



Welcome Home

A Tahltan celebration of former residential school students and their families

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Published by:



Tahltan Band Council
P.O. Box 46
Telegraph Creek, BC VoJ 2Wo

Written by: All parts except those attributed to speakers at the event, and the participant comments on pages 8-11 and 14, were written by Jennifer Ellis, Engage Strategies.

Design & Layout: Jennifer Ellis, Engage Strategies

Photo Credits: Jody Nishima (p. 2 - Top Left; p. 8 - Background; p. 15 - Centre-bottom; p.16 - 2nd & 3rd from left; p. 19 - 1st on left; p.21 - 2 photos on right side). All other photos by Jennifer Ellis.

Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to all former students of residential schools and family members who have found the courage to start their healing journey and to share their stories with their families and community members.

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

We welcome you all home!

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Introduction

Over many decades in the 1900s, Tahltan children were forced into Canada's residential school system.

Young children from our Nation were made to leave their families and attend schools such as La Jac and Lower Post in BC, the Coudert Residence, Yukon Hall, and Dawson City in the Yukon, and Grouiard in Alberta.

Those who later returned to their families and communities often said they felt like they did not fit in. Their experiences at school, which they usually bottled up inside of them, had a way of separating them from the people they loved. Many were angry at their parents and communities for letting them be taken away; they didn't realize people had no choice.

A number of people never returned at all. Their connection to their families, their communities and their traditional lands had been broken. Sadly, some of our children died in residential school, and many were buried in unknown cemeteries and unmarked graves.

The Tahltan Nation, with the support of the Stikine Wholistic Working Group (SWWG), decided it was time to bring our people back together, to acknowledge and listen to the experiences of

former students and their families, to help families reconnect and forgive each other, and to welcome everyone home.

We knew that this would be an important step for many in their healing journey. It would also be an important step forward for our families, our communities and our nation.

Over 500 people attended the four-day Welcome Home Ceremony and Gathering we hosted in the summer of 2013.

There were many painful and emotional times that were difficult for everyone. And there were also many happy reunions and healing moments.

This booklet doesn't capture the full depth and intensity of what happened, but we hope it will give readers a sense of what an important experience it was for everyone.

We also hope it will help the people who came to the event to remember the strength they felt here and their connection to home.

And for others, we hope it will provide you with a sense of the strength and resilience of the Tahltan people as we move forward together into a future of strong families, communities and culture.

Our Journey Here



Chief Rick McLean

At the lighting of the sacred fire for the event, Rick McLean, Chief of the Tahltan Band Council, welcomed people to the ceremony.

This is quite a journey to be on.

Standing here, the little sprinkles of rain that just fell felt like tears of joy from our ancestors, our brother and sisters—joy to see this event start.

This is a journey that started many moons ago when our little ones were taken from our families, taken from our communities.

This journey, this event, isn't the end of it. But it will help us put closure to all of those hard times that we have had, that our families and communities have suffered. This is very necessary.

We started this journey a few years ago. We have a commitment to help our people on the healing path.

It all started with the apology from the federal government. And out of that came the hearings. And out of that came healing ceremonies.



We went to Lower Post last year, and we started the process there.

And back home at Tṣēdu, we mixed the waters from our rivers to show unity in washing away the pain and we sent a wreath which captured the pain down the river, out to the ocean, to be gone forever. After we heard so many touching stories, we knew this was a huge undertaking.

After Lower Post and Tṣēdu, we then went onto Whitehorse to pack the totem pole.

As we packed and raised that totem pole, we continued this road to healing.

In our communities where our kids were taken from, and our families were disrupted, it's now time to say *welcome home*.

Welcome home to all those people who were taken.

Welcome home to all of those people and support staff that came to help.

Welcome home to our community and to the Tahltan Nation.

Welcome home.



Lighting the Sacred Fire

The Welcome Home Celebration began with the lighting of the sacred fire. Four Elders stood around the fire pit, in each of the four directions. One-by one, they placed tobacco in the fire after it was lit.

Phil Gatensby, one of the fire keepers, spoke about the meaning of the fire.

It is about life, about remembering who we are, about returning.

Like a gesture of gratitude, we will light this fire and keep it going for four days. We will keep it clean.

People can take tobacco, a sacred plant for First Nations, and put their prayers or their intent into the tobacco and put that into the fire.

My prayer is strong, but when someone else joins me in that prayer, it will be twice as strong.

If we all come together in prayer, it produces an incredible amount of energy. When we do this together, we create light.

All of us know someone who can use that light, someone who is struggling out there, having a hard time.

We can direct the light to them and give them help that way.



The Memory Tree



Remembering and giving thanks for the love and support we have received is an important part of healing.

Over four days, in a corner of the gathering, people wrote notes on pieces of paper that were shaped like leaves, or on birch bark.

They expressed their love for family who could not attend or had passed on.

They thanked friends for their support. They sent wishes and prayers to people they cared about.

They then tied these messages of love and gratitude to a small tree.

At the closing of the sacred fire, the tree was placed in the fire. The prayers, wishes and thanks that were attached to its branches were carried off in the smoke to the people they were intended for.

We also burned the tissues people had used to wipe their tears during the gathering. These had been collected in paper bags throughout the event and burning these sent the sorrows on their way.





Coming Back Home

It was a beautiful sunny day as people gathered at the Tahltan River for the main Welcome Home Ceremony.

On one side of the river, former students of residential school and many family members gathered, getting ready to walk across the bridge to Tahltan.

On the other side, people prepared to welcome them back home. Leaders, family and other community members waited with full hearts.

The former students, and the relatives representing former students, crossed the bridge and passed through an arch of juniper and balsam branches. They were sprinkled with river water by Elders of each clan. They were hugged and held.

They were welcomed home.

Welcome Home Song



When they were taken
There was sadness in our hearts
The little voices
We didn't hear anymore
There was a silence
No music in the air
So we drank to ease the pain
In our homes

We had to travel
Oh, so far in the night
And not knowing
Where we're leaving on this flight
We were lonely
For our homes and family
A new home, oh, somewhere
Far away

Now we don't have to
Be afraid anymore
No one to judge us
Or tell us who we are
We're God's children
And we're shining like a star
So little brothers, little sisters
Welcome home!!!

So forgive them
They know now what they've done
And our healing
Will be a journey to the end
And our love
Love will conquer all
So let us follow, oh, God's spirit
Take us home

© RJay (Richard "Rocky" Jackson)
March 5th, 2012





The Feeling of Coming Home

I would just like to say that walking across the Tahltan bridge was very powerful for me.

It's been 49 years since I was sent off to residential school. I came back in 1995. And so much had changed when I came back that I didn't feel I belonged here. And I was told that I was an outsider.

And today, walking across that bridge, coming home for me was a very powerful experience for me. I am home. I am where I was born and raised.

It was emotional and it was powerful. And my family who were on the other side, the people that I work with, were there to welcome me. It was an awesome feeling. I want to thank each and every one of you for being there.

I left home at a very young age. I was 13 years old. I wasn't raised up among my people who are sitting here today. Until I moved back into the area in 1979 when I moved to Dease Lake, that was a time I got to meet my uncles, my aunts, my cousins, my nieces, my nephews. It was such a blessing to come home and see my mom and my brothers and sisters, and my relatives that live here, that were born and raised here.

I really enjoyed these days being here, being part of the circles. It has brought a lot back of memories for me.



You know, coming back, going across that bridge, it was quite an experience. It meant a lot to me to come across that bridge, to let it go. A lot of people say it is difficult but you know, when I looked up in the sky and seen those eagles flying, and they took our spirit and our sorrows and our hurt.

At the end of the day, I felt great. It felt great to be welcomed home and to be joining all my brothers and sisters here in Telegraph. It's been a long journey, but we made it. We can't dwell on it. I know a lot of people have a lot of memories and it is hard to break the cycle. But if you don't you are going to be caught in a rut.

I had a lot of relatives that stood with me. For my friends to come from Ross River, from the Yukon, from all over, it made me feel great. I am not the only one. I am very honoured to see a lot of people come home, to be welcomed home. The feeling that you get, it is awesome.

I know that listening to us survivors opens doors for the rest of you. Please come forward and start your healing journey. Its not only us that needs to heal, it is everyone of us. Let's put that shame back where it belongs, and let's walk together and heal together. Don't let it end here. Let's keep in touch. And heal together. I am not going back drinking because I am up here talking. No I am not, because I have support.

I love everything about you and I love being here. its just so beautiful to be here on my homeland and sharing this with you. I have been carrying this with me for some years. I am leaving it. I am not having any more pain and hurt. I am going to go forward and I am willing to walk with you.





Walking across the bridge was awesome. I had goose bumps. I was crying but they were tears of happiness.

It is such a homecoming to me. I left here in my mom's belly, 62 years ago. It is welcoming here.



This past year, I really reached out to my Elders and so many others and their love and their kind words and their encouragement really pushed me through when I felt like I couldn't go forward any more.

I knew that if I just could push through those last few months, and get back to the homeland, I knew that I'd be stronger than ever. As soon as I get to the Days Ranch, I feel about 20 feet tall when I get there. Between there and 6 mile, I feel like it is heaven. It's heaven on earth when I get back here, with my people, with my cousins, with my Elders. I am so proud to be Tahltan, I am so proud to share this time with you.



The children of a residential school survivor share a different kind of pain than their parents. There are times that I just want to get in my truck and go. And lately that has been what I have been doing.

I knew this was coming up this summer and I have done everything I could possibly do to avoid it. But then I went home as my sister was having her baby. I decided that I was going to stick with this for the whole duration, from beginning to end. Because I feel that I needed this.

When you walked that bridge, it was so powerful. If you could see yourself in action, it was power coming home. It was the missing power, and that is some of the missing things in your life. You came home and you are going to fit those Elders' shoes that left us so long ago.

I truly do believe that when you crossed that bridge, with everyone with you and the power, there was nothing left. That is the way we have to work - together. I can't even express the power I saw over you - nothing is stopping you. You are truly my heroes.

Each of you that talked to me, that stopped and said hello, that shook my hand, that welcomed me after we did the bridge walk, has helped me, and has helped my son, and will help my children back home. You haven't seen the last of me.

You know that thing we went through, the welcome home? Me and my sister we were across the river. When we were coming back to you people, I got that long lost feeling that there was nobody there to meet me.

Again some of the symptoms that we learned to live with, learned to identify with, through residential school, is that there is nobody there for us, nobody we can identify with.

But halfway across the bridge, I started realizing that there was lots of people there, they were Momma's people. And I had to smile. And I seen those people smile.



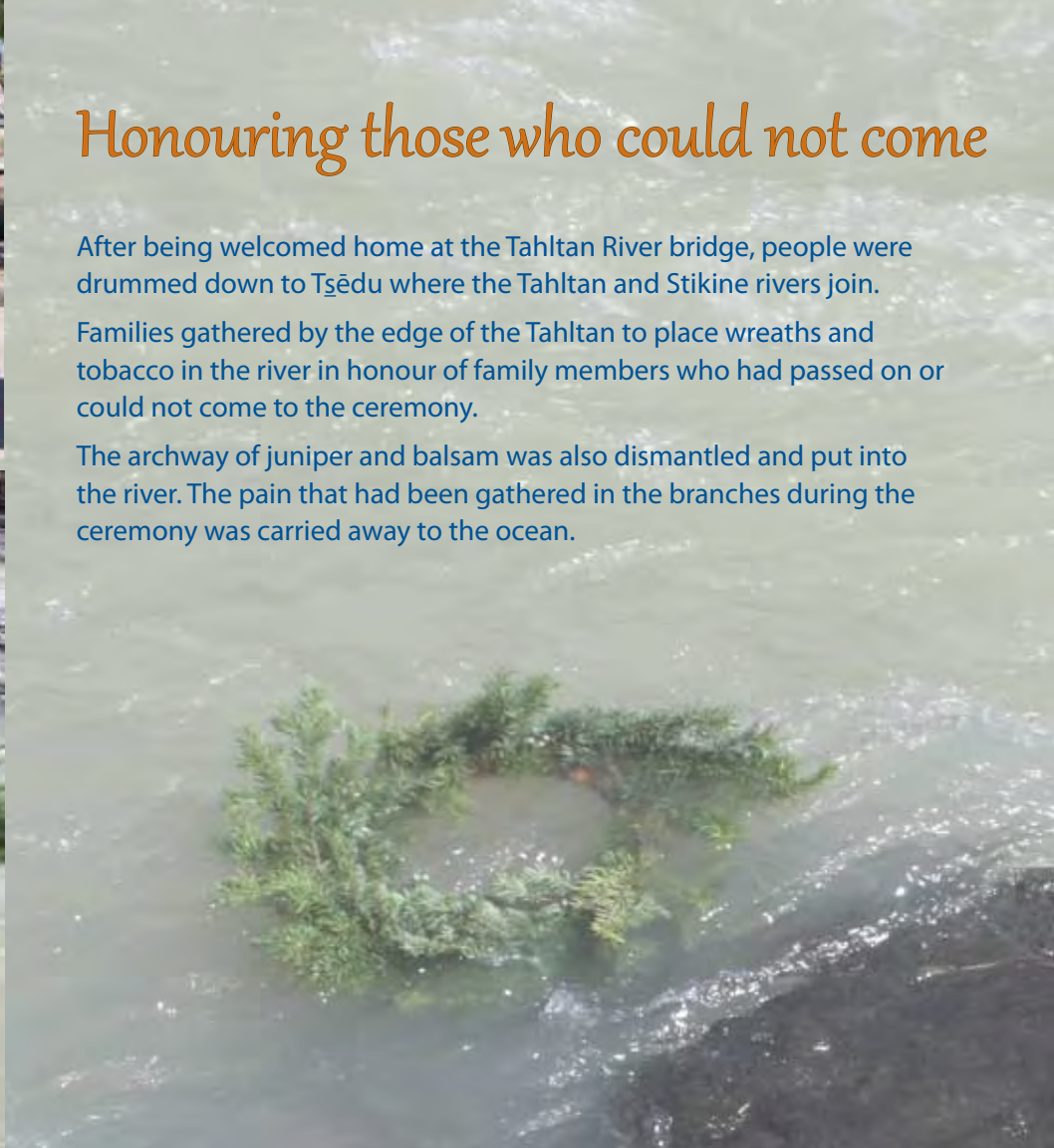


Honouring those who could not come

After being welcomed home at the Tahltan River bridge, people were drummed down to T̓ḡḡdu where the Tahltan and Stikine rivers join.

Families gathered by the edge of the Tahltan to place wreaths and tobacco in the river in honour of family members who had passed on or could not come to the ceremony.

The archway of juniper and balsam was also dismantled and put into the river. The pain that had been gathered in the branches during the ceremony was carried away to the ocean.



Anī: Calling the Spirit Back

Elder Flora Reid of the Wolf Clan led a ceremony to call back the spirits of all the children that were taken from our Nation.

Traditionally, our people believed that the spirits of young children were not firmly attached to their body.

Whenever children played in a strange or exciting place we would call "*anī*" to gather their spirits before leaving the area. If a child got scared, we would *anī* their spirit to come back. *Anī* means 'come' in Tahltan.

First, Flora called upon our ancestors and those who had passed on were to be with us, to support us.

Then, to each of the four directions, she called *anī* three times to call back and welcome home all of the spirits of the children who had been taken from our communities and sent to residential school. People were encouraged to *anī* their own spirits back.

The ceremony was closed with a song, drumming and dancing.



North Boys: The Story of Jimmy & Charlie

On the same day in 1944, Charlie Pete Tashoots (age 6), Jimmy Dennis (age 7) and eight other Tahltan children were taken away from their home and families in Telegraph Creek.

They were taken over 1,000 kilometres by boat and train to Lejac Indian Residential School.

The film, *North Boys: The Story of Jimmy & Charlie*, was shown at the Welcome Home event. It highlighted the many long-lasting impacts of residential schools on children, including the difficulty of returning "home".

After experiencing much abuse, Charlie and Jimmy were returned to their community nine years after they had left. They

soon learned what the school had never told them: their siblings had all been moved and their mothers had both died.



"My mother wasn't there to meet me," Jimmy explains in the film. "My sisters and brothers weren't there to meet me. They didn't know who I was. Holy man, I never felt so alone in my life."

Charlie added, "It don't seem like it was our people. That was the thing that was hard. It is not our people. They don't know you. We are just like other people to them: strangers. In your own hometown! Imagine how we felt."



The 'North Boys' on the Welcome Home Celebration



Charlie Pete Tashoots

It feels good to be in Tahltan country. You don't have to tell me I am welcome, I know I am. It is my home. It's not my fault that I left.

I miss all my people in Telegraph Creek. Half of them I don't know. That's what the residential school did to me. I lost not only my mom, I lost all of my people. People that know me don't know me at all because I never was raised up with these people. People from Fort St. James, from Lower post, the ones I was raised up with, they are my brothers and sisters now.

I'd like to thank you for welcoming me home. I'll tell you one thing, we're going to win. Nobody's going to knock us down there anymore. I was down there long enough. I want to be here.



Jimmy Dennis is welcomed home by Chief McLean.

From the time I was a child I never returned til now.

I look at the people and they are far advanced from the time I seen them. And today I am proud to tell my people, my children, that you belong to one of the second greatest nations in Canada.

So once again I extend my gratitude and my greatest respects to the Tahltan Nation.



We Love You All



Kudookaa Terri Brown

Kukdookaa Terri Brown was a young Tahltan girl when she was taken from her mom and sent to residential school. In part of her talk, she spoke of the impact on everyone, including the children of former students of residential school.

I want to give you intergenerational survivors a message. I want to apologize to you for all the harm we have caused you. Whether or not your parents are able to do it, I want to tell you how very sorry we are. We didn't know any better.

Son, I am sorry, from the bottom of my heart. I wanted to be a better woman, I wanted to be a better mother. I didn't know how to do either. I want to give you my blessing and my love. All of you, we love you. We're proud of you.

Maybe your parents never had the chance to tell you how wonderful and handsome and beautiful you are but I will tell you that tonight because that is part of my job. I want to bring joy into the lives of people because it brings me joy. Thank you all.



If you are struggling out there, our Nation will love you here. You are strong. Your grandparents loved you. In your heart you know who you are. You are Tahltan people. Or Kaska people. Or Tlingit people. Or Nisga'a people. We all suffered and it is time to move on. God bless you all, we love you.

And to the former students of residential school, Terri had these words:

All of you remember that day you went to school. It doesn't matter the therapists you

go to, the healing you go to, the truth is that we cannot go back. The past is in the past. You have a future that can be really great.

All of us have greatness in us. We have something to offer our nation, our children and all of the world I think.

Among people who have suffered so much I haven't seen so many smiles in a long time.

We have a gift that we share among each other, we have a way of cheering each other up even in the darkest moments and the most difficult situations.

I just hope people will take this experience and remember it and keep it in your heart. When you are not feeling so good, think about some of the songs, some of the people you met here.



We All Have Power



Phil Gatensby

Phil Gatensby, a Tlingit from the Yukon, spoke of his personal history and the anger he used to have inside him. But at one point, he started to recognize he needed to gather power to be the human being he wanted to be.

We are all born with power; we've had it the whole time. Somehow we've been tricked into thinking we don't have power. So we spend our life looking for it.

We do it through violence or we do it through sex. Or we do it through alcohol or drugs or position or money. We're always looking for it.

But I realized I was born with power. I've always had power.

Once I was in a line in Extra Foods and I was 3-4 people back. I watched the cashier and she was not friendly. She was even rude. I wondered why she was even working with people as a cashier.

And the more that I looked at her, I saw that what I was looking at wasn't her at all. It was probably all the garbage that people gave her all day long, all the hard times, all the flak that they gave her.

As soon as I saw that and looked past that, I seen this girl who was the same as me, who wanted to be loved, who wanted everything the same as like me. I realized this woman was like my sister.



I looked past her Velcro outfit and all the doo-doo stuck to it all day long. When I got up to her in the line she treated me nicely, she was kind. As I was leaving, she said "Hey, have a nice day."

As I walked away I wondered if I just did that? Did I just change her because of the way I saw her?

And I thought that was power. What if I could change the world by the way I see it? What if I could change myself by the way I see myself?

And I think about living in a community where we hold ourselves down by the way we see ourselves, and by the way we see each other.

Each one of us is here because something really powerful is going on and we are part of it. We are part of changing who we are. We are part of becoming who we are, who our ancestors left a trail for us to walk.

I often call what I do "cleaning up my grandmother's trail" because, honest to goodness, I shit all over her trail.

She taught me things but I didn't pay attention because I didn't know. But now I actually get it and I am trying to clean that trail now.

I want my son to walk that trail. I want my little girl to walk in that trail and I don't want her to step in my stuff. I want it to be good and clean for them. I want to leave a better world for them.



You Have What It Takes



Andy Nieman

Andy Nieman, a former student at Lower Post, spoke about how we all have what it takes to be happy. He also spoke about the value of forgiveness.

Somehow we have it in our minds that "If only I had a million dollars, things would be great. I'd be happy!"

Or "If only I had a huge house, with lots of land, and many cars, I'd be happy!"

Or "If only I could have any man or any woman I wanted, I'd be happy!"

Yet happiness is not found in all of these things.

Abraham Lincoln said, "I suppose a person is about as happy as they make their mind up to be."

Happiness is such a simple thing—when we discover where it is found!

When we have suffered childhood abuse, happiness can become something that seems out of sight. And we believe it is out of reach. And unattainable. Or "for someone else but not for me!"

But I am here today to tell you that you have what it takes to be happy, no matter what kind of abuse you suffered! Because the truth is the most damaged heart can mend.



Let me speak briefly on forgiveness!
Forgiveness is one of the most powerful
healing activities we can engage in! But it's
not the easiest!

You know why it's so hard for some people
to forgive? Because they don't truly
understand what forgiveness is!

Forgiveness is not letting the other person
"off the hook." It's not saying "I love you and
therefore I forgive you."

It is not saying "Well, I forgive you because
I have to!"

And it is definitely not "If you give me
some money I'll forgive you."

In fact, true forgiveness does not involve
the other person (unless you want it to).

You can forgive the one who harmed you
without that person even being anywhere
near you.

Here is what real forgiveness is.
Forgiveness—real forgiveness—is all
about you! It is not about the offender!

Real forgiveness is all about you because
it is about your decency. It is about your

dignity, your self-respect, your honour and
your moving on!

Forgiveness does not benefit the abuser/
offender or the other person. Because they
still carry the burden of guilt. Forgiveness
benefits you!

And at the beginning it is only you who
benefits. Then from you, the benefits
spread to others including those closest to
you, your loved ones, and your community.

The one who forgives is the one who goes
free!



Getting on the Healing Path



David Rattray

David Rattray, a Tahltan Elder and the MC for the gathering, shared a story about his healing journey.

There are many different ways of healing.

Part of my journey is that I hated who I was. I couldn't stand me. And that was a really difficult place to be.

I'd look at who I was and would think "you're disgusting." I had to overcome that.

I am at a place now where I love who I am, most of the time. But not all of it.

It is a journey.

And I want to share part of my healing journey.

I was doing workshops once and I stopped in Dease Lake.

I decided to go snowshoeing up at Gnat Pass by myself. My heart was really heavy.

But I stepped on this buck brush and I looked down. And I thought "I belong here. I am just here to cleanse. I am just here to make peace with myself."

And I felt this energy moving up my legs. When it hit my stomach, the pain—everything—went away.



It went up my side and out the top of my head. I couldn't separate myself from anything. I was completely connected to the world as I snowshoed: the snow, the sun shining on it, the laden trees. Everything. I was a part of it.

I understand now when our Elders say we don't own the land, the land owns us.

I was filled with so much peace that I snowshoed for six hours, in that much peace.

I did *not* get there overnight. It was a heck of a journey from the time that I was suicidal—when I wanted to drive my motorcycle to kill myself—to that peaceful place. There was a whole bunch of steps.

And it is awesome to me because I have been following the journeys of others. And it is exciting when I see a person turning down that healing path—so exciting.

And that is why we have to keep doing things like this.

If we can keep working together, we can move ahead, we can heal.

As a counsellor, I have found most healing journeys—when you are serious—take three to five years.

When you roll up your sleeves and say, "Enough is enough. I am getting on this healing journey. I am going to clean up my act," it takes 3 to 5 years.

After that you look back, and the world is much better.



Revitalizing our Language and Culture



Left to right: Odelia Dennis; HuYanī Dene (Sonia Dennis); Ło'oks (Ryan Dennis); ChāChā (Verna Vance); Ishkādī (Reginald Dennis); Hos tēlmā. (Pauline Hawkins).

The Tahltan Language Revitalization Project is working on a number of projects to revitalize our language. In their presentation, the project team spoke about the importance of language and culture in their lives.

To honour our Tahltan ancestors, and for the benefit of our current and future generations, we need to carry on the traditional way of living. We need to learn our songs, our dances, our art, our history and our own Tahltan language.

This is why it is important for us to come together to work as a Nation, to save our traditional way of living.

With no language, we have no traditions. With no traditions we have no culture.



The team shared strategies that help people learn: positive learning; good role models; and demonstration and observation.

We were fortunate to have that type of teaching in our lives. An unfortunate generation is the residential school survivors who missed out on being taught through love.

The survivors were taught to be ashamed of who they are. It began with a separation of family and community, then with being disciplined for speaking their language

and called horrible names because of it.

When they returned to their communities, they returned scarred and shamed. Many returned not knowing how to fit in with their family and community.

Therefore, they were angry and hurt. Some blamed their parents for allowing them to be taken. But it wasn't until later that they learned their parents had no choice.

However, there were many families that were waiting to embrace them with love and patience. To be embraced with love

and patience is to be taken under the wing and taught what it means to be Tahltan.

This support is not only needed for survivors, but for the second and third generations as well. We, as a whole, can overcome this feeling of shame of who we are. We can start healing through personal awareness of family connections, cultural awareness and our language....

Let's all strive to teach lovingly, gently, and be good role models for the future generations.



Raising the Village



Carol Quock (speaking)

Carol Quock, with help from the Stikine Wholistic Working Group, shared a "Tahltan Power Point", a hands on presentation about the Tahltan Nation's traditional ways and our future path. She spoke of our strong connection to the land and animals, and the importance of things like traditional medicines, art, music and ceremonies.

Carol noted our people used to have clear and connected roles: Elders, warriors, parents, aunts and uncles. "We were all connected, like a woven snowshoe." And at the centre of our villages were our children.

The children were the purpose of the community, the heart of the Nation. The children were the gifts from the Creator. Care and education of children were considered a sacred and valued responsibility.

Children were considered the purest of spirit and we based our interaction with them accordingly... Traditionally our children had a strong sense of belonging, rich with culture and pride.

In this type of society, "family" signified not only parents and children, but a broad network of



grandparents, uncles and aunts, a circle of family members.

Each of these family members had a role and responsibility to care and educate the child. Everyone was expected to contribute to the general welfare of the family.

The removal of the children from our families and culture had damaging and traumatic effects upon our people, effects that are still apparent today.

When they took our children they took our heart! The mothers, grandmothers, aunts, warriors and the children whom were lucky enough to be left behind had no purpose.

The system collapsed, but they didn't destroy us—we are back!

We will raise our village again, the way we see fit!

Our people are resilient and we are working to overcome the traumatic

experiences and working toward a healthy, holistic future.

We can change our future when we put the children back in the centre of our communities; creating wonderful nurturing environments that create positive pathways.

Carol thanked Jan Derrick, a Mohawk woman, for first demonstrating this hands on approach to sharing a story.



Walking a New Path Together



Annita McPhee

Annita McPhee, President of the Tahltan Central Council, reflected on her excitement about the new healing energy created at the Welcome Home Celebration.

I raise my hands to all the survivors and people that attended residential school. I raise my hands to your bravery, your courage, your strength.

Over the last few days we have learned an important part of our history, about who we are and where our people have been, about the road you have walked.

And it has been a very painful journey. And we acknowledge where you have been.

I have learned so much it is beyond words.

All of the stories of each and everyone who shared their stories was like connecting the dots. Because there were a lot of pieces missing. When you started hearing the history, we were able to put it together—who families were and what happened.

At the same time I felt this sense of healing in this room and the energy that is here.

This good feeling we have is going to keep going! And that I am excited about. I am excited that we get to walk together on a new path, on a new journey.



Taking Responsibility



Chief Rick McLean

Chief Rick McLean shared thoughts about how we are healing.

We have shown great resilience.

We have taken back our traditions. That is the key to success.

We have been told by Western society about how to fix our problems. They came and took our children through Ministry of Children and Families.

But that has all changed now as we are taking ownership, we are taking responsibility for those actions.

We are taking responsibility for families again. And that is the hope that I see.

The solutions lie in our community.

The power of moving ahead has come back with our language, our culture.

Our healing is in the land.

Our healing is in our language.

Our healing is in our culture, our dance.



Releasing our Ancestors



People gathered in a large circle around the sacred fire on the last day of the event.

Phil Gatensby reminded people about the importance and role of the sacred fire.

People came to the fire, they shared with one another, they gathered strength from one another.

When we started this fire we called in the ancestors. We said to them we are trying to do something good with our lives, we are trying to

remember who we are, we are trying to gather the strength to come back home. And we asked if they could come here and help us.

And there is no question that they are here. They have been helping us the whole time.

And now we are going to release them. We are going to let them go back.

We've already set a plate out into the land, to feed them. We are going to put some tobacco in the fire, to send with them all the prayers that have gone in here.



Many many people have come here and prayed over this time and it is a powerful thing that is going to stay here in this land. It has permeated here. It is in the land. It is in the mountains now.

They heard us sing. They heard us speak. They heard our hearts beat. They heard us laugh. They heard us cry.

I want to just say how grateful we are for the help that we got here, for the blessings, for the strength, for the renewal.

This isn't the end of something. This is the continuation of something and we'll continue to grow strong.

We ask the Great Spirit to bless each one here.

We also release the grandfathers and grandmothers, the ancestors that have come here today. We ask them now to go back to where they come from.

The helpers of the Great Spirit, we release them.

We ask that they go back and we give them thanks.

As we leave here, we all carry a piece of that light, of that spark from that fire, in our hearts.



Filling the Drum for the Future

Near the end of the Gathering, participants formed two circles. Former students of residential schools were in the centre circle, surrounded on the outside by their family, friends and supporters.

People linked hands. One-by-one, they symbolically passed words around the circle, words that represented how they were feeling about their experience at the gathering.

After the words had been shared in both circles, they were symbolically gathered and placed in a drum made by HuYant Dene (Sonia Dennis).



The drum was then presented to Richard (Rocky) Jackson and the Stikine Wholistic Working Group. They were asked to hold onto the beauty and energy placed in the drum until we could come back together again.

Everyone was encouraged to take the goodness they had passed around the circle into their hearts. People were encouraged to spread the goodness around to someone else, to help others to get stronger, to help us all to get more healthy, and to help our children have a cleaner and better walk in life.

Some of the words heard in the circle:

Forgiveness
Love
Acceptance
Freedom
Relationships
Healing
Hope
Connection
Honour
Joy
Unity

Friends
Courage
Family
Faith
Truth
Passion
Strength
Freedom
Gratitude
Respect
Pride



It's Up to Me



Today I have a choice,
To shout out loud or still my voice,
To hold a grudge or let it go,
To keep my love or let it flow,
Today I have a choice.

Today, I'm free to choose,
To share some gossip or share good news,
I can heal a heart or leave a bruise,
I can have a coffee and leave the booze
It's up to me, I'm free to choose.

Today it's up to me,
To be as happy as can be,
To leave the past where it should be,
To share my voice let pain go free
I'm free to choose, it's up to me.

I'll make my choice to share my voice,
And I will choose to share good news,
I know God's love each day is new,
What love I have I'll share with you,
And all I do, I'll do freely,
Because today...it's up to me!

Andy Nieman

Meduh!

The Tahltan Nation would like to say a big Meduh (Thank-you) to everyone who helped make this event such a great success. In particular, we'd like to acknowledge:

The Participants

All of the former students and their family members who participated and shared their stories.

Our Leaders

Chief Rick McLean (Tahltan Band Council), Chief Marie Quock (Iskut Band Council), Annita McPhee (President, Tahltan Central Council) and all of the council members and Central Council board members.

Welcome Home Steering Committee

Nancy Norby-Quock, Geraldine Quock, Shana Dennis, Rocky Jackson, Christine Ball, Connie Nole, Nancy McGhee, Willie Bob, Annabelle Nole.

Event Organizers

Jeanie Dendys
Tina VanMierlo

Stikine Wholistic Working Group (Tahltan members)

Ramona Quock, Carol Quock, Nancy Norby-Quock, Geraldine Quock, Shana Dennis, Rocky Jackson, Christine Ball, Connie Nole, Nancy McGhee, Willie Bob, Annabelle Nole.

And a big Meduh to the many, many other people who contributed their time, stories, music, skills, support, and love. Together we made this a very special event to remember on our journey together.

**“When everybody leave here, you
leave Telegraph Creek with a smile
on your face, and you come back
with a smile. We need that.”**

AUGUST BROWN

Over many decades in the 1900s, Tahltan children were forced into the residential school system.

Many who later returned to their families and communities said they never felt like they belonged.

Many never returned at all. Their connection to their families, their communities and their traditional lands had been broken.

The Tahltan Nation wanted to bring our people back together. We wanted to acknowledge and listen to the experiences of former students and their families, and to truly welcome everyone home.

Over 500 people came to the *Welcome Home Celebration and Gathering* we hosted in the summer of 2013.

We hope this booklet about the event will remind the people who attended of the strength and connection they felt as they continue on their healing journey.

For others, we hope it will provide you with a sense of the resilience and strength of the Tahltan people as we move forward together into a future of strong families, communities and culture.



Tahltan Band Council