



Ni'NOXSOLA

Elders in Residence Program
Indigenous Education Comox Valley Schools

Sheila Buchanan
Living off the Land



I would like to talk about the benefits of living off the land. It is not like it is today. Most people back in the 1800's and early 1900's lived off the land. They basically survived by hunting and foraging for their food. It was not an easy life, but it was a way of survival. My grandparents had this experience so did a few of us grandchildren. They lived a long time before passing away. Their way of life was tough, but they did not know any different, so they endured.

This life was healthy because the foods that were eaten were not filled with preservatives, but only organic. Fresh off the land. The garden was not sprayed with any chemicals, it just grew without it. It did not seem to get eaten by animals or insects. The food was so healthy, that people did not have the diseases they are burdened with today.

The other benefit to eating healthy was exercise. No one had a motor vehicle therefore everyone walked to their destination. It did not matter how far it was. My grandfather told a story about how he worked ten miles from home and would walk home every weekend just to spend time with his family. Sunday night he would have to go back to work for Monday morning.

There were no obese people, diabetes, cancer, or heart disease. Most people were healthy. It was not easy to get access to a doctor back then anyway. If someone needed medicine, it was dug up from the roots of plants and made into a tea and it would usually cure whatever it was ailing an individual.

The pets were not vaccinated but they did not get the diseases animals get today. They were fed scraps from the table not the preservatives dog food. The pets ate healthy too and they got a lot of exercise running around playing with the children.

Children were much healthier; they did not sit around the house playing video games. There was no such thing. No computers either. They made their own games playing outside with the neighbors' kids. They would play outside whether it was raining or snowing.

Living off the land and getting plenty of exercise was the great way of life. Most of those people lived past their ninety years before passing away. I used to love to listen to their stories about how they lived in tents in 40 below zero weather and to endure the cold winter nights when the fire went out in the stove. To hunt and fish in the winter, walking through deep snow with homemade snowshoes, sinking knee deep in snowbanks.

They did not have an ice auger to cut through the ice. An axe was used to cut a hole in the ice so a net could be set to catch the fish. It would-be left-over night in the lake only to be frozen over again, but it was worth it in the end. There would be plenty of fish to last a while.

This is just a part of the way of life back when my grand parents were growing up and into their adult years. They have lived it and endured it. They were taught to survive by their ancestors, and they passed on to their children and grandchildren. Due to modern technology today, not many of the surviving families practice survival skills. My goal is to pass on the knowledge that was taught to me and teach as much of it as I know. As well as to preserve my Cree/michif language along with it.

Sheila Buchanan (Kookum)

