

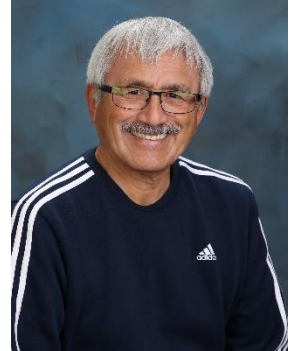
NI'NOXSOLA

Elders in Residence Program
Indigenous Education Comox Valley Schools



Mooshum Bryce Mercredi

Life in the Bush



We lived in the bush for the first six years of my life as my dad was a Hudson Bay Fur Trader. Our homes were in the native communities in Northern Alberta and the North West Territories. I can remember the last two communities we lived in, Chip Lake in Alberta and Snowdrift (Lutselke) in the East arm of Great Slave Lake. It was in these communities that I learned to speak Cree and Chipewyan.

This is where we had our first flights in an airplane. It was quite a feeling to be in the air and see the ground below us. We were quite excited until we hit turbulence before landing. Our excitement turned to fluttery stomachs and we threw up as we were landing. Fortunately, mom gave us bags to barf into. This happened quite frequently.

In Chip Lake, the community had a lot of horses which ran wild. The kids would be riding them everywhere. When you are about three years old, you could feel quite intimidated by their size, when they were close to you. My brother and I were quite afraid of them. I am still nervous to be around them.

Later on my brother, Matthew, was helping his father-in-law to shoe his horses that he had on the ranch. He was to hold the horse's neck down while his father-in-law shod the horse. He said that the horse glared at him as he was holding him down. That was it. He stood up and walked away, The old fear came back to him.

We were in Ft. McMurray when we developed mumps and we were scheduled to fly into Ft. Chipewyan to visit grandparents. It was winter so mom dressed us up and tied our hoods down so that only our eyes and noses were showing. She told us if someone told us we could take off our parkas, we were to say no.

Sure enough, someone asked us to take off our parkas and we said no. We sweltered into Ft. Chipewyan, where we were quarantined until we recovered.

One of the daily chores we had was to ensure that the water barrels were full. These were two forty-five gallon drums that were kept in the porch. The source of water was about three hundred meters from the house.

At Chip Lake the water had to be strained as the water was moving with bugs. Dad had sent samples of the water to be tested and the results was that the water was clean and drinkable.

We used to watch the bugs collect on the cloth used to strain the water. Dad carried two buckets on a yoke on his shoulders and we would help by carrying water in an empty lard pail. Once the barrels were full, dad would us drops of iodine to purify the water.

In the winter, when it was safe enough to go on the ice, dad would use a needle bar (chisel) to open a hole big enough to put a pail in. When we got enough water to fill the drums, he would cover the hole with spruce boughs to prevent the hole from freezing too thick. In the middle of winter the ice could be up to two meters thick.

This was the time that dad would cuts blocks of ice were cut and pulled out and placed in a sled and hauled up to the icehouse. A Layer of sawdust was placed between each block so that they wouldn't stick together. The ice was used in the summer to make ice-cream and also keep meat and produce fresh. This was our refrigerator in the summer.

Another very important chore that was done was to have enough firewood to last the year. The summer was spent cutting and hauling dry wood from the bush. The wood was bucked up into 18" lengths, split and stacked into rows about 3 feet high and maybe 12 feet long. I remember that we had quite a few stacks of wood. This wood was used all year for cooking and for heat. My brother Matthew and I would help to stack the split wood. In the winter we had a porch where we would bring in the wood. The wood had to be banged together to clear off the hoarfrost and then stacked on the porch.

We used to play on the lake shore, looking for minnows. We would turn over rocks and watch the minnows dart away looking for cover. Matt and I decided that we needed to catch some for our aquarium, which was a five-gallon pail. We stuck needles in a stick and went fishing. One of us would turn or a rock and the other would spear the minnow before it got away. We caught quite a few before we noticed that they were either dead or dying. We couldn't understand why so we stopped. That was the end of our aquarium.