

About the Material

The material presented here was compiled predominately from interviews done with Gitxaala community members in June 2006. However, some supplemental material was taken from early interviews done by other UBC researchers. The materials presented are personal accounts that have been shared for educational purposes. This work has been produced with the intention of having it remain in the community for the benefit of Gitxaala community members. No part of this work can be reproduced or sold without permission. The stories and personal accounts provided for this document are valuable to the people who have shared them, and should thus be shown respect.

Acknowledgements

I want to begin by first acknowledging the help and support of Matthew Hill, Rufus Innes, Alberta Jackson, Martha Lewis, and Agnes Shaw; Sam Lewis who worked tirelessly along with me; the chief and council, and the staff at the Gitxaala Band Office for lending their support. I would also like to acknowledge those members of the community at large who made me feel welcome while I stayed in your community, and finally to my instructors Drs. Charles Menzies and Caroline Butler.

Selected Profiles of Gitxaala Elders and Community Leaders

About the Project

The following project presents profiles of five Gitxaala elders and community leaders. The purpose of this document is to act as an educational resource for the community. The hope is that the stories and experiences of the people presented here will be of value for community members in understanding their past as they move into the future.

The project was part of the UBC Department of Anthropology's Ethnographic Fieldschool. In June 2006 six UBC graduate students spent the month of June conducting research in Prince Rupert and Gitxaala. The student projects included:

- Socio-economic impacts of the implementation of fisheries quotas
- An examination of the introduction of the Forest Range Agreements in the industry.
- The environmental movement in Prince Rupert
- Overview of services available for aboriginal women in Prince Rupert
- Profiles of First Nations families negotiating current economic transitions
- Selected Profiles of Gitxaala elders and community leaders

This is the written report of the final project in the list of student projects.

The Author



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The Translator



Columbia.

Sam Lewis worked as the translator for this project. He is a proud Gitxaala community member. Sam has been actively involved in several anthropology projects in the community in collaboration with the University of British

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Matthew Hill



Matthew Hill has dedicated much of his life to working for the betterment of Gitxaala¹. He is proud of all the hard work he has put into the community and he hopes to continue to contribute as much as he can. Matthew knows a great deal about the history of Gitxaala. For this project Matthew has recounted some of his memories of growing up in the community and a story about a young man's encounter with sea lions.

Learning through doing

Matthew remembers that from a very young age he was taught how to live by working along side his family members. He remembers having to work very hard growing up. For instance, his father would call him down to the beach to help back wood. The men would carry big blocks of wood raised high up on their shoulders. Although he could only carry a small amount, he still helped. By carrying what little he could. The older people taught the young by including them in the work that needed to be done. The young people contributed what they were capable of doing. This was the way that children learned.

When he became a little bit older his father began taking him out. They would row out together early in the morning to trap minx, otter, and beavers. They would usually be gone all day, even in the winter when it was cold. They would often return home very late. It was long and hard work. He and his father would also gather cockles and

^{1 1} The information in this document is based on an interview done with Matthew Hill on June 18, 2006.

mussels together. They would catch eels under rocks to use in the traps to catch minx. Together they would gather herring eggs, and seaweed too. He remembers that all the families would work together drying food when it came in.

Making ends meet

In those days the people used whatever money they had to buy the supplies they needed. There was no welfare in those days. People had much less money to purchase goods than they do today. With what little they had they would buy the things they really needed. They would save their money to buy bullets for hunting, supplies for trapping, and gas for the lights. Every year they would have to save up to get through the winter.

People relied on eating the foods they caught far more than they do today. They would use some money to buy vegetables, but most of what they ate came from what they caught themselves. They ate many things that most people don't eat anymore. They ate such things as sea lion, fur seal, beaver, porcupine, mountain goat, and lots of things from the sea.

Material improvements to the village

As Matthew grew up he became chief council of the community. He was very young when he first took on this role. At that time the village only had lights for a short time. Gradually the conditions started to improve. Eventually they had lights for twenty four hours a day.

Soon after that fridges, stoves, televisions, and stereos began to arrive. A new generator was needed to power all of the new electronic devices. The plumbing started to change. Running water came into the homes.

People no longer had to go outside to get buckets of water. As chief council it was important for Matthew to get plumbing into the homes.

With running water came indoor toilets. There were only outhouses before this. Then people started to get washers and dryers. Things really started looking up for the community.

Yet there were some consequences to all the changes too. It has become very expensive to run everything. Matthew feels that in some ways the people have gotten lazier because the machines can do so much of the work that used to be done by hand. He feels the work ethic has suffered. The stereo, radio, and television have replaced storytelling too. While the material improvements have benefited the community, Matthew feels that they have also lost some positive qualities because of the changes.

The Story about the Sea Lions

This is a story about three young men that my grandfather told me about. The youngest of the three was named *Wha Hayeh*². *Wha Hayeh* was a good person because everything that he did, he did for other

² Sm'algyax words will appear in italics since they are written phonetically as I heard them. I used the available dictionaries for identifying some of the common words. However, I am not trained to write the words according to any of the standardized systems. Therefore the rendering of the words that I could not find any reference to is an approximation.

people. He was always called upon whenever anyone needed things to be done. Because he was unselfish his brothers were jealous of him. So one day the three brothers went out together into the ocean off the west coast of Banks Island to some rocks where you can find sea lions. Now, *Wha Hayeh* didn't know it, but his brothers had a plan to get rid of their younger brother. When they reached the rocks, and *Wha Hayeh* got out of the boat, his brothers turned the boat around and left him there on the rocks. When the brothers got back to the community they told everyone that they didn't know what had happened to their younger brother.

When *Wha Hayeh* realized what his brothers had done he decided to lay down and wait for members of the community to come and save him. So he found a place to lay down where the wind would not hit him. As he lay there for awhile, he felt someone poke him on the side. He heard a little voice say, "come on in, come on in, the sea lions are inviting you. Come on in, come on in, the sea lions are inviting you." He got up and looked around, but he didn't see anyone. He heard the voice, and he felt that somebody had poked him, but nobody was around. So, he laid back down again and went to sleep. While he drifted off to sleep again, again somebody poked him on the side, and he heard this little voice say, "come on in, come on in, come into the house of the sea lions." Yet still, he didn't see anyone. So, he figured that this time he would pretend to sleep and he put his hand over his eyes, but he was peaking out through

his fingers, and waited listening to what was going on. That is when he saw it. On top of the rocks there were little grass patches, and all of a sudden he saw the grass patch open up, it was a little door, and a little rat came running out. That little rat poked him on the side and said to him, “come on in, come on in, you are invited to the house of the sea lions. Come on in, come on in, you are invited to the house of the sea lions, come on in.” Years ago, creatures used little rats as their messengers. This rat was a messenger sent by the sea lions.

So when he heard this message from the rat that he had been invited to the house of the sea lions, he got up, went over to the grass patch where the little door was, and he went in. As we walked down he heard a big voice say “Come Forth!” The voice was like a human being, but it also sounded just like how sea lions sound when they are out on the rocks. The man realized that these were the ghosts of the sea lions that had been hurt and died as a result of injuries in the past. So he walked to the front where the voice was coming from. When he got there, they fed him well. He thought that he was there with the sea lions for a few days, but actually he was there for years. Because *Wha Hayeh* was gone for so long his wife went up into the hills to mourn and cry for her husband.

Finally the sea lions asked him, “Do you want to go home?” And he said, “yes, I want to go home.” And the sea lions said to him, “you’ll have to wait until the wind blows in the right direction, and we can send you

home.” Then the sea lions said, “We’ll return you, we’ll return you.” But, the sea lions warned him “don’t tell them what you ate in the house of the sea lions.” The sea lions said to him, “whatever they say, do not tell them anything.”

The sea lions said to him “we are going to build you a raft and then send you home. The raft was made out of the kidneys of the sea lions. When you drift across you will first hit some rocks. When you hit the rocks, don’t go out, don’t open the door, stay where you are. When the raft floats further along, you are going to feel the difference when you reach a sandy beach. When you feel the difference, then open the door and get out. When you get off the raft, fill it up with air again and turn the raft around. The wind will shift back around and return the raft to us.” That is exactly what happened when he got into the raft. The raft drifted ashore. He hit the rocks first but he didn’t open the door. The raft continued to drift along until it hit the sandy beach. He felt the difference, and he knew he was there. He opened the door and got off the raft. He followed all the instruction he was told. He put air back in the raft. The winds changed directions. He pointed the raft back towards where the sea lions were and it drifted back. He followed the instructions he was given, and returned the raft. He watched it to make sure it was going back. When it got lost in the distance he turned around and went up to the hills.

The beach was around *Katoonsta* area. *Wha Hayeh* headed up towards the bushes, but as he walked he heard someone crying. It was his wife. He went around the back way into the bush so the people wouldn't see him. When he came upon her, he told her, "don't stop, don't stop." His wife didn't stop crying, but the tone changed in her voice. When the tone changed, the elders of that community knew something was wrong. The elders knew it, the minute the tone changed in her voice when she was crying. "He's back," they said, "he's back". *Wha Hayeh* said to his wife "okay, go back home, its enough for now, go back home." And she returned home. When she arrived the people of that little community asked her "what's wrong?", but she didn't reply, she didn't answer. "What's wrong?" they said, but again she didn't reply. *Wha Heyeh's* wife continued to go up into the hills to cry and mourn her husband, but her tone was different, all different, and the people heard it and it was not the same. Then she started bringing food up for him to eat. This continued for awhile, and the people came to say, "she's okay, she's okay." The people of the community said to her, "bring him home, bring him home."

While *Wha Hayeh* was living in the woods, he carved three little black fish out of sticks. He gave names to all three of those little whales. He walked down from the woods, and went to a stream. He took those little whales that he had made and walked out into the middle of the stream and then he breathed air into each one of these little whales that

he had carved. He breathed air into them and put them into the water. After doing this the little whales swam away out past the point where all the people lived. This is what *Wha Hayeh* used to give the people the message of what his brothers had done to him. The people of the community understood. So *Wha Hayeh* went home. When he returned, his brothers finally admitted that they had tried to kill their younger brother.

Everyone was so happy to have *Wha Hayeh* back. Everyone sat down at the dinner table to eat together. A little child approached him and asked “what did you eat in the house of the sea lions?” He said to this little child, “no, no, you are not supposed to ask questions, no.” After awhile, again the little boy returned to him and asked “what did you eat in the house of the sea lions?” He again said “no, no you are not supposed to ask questions.” All the people were so happy to be back together. And again, this little boy ran up to him and asked the same thing. But this time *Wha Hayeh* forgot that the sea lions had told him that he was not supposed to tell anyone what he had eaten in the house of the sea lions. He just turned around and said, “we had red snapper, we had red snapper.” As soon as he said this, he just collapsed right there on the spot. Sticking out of his throat were red snapper bones.

The reason why the sea lions told him, “don’t tell them what you ate, don’t tell them anything” was because he was among creatures of

the sea at that time This story is about jealousy, and showing respect to everything you do.



Rufus Innes



Growing up in Gitxaala

Rufus Innes³ grew up in Gitxaala and spent much of his time as a small boy with his father setting traps, hunting and fishing. He spent a great deal of time on Pitt Island, in a place known as Captain's Cove. With what they caught, they would share with others in the community.

Rufus remembers how telling stories was a great thing for the people of Gitxaala. He says that it was a very important practice that was taken very seriously. Because Gitxaala is such an old community there is a rich amount of stories connected to the people, the lands, and the sea. He says that the other communities are aware of how long Gitxaala has been in existence through these stories. It is widely acknowledged, and important for Rufus that people recognize that Gitxaala has been around since "time immemorial." He points out that one chief always addresses the community as "mighty Gitxaala". This chief does this because he is aware of the long history of power and strength that the community holds.

Rufus feels that the stories held in the community are very important for issues of land claims today in providing proof as to the inheritance and rights to areas. He is afraid that if the people in Gitxaala today don't share the stories and pay attention to the rights of inheritance to the areas that their ancestors used, then Gitxaala will lose what is rightfully theirs.

³ The following profile is based upon an interview conducted with Rufus Innes on June 23, 2006.

Rufus is very concerned about the proper use of stories and names. He says that today there are people from other communities outside of Gitxaala that have taken names and the stories associated with those names without permission. He feels that this is a great injustice to the people of Gitxaala. He has been reluctant to share the stories that he knows with anyone because he is fearful that the stories will be taken away by people who do not have the rights to those stories. However, he also knows that it is important for the elders in Gitxaala to tell their stories so that everyone knows who these stories rightfully belong to. That is why he is sharing these stories with us.

Training for War on Kennedy Island

Rufus explains that in the past, it was on Kennedy Island where the men trained to prepare themselves for war. Through the winter they'd train to be strong. There is a fast running river on the island. It was into this river where the men would step in and swim against the tide. In this way it would prepare their bodies by making them strong. When the young men were tired and could no longer swim they would try to climb back up to the shore line. But the young men would be met by the leaders who would push them back down into the freezing water saying, "you are not done yet!" This was necessary to make them strong. Further into their training, after they came out of the water their wet skin would be hit by pine tree branches to toughen them. They say the

men became so strong in this process that their arms were as hard as boards.

Kennedy Island was a place completely inhabited by Gitxaala. However, they used to pull the canoes way up into the bush so if you passed by on the outside you would never see a canoe on the beach. It would fool the enemy if they came around. They had a watchman on a mountain on Kennedy Island. From his position you could see all around. You could see all the way to the Skeena, the Nass, to Lach Klan, and to any pass where the Haida came through. The watchman used smoke signals to warn the people that outsiders were approaching. If this happened, the warriors would get ready.

When our Holy Man met God

Captain's Cove is a very important place in the history of Gitxaala. It was in this place where our holy man met God. This holy man was also a chief. When he encountered God, he asked Him, "how can I know you are our God?" So all of a sudden there was a huge noise and a great flash of light. Lightning struck a great big tree nearby and split it right in half. The tree is still standing there today.

A Story about the White Bear in Captain's Cove

The place called "Captain's Cove," on Pitt Island is of great importance to Gitxaala. There is a yellow tree there, it is a strange tree.

If you go out in the water you can see it up in the mountain, but if you go to the shore, you could never find it by foot. That's where my chief met up with a grizzly bear, a white grizzly. The real name in Ts'msyen for white bears is *Mashala*. It's not *Mok Shamal*. *Mashala*, that's the real name for the white bear.

There are two lakes there in Captain's cove with one little one on top. The chief and some hunters went looking for deer. While they were out they didn't see very many deer. So, they decided to go up the mountain further to see if there were any goats. On the way up when they were getting close to the lake, they started hearing a strange noise. It sounded like somebody singing. When they got a little closer the chief looked amongst the trees. There was a big animal there, but something was strange, it had no fur. It was a great big bear, and it had taken all his fur off, and he had pilled it up, and he was giving himself a bath.

Now the chief started thinking that he should go and take that fur. So he quietly went over and took it without the bear knowing. The next day the chief went back up to where he had taken the fur to see if the bear was still there. He was. On the second day, the chief went back up to see if the bear was still there. He was. On the third day, the chief went back to see if the bear was still there. He was. However, the bear finally knew that the chief was watching him. In a great big voice he yelled out, "WHAT DO YOU WANT!" three times.

So the chief said, “What are you doing?” The bear told him that he had been washing himself, cleansing both his insides and his outsides. It came to the chief’s mind that you’ll never see a sickly bear, even to this day. You’ll never see one. The chief became interested. He asked the bear “what do you use to cleanse yourself?” So the bear started naming off all of the trees and the little things that you can pick up off the ground that he used. Among the things that the bear named were very strong medicines. After the chief received all of the information as to why bears are so healthy, he returned the fur to the bear. In doing that he felt so free going back home. So that is why one of the chiefs in Laxsgyiik was himself named *Mashala*. All our totem poles have bears on the bottom. It’s our strength. It is where our family strength comes from. It is where all our information comes from.

The Black Fish

The old people had a way of talking to the black fish. One day in the past the black fish came to Gitxaala. They told the chief to get ready because when the tide went down and reached a certain point the black fish would return to take the chief away. So the people of the community started a big celebration in the longhouses before the chief was taken away. Everyone took turns hugging the chief in the longhouse and saying goodbye. As the time approached, and the tide went down, the whole community walked to the harbor with the chief. The time came.

Hundreds of black fish were there lined right up in the harbor. They say you could hear them, there was so many of them.

When the time came for him to go down, the chief grabbed the water just like it was a blanket, lifted it up and went under it and disappeared. A few minutes later the community heard the chief yell back to them, he was riding on top of a black fish. They took the chief down to the bottom of the ocean and showed him around to places that looked like villages. They also showed him a great big coral reef as far as the eye could see. There were so many fish down there. The black fish showed the chief what they should eat from the ocean, and what they should not eat.

When it was time to bring him back, they brought him back to the village. But when the chief started walking up towards the village the people noticed that his skin was full of barnacles. The chief had been underwater with the black fish for so many years that barnacles had grown all over his skin. So the people got some gum from a spruce tree and used it on the chief to remove the barnacles. After awhile he started to look like himself again.



Alberta Jackson

On growing up in Gitxaala

When Alberta was growing up one of the things she used to do was go out with her grandmother in a row boat to get food. She says that in those days they did not need speedboats to get around. Her and her grandmother never needed a speedboat to go out and collect the foods that they ate. She says that they would row far up the inlet to get seafood and to get to their garden. Their garden was located on another island. In it they planted potatoes, carrots, and turnips. She remembers when she was young that she would row along with her mother and her grandmother to such places as Port Essington to work in the canneries in the summer, to other places to pick berries, and around Banks Island in the fall to get seafood. Alberta explains that her grandmother and mother would “they tell me what to do and how to get it, and where to get it.” That is how she learned to get things like herring eggs. She remembers that her grandmother would know if they were in a good place or whether they would have to go some place else.

She always stayed by her grandmother’s side. That was the way she learned. When her grandmother went to pick medicine, she would show Alberta what to get and what not to pick. She also learned how to store and preserve their own food. Today people use freezers to preserve their food. However, in the past they used to dry their food so that it kept for a very long time. Alberta says that she has forgotten many of

the ways that her grandmother used to keep food for so long since she uses the freezer herself nowadays. Nevertheless, she is trying to teach her own children how to do things in the way she used to learn.

After she married, Alberta often worked with her husband getting the kinds of food they needed to support their family. Sometimes she went out fishing with her husband. Her family always worked together. When she came home the kids would help with all the stuff that she had picked. This was the way the kids could help her, but it was also the way that they learned.

Today Alberta can see that there are many young members of the community that do not know to do common tasks from the past, like preparing a fish, for instance. Yet, she doesn't blame those young people because they were never taught how to do so. She worries that the way she learned from the women in her family is happening less and less these days. She believes that the way she was taught by spending time with her grandmother and mother, working along side them, and learning by doing is a powerful way to pass on special knowledge and skills that community members hold. Even today, gradually she continues to remember lessons she was taught by her grandmother when she was very small. So, she is trying to teach her kids what she had learned.

There is great power in sharing knowledge. For example, Alberta says that recently many of the older people gathered at the band office to

discuss traditional medicines. Some of the older people took all kinds of leaves from different plants and spread them out all over the table explaining what each one was and what they were used for. What was surprising to Alberta was that some of the people that were older than her did not know what some of leaves were used for. She knew what they were, but they did not. Alberta explains that the reason she knew about medicines is because “I was taught when I was small what they all are, and what they are all for.” Therefore, it is not based simply on whether someone is old or young as to whether they have specialized knowledge, but rather if they were taught or not.

Alberta sees the most important thing for the young members of her community today is to learn. She sees it as their best chance at surviving well. She thinks that if they want to do something, but they do not know how to do it, then they should come and talk to the elders. The elders will give them instruction.

One of the major changes that Alberta has seen in the community is a shift away from people relying on the food they gather and catch themselves to a dependence on the food they buy in the stores. Before the welfare program was implemented people didn't go to town to buy things like carrots since they could grow them out here. People used to be able to get everything they needed by what they caught themselves. Whatever they couldn't get themselves they would trade for it. After people here in the community caught and prepared local seafood they

would take it and trade it for other things. She remembers her grandmother used to take her own dried herring eggs, clams, and abalone and trade them up the line for different kinds of berries. Along the Nass River they traded these things for ooligan grease. The people back then didn't need to use money to get what they needed, they just traded what they had. Today it is all different, she feels. Everyone wants money for what they have.

Having to buy things rather than sharing is something that deeply troubles Alberta. She feels sad that the practices of sharing food are being forgotten. She used to go out with her parents picking berries. Whatever extra they had they would give it to people who couldn't go out themselves. They never would have sold it to anyone. She feels that the lack of sharing between people in the community happens in other ways too. In the past she remembers that if they saw people working they would help them. Even the young people would pitch in and help. People did this just to be helpful, they did not expect anything in return. Today she feels that it is different. She thinks that if people help out with work they expect to be paid. She feels that this is a very sad state of affairs.

Alberta also thinks that the elders have a responsibility to the young people too. She feels that there are older people that are not properly teaching the younger ones how they were brought up, who their relations are, and the proper way of behaving. Particularly when some

families live outside of the village they are not always fully aware of who their relatives are. Alberta feels that it is the responsibility of the older people in the family to make sure the younger members are aware of these things. The younger people have a family history and relationships that they are not always aware of.

Alberta sees that the young people also have an active role to play too. Some young people are not interested in what the older generation has to say at all. She thinks that this is unfortunate. However it does make her happy to see those young people who are really interested in their traditions. The older people try to get the younger people to come to community meetings, but they don't often come, which is discouraging. However, she remembers that at one point they had a meeting at a hotel in Prince Rupert for all the young people including those that lived outside of the village. At the meeting they taught the youth all about their traditions. She was very impressed that so many of the young people living in town were so interested in learning, but they hadn't been taught by their grandparents or parents. So, there is an interest on the part of many of the young people today that should be encouraged.

Alberta's wish is that the young people know the history of how their people survived and learn how to live their lives properly. The elders have knowledge about whether behaviors are considered right or wrong. She knows that the young people don't like to be criticized. Yet,

when the elders tell them not to something the young people often feel that it is because the elders don't like them, but this not true. Telling the young people how to behave is how the elders show they care. If the elders did not care about the young people they wouldn't say anything. It is because the elders care about the young people that they tell them what to do. Alberta says, "we love them that's why we teach them what's right and what's wrong."

Martha Lewis



Growing Up In Gitxaala

Martha⁴ was just eight years old when her father died. It was difficult for her mother to take care of her children. Martha recalls that, “We were so poor when we were young. When we were children you know. There wasn’t any family allowance. My mother had to go out and get some seafood. When I was old enough I had to go out with her in a row boat, we’d just row. We didn’t use a speed boat.”

Martha remembers that her uncle gave her family fish. Her mother taught her how to slice and dry them. Her mother would also take her out to gather seaweed. Martha explains that “sometimes we went up the inlet and we stayed there for three days and three night and we dried the seaweed on the rocks. We weren’t even scared. There weren’t any wolves around then.” They would gather around three barrels of seaweed and would row back.

Martha was married at eighteen to her husband Dwyer, who just recently passed away two years ago. Dwyer owned a Gillnet boat and he and Martha used to go out fishing together. Along with fish, Martha and Dwyer also brought home clams, cockles, and abalone. They always had lots of seafood in the house. “I jarred abalone, and the same way with cockles too...It tastes really good.” They hardly had to rely on buying food in the stores in those days.

⁴ Martha was interviewed on June 16, 2006.

They always fished Halibut. Martha really liked to jigger. She liked to jigger so much that the people in the Church Army used to tease her by calling her “jigger.” They used to say “Okay Martha Jigger I want you to testify.” Sometimes her husband would get tired and plead with her to let him jigger for awhile. Because of that, their house was always full of dried halibut.

Martha and Dwyer often went fishing near Banks Island. They always gave away much of their catch to the people living in Gitxaala. They always shared what they had. Unfortunately she does not see the same practice of sharing today. Since nobody in her immediate family has a boat anymore, they do not get much seafood.

Changes She Has Seen In the Community

One of the positive changes Martha sees that has happened to Gitxaala is the presence of doctors and nurses. She remembers that most people used to die in their own homes here. She remembers that when her own brother was eighteen he became sick and died at home. There were no nurses or doctors to attend to him.

Martha prefers when the village used to have a curfew. She says that in the olden days one guy was in charge of walking around the village at 8:00 p.m. to chase all the children home. At 11:00 P.M. he made all of the adults go home too. This man would walk around the village checking to make sure everything was alright until morning. Martha feels that this system kept the village safer than it is today.

The Story about My Name *Sagyoks*

(As told by Martha Lewis and supplemented by Sam Lewis.)

This name called *Sagyoks* is the one I am going to tell. This story took place near the shores of Banks Island, around the Bonilla Arm area. A young girl was told by her parents to go out to check how the seaweed was doing on a nearby reef. So she got into her boat that morning to do as she was told.



When she got to the reef, she started picking seaweed. She was there for a long time picking seaweed on the reef. She was not paying attention to the rising tide. She didn't realize how fast the tide was coming up. She did not notice it all until the water was close to her. Before she could do anything about it, the boat was gone. The boat had drifted away. So she looked for the highest point on the rock, where she was on the reef. Then she climbed up there and looked around into the open ocean. She was looking for someone to help her.

She noticed a couple men jigging for halibut across the way. She yelled out to them for help. She yelled out "hey you guys out there, I'm going to drift away here pretty soon. Hey you guys out there," she said, "I'm going to drift away pretty soon." Those men heard her. So they hauled in their lines, their jiggers. They started rowing towards the reef where this young lady was stranded. These men picked her up, took her

onboard, and brought her back home to the little community where she lived.

When they arrived she told everyone what had happened to her. “I almost drifted away,” she said. “I almost drifted away, and these guys picked me up. I was picking seaweed, and almost drifted away.” She kept mentioning it to the people. So the leaders of the little community the chiefs, the *sm’gyigyeyet*, said to the other people, the men that were there, “take your boats and go and invite the people from down the island. Invite them. We are going to have a feast. We are going to have a feast. Go and invite the people from *Klagak*. Along the way, invite them all, and let them know we’re going to have a feast.” All the people gathered along the shores of Banks Island. The leaders spoke up and told them what had happened to the young lady. The chief spoke and told the community what had happened to the young lady. He said “we are going to give this young lady a name today. We are going to give her a name. She almost had an accident. So she is going to earn a name today. We are going to give her a name. That is why we have invited you all today. We are going to give this young lady a name. The Chief said, “from this day forth, your name will be *Sagyoks*,’ the chief said. So that is how *Sagyoks* came about.

We do not know who this young lady was, but she surely came from the Killer Whale clan. This young lady was the first one to use the name *Sagyoks*. We do not know how long this name has been passed

down. In our family, we know that Fanny came to wear the name *Sagyoks*. When Fanny passed away, the name went to Dorothy Lewis. When Dorothy passed away, the name went to Martha Lewis. We all know her. The people from here call her “Matha.” So, Matha is wearing the name *Sagyoks* today.

The Story of the Name *Gyam T'gwah*

This is the story about the name *Gyam T'gwah*. One morning a young man took his boat and left Bonilla Arm to go out jigging for Halibut. He went out offshore a little ways going through the rock piles in Bonilla Arm. When he got towards the outside entrance, his boat capsized. Nobody saw the accident when it happened. His boat capsized. He went down. The boat went down.

The man recalled that his boat capsized because he encountered a monster. The monster took him down to the bottom of the ocean. When he was taken down to the bottom of the ocean, he opened his eyes and looked around. The young man found himself in beautiful place completely made out of glass, like a giant mirror. He was in a big glass building. In the front of the building there was a man sitting there in a big arm chair. This man sat there and he never said a word to the young man. The young man sat there for what seemed to him, just like a day. Finally the man sitting in the armchair at the front of the building spoke to the young man. He said, “Okay, you are going to go home now.”

When the young man came back to the top of the ocean, he was sitting in his boat. So the young man began to row back to his community in Bonilla Arm. When the young man got back to the beach, the people noticed his arrival. People began running around when they saw him coming.

The young man told the people what had happened. He explained that the sea monster took him down for a day. However, the people told him that it had been a year since he disappeared. The search for him had been called off because he had been gone that long. The people of that little community told him that they had been looking for him for so long because they didn't know where he was. Then the leaders in Bonilla Arm sent word out to the young men, "go out and invite the other communities, go out and invite them all. We are going to have a feast," the chief said, "we are going to have a feast. Go out and invite the other communities. We are going to give him a name." So they had the feast. The chiefs, the elders of that community, they had a feast. They said to the young man, "from this day forth your name will be *Gyam T'gwah*. You told us what had happened to you when the sea monster took you down to the bottom of the ocean. You told us about the place where you sat for awhile in the glass house. So from this day forth we'll give you a name. You are *Gyam T'gwah* from this day forth."



Agnes Shaw



Agnes Shaw⁵ was born July 14, 1914 in Gitxaala. She was the oldest daughter of Beatrice and William Lewis. They had a big family that included her brothers and sisters Charlotte, Maggie, Violet, Dwyer, Lily, Sam, Sarah, Bertha, and Magnus. Agnes spent much of her time with her father when he was out hunting and fishing on his seine boat. She learned how to work along side her mother, grandmother and other women of the community. Agnes has seen a great deal of changes happen in Gitxaala. Many aspects of life have changed quite dramatically from the way she was raised. Agnes had to work very hard as she was growing up to enjoy many of the basic things that come easily to the young people today. In particular Agnes worked hard at gathering and preparing food. This was the common way of life for all the people living in the community.

Agnes spent most of her time working along side her family getting and preparing food. Agnes remembers that it took a great deal of work to make sure they had enough food to eat. The people had to preserve what they caught before they had jars, canning machines, or freezers to easily keep the food fresh. What they did was dry such food as fish, seal, and deer so that it lasted a long time.

She has lots of memories of being out in Bonilla Arm on Banks Island after they finished fishing. It was her job to help dry the fish. It

⁵ The profile created here about Agnes Shaw was put together from a series of interviews from 2002 to 2006. Much of the materials were taken from interviews done by other UBC researchers, Caroline Butler and Robin Anderson.

was a big process. Many people from Gitxaala would settle there at this time. There would be hundreds of fish in the big smokehouse there. Her and her mother would work together drying fish. They would begin by preparing Sockeye then move to Coho. The smokehouse would be divided between four ladies. Each woman would have somewhere around 300 fish each to dry. They would use bark strips like rope to hang the fish on in the smokehouse. When the fish were dry they would move them higher up to dry them out even further. This would full dry the fish. Few people full dry fish anymore. If you get dried fish today it is usually only half dried. They did the same thing for halibut, seal, and sea lion. When they would eat the fish in the winter time they would soak it overnight, and then boil it. It was common to eat the boiled fish in the morning for breakfast. They would put boiled seal fat with it, and have it with potatoes.

Harvesting and preparing seaweed was something that Agnes also spent much of her time doing. Although today it is usually men that go out to gather seaweed, it was not that way in the past. Agnes remembers when it used to be the women that would collect the seaweed. The women would go out and pick seaweed in different areas. She really enjoyed going around the west coast of Banks Island with her mother, Gertie, her aunt Josie and lots of other women. It was often Solomon Brown who took the women out on his boat to bring them to good areas to gather seaweed. They would begin by drying what they had picked.

Then they would chop them, and dry them some more. Next, they would press the seaweed with their feet which was known as “kicking the seaweed.” The seaweed would be kept in cedar box containers for ten days. Then they would wet them again and fold them into five squares. They would put the seaweed back into the container. The container would be wrapped in berry bushes and cedar bark. Her father would then put heavy rocks on top of it. They would wait for another 10 days. When a sunny day arrived they would take out the seaweed and lay them out in the sun to dry. After all of this work, the seaweed would be finally ready to eat. They would toast the older seaweed.

Collecting and drying herring eggs was something else that she remembers her family doing. Around the 24th of May each year, Agnes’ father would go to a big sandy beach called White Swan where many Gitxaala people lived at that time of the year. Her father would go there to gather and preserve herring eggs. He would put kelp down and let the herring roe gather to about half a centimeter thick. This was just thick enough so that it could be dried by the sun. He would then tow it to another area where there was no spawn. When the water cleared, he would pull it all up and dry them.

When the men went off to tend to their trap lines every fall the ladies would go out to collect cockles. She remembers her Aunt Dorothy Gordon doing that. After she collected the cockles, she would dry them near her husband Casper Gordon’s trap line.

It was not only seafood that Agnes learned how to preserve and prepare. She also made her own jam from the berries that she would pick. She remembers making a lot of laughing berry, frog berry, and black currant jam. She'd cook the berries down and add lots of sugar. However, they didn't have small jars in those days. They would use gallon sized glass containers to hold all the jam.

Agnes also learned how to garden. Her mother and aunt planted a garden at a place across from the village. That is where they planted their potatoes. She remembers herself and Aggie doing all of the work on that garden. They also had another garden in Bonilla Arm. She remembers that the potatoes they would get there were nice and big and almost white. The soil was very sandy in that garden. They would usually go over to pick potatoes there in the fall. However, they did have a problem with the deer eating the flowers off of the potatoes, so they had to build a fence around the garden to protect it.

Agnes remembers when a group of men, including James Lewis, William Lewis, Nathan Shaw, and Edward Gamble transplanted deer from Banks Island to Bonilla Arm. They had their dogs chase deer from the inside of the island to the other end. Some other men were waiting at the other end of the island to gather the deer when they arrived. They shot the big deer, but they put four or five baby deer in the hatch of the boat and put them on Bonilla. These men did this every weekend for a month. They ended up taking about twenty deer there in total.

Agnes also remembers how cold the winters used to be. Below her uncle's and her grandfather's house a lot of ice would form at low tide. When she was young the children used to play around by sliding on the ice. In those days they didn't have the kind of heating they have in homes today. To keep warm at night the old people would take the bricks off the stove and wrap each one up individually in newspaper. Then they would take a damp cloth and wrap it around the brick wrapped in paper. They would then put this at the foot of the bed under their blanket. This was a way to stay warm in the winter time.

The people used to wash all of their clothes by hand. Agnes remembers that people used to use big tubs both for bathing and washing clothes. She used a washing board for washing the clothes in the tub. When they were finished washing the clothes, they would hang the clothes outside to dry them. Agnes still owns her old tub, but she doesn't use it anymore.

In the past people were also far less dependent on store bought foods. People sold what they caught to get money to buy supplies. She remembers that a lot of people in Gitxaala used to leave the village to go trapping. They would sell the pelts of the animals they caught, including otter and minx, in Prince Rupert. It was the same thing with fishing. At the end of the season they would sell everything they had caught, and then do a large purchase of supplies. But what they bought was different than what people usually buy today. They would buy large

hundred pound sacks of things like flour, potatoes, and onions. They would buy large containers of baking powder and lard too. They wouldn't buy things like meat, there was no need, since they had their own dried seafood and deer meat.