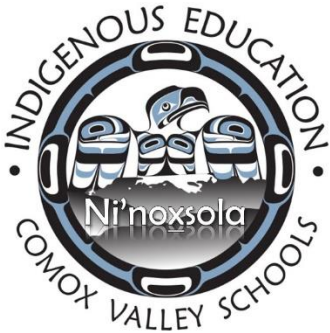
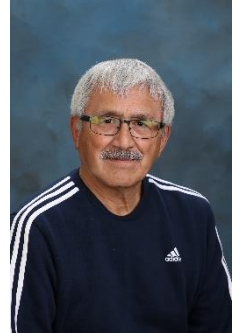


Ni'noxola

Elders in Residence Program
Indigenous Education Comox Valley Schools



Bryce Mercredi
Early Memories



Some of my early memories I have, is our early years in small native communities. My dad was a Hudson Bay trader and we lived in several communities before we moved to Yellowknife.

One of the memories is harvesting birch sap in the spring. When the snow started melting the tree would start to suck up the moisture from the ground to feed the leaves which is still hibernating. An ax was used to make a small slash in the bark and the bottom end of the bark was pried out so that the sap would drip down. A bucket was placed under the drip. Several buckets were set up this way. The sap was crystal clear and slightly sweet.

When the buckets was close to being full, the buckets were emptied into a large container. This container was then brought home and put on the stove to boil. As the level dropped in the container more sap was added. This was a long process. Sometimes the boiling and reducing the sap took all night. Five gallons of sap would make about 1 pint of Birch syrup. This was good on pancakes and as a spread on bannock or bread.

Another thing about the birch tree, is that on the young trees, there would be crystals of sugar which had transpired on the small twigs. A favourite thing to do was to pull the twig through your mouth and licking up these crystals.

Another memory I have is winter in Snowdrift (Lutselke). There was myself and two brothers, one was a baby. Mom would wrap up our baby brother real warm. She would then lay two caribou hides on the toboggan (shown), one hide hair side down and the next hair side up. She would then wrap the hides along with more blankets to cover him. My brother would then pull him around until he fell asleep. He would sleep outside for a couple of hours when he was brought back inside. The temperature would be around minus 25.

We spent two years there before we had to leave. I became school age and our dad wanted transfer to Yellowknife. He was notified by head office that he should send us to Residential School. Dad said "Have someone here in two weeks as I quit."

We had to go back to Fort Chipewyan as this was where dad was hired. I did go to residential school for about 3 months as a day student. We lived with our grandparents until dad found a place for us to live in Yellowknife.

When we lived in Snowdrift, there were times when we were completely isolated. There was just mom, dad, myself and two brothers. The native kids would be gone to residential school and the adults would head out for their traplines. We wouldn't see anyone until mid December when the community would come in to trade their furs and

their children would come home for Christmas. After Christmas, the parents would head out again and the kids would head back to school.

We didn't have TV, computers or any modern day conveniences. We hauled our water from the lake and filled two 45 gallon drums. Dad would cut blocks of ice and haul the blocks up in a toboggan into an ice house. The blocks were separated with sawdust. Our heat was a wood stove, therefore we needed to have enough wood to heat the house all year.

The only source of electricity came from a windmill which charged batteries which gave us light and also gave power for our radio.

The winter nights, although cold, was generally cold and clear. Radio reception was very good in the winter. One night we were listening to the radio when this song came up by Part Boone. "Don't let the stars get in your eyes, don't let the moon break your heart". That song really affected us. Whenever we went out and it was crystal clear and the moon was out, we didn't dare look at the moon or the stars. We didn't want the moon to break our heart.

When I was about thirteen years old, an uncle asked me if I wanted to go out to his dad's cabin about thirty miles out of Yellowknife, to bring one of his dogs home that he was training to pull with a team.

We left in early morning and it was about minus 25 degrees. Along the way we saw an open running creek with two otters sliding down the bank into the running water. We watched them for a few minutes then carried on.

When you are sitting in a sled all covered up with blankets you can still get cold. In order to warm up you have to get out of the sleigh and run behind the team to warm up.

You don't want to work up a sweat or else you will get colder. You run until you are comfortable before getting back in the sleigh.

When we got to the cabin the dog was very happy to see us. Because he didn't have any exercise he was a roly poly dog. He ate up all of his food(fish).

The next morning we went out to visit nets that were set before my great uncle got sick and had to come home. The nets were easy to find as there was a tree [placed at the holes.

We had to open up the holes as they were frozen over. Once this was done we started to pull the net. It was about minus 25 degrees, of course your hands got wet and very cold. I could hardly move my fingers as they were so cold. My uncle said to stick my hands in the water to warm them up. My thought is that it would not do the job. I finally did put my hands in the water and sure enough they warmed up. The water was warmer than the air. We had to be very fast freeing the fish so that we didn't break the net. The net would freeze and break very easily.

The net had two sets of cord attached at each end of the net. When we reset the net, I went to the other hole, pick up the cord and start walking, pulling the net back in the water. When the net was reset, spruce boughs was placed over the hole and covered with

snow. A small tree was replaced, by this time the fish were frozen stiff. They were piled up and covered with snow. Water was then sprinkled on the snow. This was done to deter wolves and foxes from getting the fish.

