Nation: 774-7257

Halfway River First Nation: 772-5058

Iskut First Nation: 234-3331

Tahltan Band Office: 235-3151

Taku River Tlingit: 651-7900

Other support (toll free)

National Indian Residential School Crisis Line 1-866-925-4419

Indian Residential School Client Services

(Health Canada Northern Region) 1-800-464-8106

First Nations in the Yukon (area code 867)

Carcross/Tagish First Nation: 821-4251

Champagne & Aishihik First Nations: 634-4200

Council of Yukon First Nations: 393-9200

Kluane First Nation: 841-4274

Kwanlin Dün Health Centre: 668-7289

Kwanlin Dün Justice: 633-7850

Liard First Nation: 536-5200

Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation: 863-5576

Na-cho Nyak Dün First Nation: 996-2265

Ross River Dena Council: 969-2277

Selkirk First Nation: 537-3331

Ta'an Kwach'an Council: 668-3613

Teslin Tlingit Council: 390-2532

Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation: 993-7100

Vuntut Gwitch'in First Nation: 966-3261

White River First Nation: 862-7802

"The sooner you start creating forgiveness, the sooner you'll start finding freedom." Andy Nieman

"As we move forward there are going to be many more tears. But embrace it, cherish it, as there is nothing to be ashamed of." Chief Robert Joseph

"Our survival is our resistance, the resistance of nations." Terri Brown



THIS IS A KWANLIN DÜN FIRST NATION PUBLICATION

Kwanlin Dün First Nation hosted *UyidYnji Tl'äky* ("let it go now"), a healing gathering and celebration potlatch, in November 2009.

Hundreds of residential school survivors and family members from the Yukon and North BC attended the event. They shared stories, gained knowledge and tools, and supported each other on their healing journey.

And hundreds more gathered for a potlatch to celebrate the ongoing strength and vitality of First Nations culture in the North.

This book shares excerpts of presentations made at *UyidYnji Tl'äky*. It is hoped these words will continue to help people on their healing journey, to help them recognize their own strengths and to "let it go" when they are ready.

