

Intercultural Narratives From The Cowichan Valley

Where Cultures Mingle



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from the Cowichan Valley

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Contents

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For more information, contact the publisher at
amanda@cis-iwc.org

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Managing editor: Catherine J Johnson
catherinejohnson13@gmail.com

Cover and book design by Ally Easterbrook.
ally@blacktailcreative.com

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Introduction

This anthology is a means of sharing stories of the diverse groups of people and cultures in the Cowichan Valley, both historically and present-day.

By highlighting personal stories that reflect relationship and interaction between immigrant, refugee, and First Nations, this book strives to encourage a deeper understanding of our intercultural community. Our heartfelt gratitude to contributors and supporters of *Where Cultures Mingle*.



Columbia to Cowichan

by Catherine J. Johnson

Carolina Castaneda Bedoya, a Columbian-born resident of Duncan, relocated from her then-home in Costa Rica to the Cowichan Valley two years ago, and has had a strong sense of belonging ever since. “I am one of the most grateful people to be here,” she says.

Carolina waited two years for her residency permit to come through, so she “had time to read and study, to find out what happened here in my new community, and why there are not as many Indigenous people here as there are in Columbia.”

She found that much of the history and colonization processes were comparable between her country of birth and her present-day home. “Both places are so nice and visual, and beautiful, with the Indigenous cultures woven through. I love the cultures and am grateful that so much is still intact.”

“The First Nations people and I look the same,” she says. “There is a beautiful connection so often for me. Everyone has been so welcoming – Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike.” Carolina finds family values to be similar between Columbian people and local First Nations people whom she’s met. “Elders are very important – Grandma is most important. Grandmothers from both countries do the plant medicine, my own grandma did it, and we do the jewelry. And the term ‘aunty’ is used too. When there is a new woman friend in the family she is introduced with respect as *aunty*.”

Carolina volunteers in both of her children’s elementary classrooms and was excited to discover that Quw’utsun Elders come in to do storytelling. She loves to sit and listen with the students and feels relaxed and at home amid the First Nations culture. Her own two children’s friends are mainly Quw’utsun kids. She and her family walked with the Elders on Reconciliation Day and thought that besides being “very cool” it was meaningful and necessary. She says, “We are very blessed. A lot of people just have no clue what happened and what is still happening.”



Meeting of Joyful Hearts

by Amanda Vance

On July 29th, 2023, Cowichan Intercultural Society (CIS), Duncan United Church, the City of Duncan and several community members unveiled a reconciliation mural called “thu-its-thuw tun shqwalawun // be truthful with your feelings” by Coast Salish artist Charlene Johnny. On March 25th, 2024, a second mural unveiling followed: “Sq'uq'iptul / Journey Together” by Cowichan Tribes artist Stuart Pagaduan. Both murals were designed in consultation with CIS, the City, Duncan United Church, and local businesses and property owners in the Downtown Duncan Business Improvement Area, led by a group of Indigenous Elders in a partnership called “Nanum Iyus Th'ele / Meeting of Joyful Hearts.”

Elder advisors directed a multicultural group of CIS staff, which included Mexican and Ukrainian immigrants, in carrying out aspects of the project, including the promotion and translation of the artist statements into five languages plus an educational tour. The mural-unveiling events brought together CIS volunteers and clients, creating a shared celebration of local Indigenous art with people from all around the world – there were Cowichan Tribes members in cedar hats sitting alongside people from Tibet, Taiwan, Germany, South Africa, Turkey, and other nations. A local food company (Syrian Falafel) founded by Syrian refugees, catered the event. The murals and unveiling events demonstrated many of the joys of multiculturalism and reconciliation efforts in Canada.



While these events were at heart a celebration of multiculturalism and reconciliation, creating visual testaments to these principles, the behind-the-scenes work that went into these moments was much more complicated. Just as the principles of multiculturalism and reconciliation are aspirational rather than given and require intention, self-awareness, and humility to put into practice, the process of creating these murals was emotionally rigorous. Each artwork required multiple revisions. In one case, the artist wanted a piece that was purely celebratory of Cowichan heritage, while the Elders wanted the mural to honour the pain and suffering that the churches inflicted upon them and their ancestors in residential schools. Finding a way to balance these perspectives artistically required ongoing communication and a commitment to see through a project that put everyone to the test.

The unveiling of the “thu-its-thuw tun shqwalawun // be truthful with your feelings” mural was a day full of smiles, collaboration and the culmination of truly meaningful work. (Kurt Knock photos)



The Nanum Iyus Tth'ele work carries on, most recently with a S'amuna Longhouse tour and piq'wun feast in which Ukrainian, Syrian, German, Afghani, Rwandan, and other immigrants enjoyed a salmon and potato dinner prepared according to traditional methods by Indigenous chef Jared Qwestenuxun Williams on Kil-Pah-Las Beach. Elders who led the mural design process were drumming and singing around the fire as the meal cooked.

Mayor Michelle Staples and City of Duncan staff who were on the mural committee joined the festivities to celebrate the completed projects. In short, despite the challenges, the work that went into the murals lives on not only in the art but in the people who continue to come together and practice their values.

The central teaching that CIS staff have learned through this process can be summed up in a Hul'q'umi'num saying: "nutsamuut shqwalawun/one mind, one heart." At core, no matter our cultural differences which make us a unique community, we are all human and working together to realize the promise of our shared values. The work is never finished, nor easy, but it is worth the effort, and, most of all, worth celebrating.



Young Tzinquaw Dancers move in harmony to the beat of a drum while parading in front of the newly finished mural. (Kurt Knock photo)

Alby George who served as an Elder on the mural committee shared some opening words at the unveiling (Kurt Knock photo). Jared Qwestenuxun Williams prepared a celebratory meal on Kil-Pah-Las Beach. Artist Stuart Pagaduan with his art installation "Sq'uq'iptul / Journey Together." (Amanda Vance photos)



Late-life Love, Intercultural Style

by Catherine J Johnson

“It was a little United Nations,” said bride Addie Russell, born 300 miles above the Arctic Circle to Scottish parents. “We had diversity,” said groom Gus Williams, whose mother was Cowichan, and father was Songhees. The wedding took place on September 16, 2017, and the “later-life” couple were married amid a mingling of cultures and festivity. Addie was traditionally lovely, wearing a white vintage dress. Gus said, “I nearly melted when I saw her in it.”

Her veil was actually a hand-knit “wedding ring” shawl made in the Shetland Islands where her mother was born. It was knit from one-ply yarn in three interlocking patterns. A wedding ring shawl is so delicate and fine that it can be pulled in its entirety through a wedding ring. Shetland knitters have been at their craft for hundreds of years, with the oldest existing Shetland lace traced back to the early 1800s. A perfect parallel, as women of Shetland who settled in the Cowichan Valley around the same time, knit and wove alongside Quw'utsun women, the two groups sharing knowledge and skills. Serendipity continues, as both groups of knitters have become world-renowned for their artistry.

Addie’s “best woman” was her daughter, Marsha Moreau, and her bridesmaid was Gus’s granddaughter, Doreen George. The attendants carried bouquets of roses and cedar, each with two ribbons: one a tartan, one a First Nations motif. The men’s boutonniers followed suit. Addie’s friends at the Meadows Apartment created the accoutrements as well as festooned the hall with flags of all nations. The groom was dashing in a red and black ceremonial jacket with Thunderbird design.

The wedding reception was a merry mix of guests that included both Gus’s and Addie’s grandchildren, nieces, and nephews, and friends from all over – from the Food Basket Society, The Cowichan Capitals hockey team, Nanaimo friends, friends from the Cowichan Intercultural Society, the Meadows Apartment, church staff, as well as Addie’s anthropology instructors and departmental dean from Vancouver Island University. The ceremony and reception were held at the Duncan United Church (known as the Blue Door Church) with minister Keith Simmonds officiating.

Gus and Keith had originally met in the 1980s at a kids’ camp in Keremeos – Keith was running the camp and Gus had taken a group of kids there from Cowichan. The two men had bumped into each other years later in downtown Duncan and stayed in touch. As noted by Pema Rigzin, Gus’s best man, “[The church ceremony] alone was very interesting, with the cultures and religions getting together. Keith was amazing, and he did a beautiful ceremony.” Pema is Buddhist and hails from Tibet.

Addie's son and groomsman, Nat Moreau, donned a kilt for the occasion and escorted his mother down the aisle. He announced to her, "I'm finally able to give away my mother!" To which Addie giggled, "Not on your life! And I know you're just making sure I don't fall flat on my face." The bride and groom had invited Highland piper Stewart Campbell to pipe them into the church—the drone and drama of the pipes honouring Addie's Scottish heritage. In honour of Gus's First Nations heritage, Tzinquaw Dancers performed during the evening, including a blessing dance at the bride and groom's table.

The dance group was founded by a small group of local Quw'utsun men in 1950 with respect and appreciation of all cultures. The Tzinquaw Dancers are vibrant performers, rich with meaning, moves, and colour—wedding guests tapped their feet and drummed along on tabletops. The wedding dinner was an international feast – potluck dishes of Indian pakoras, Tibetan mo-mo, Chinese noodles and stir fry, Tai salad, potato salad, BC smoked or baked salmon, Arabic tabouli and falafel, shepherd's pie, Filipino delicacies, samosas, and, as Gus added, "six or eight wedding cakes that didn't go to waste."

Extra cakes were given to the food basket and the church dinner program. Gus and Addie regaled guests with the story of how they met. It had been one morning in the dining room at Duncan Manor where they'd both had apartments. Gus was having breakfast with a friend. "I was working on the Wild Woman story for the Aboriginal Film Fest at the time, and Addie was passing me, and her long hair was waaay out, like the wild woman." Addie laughs. "I think I scared the daylights out of him." Gus laughs too, and says, "I went running back upstairs to my room, calmed down, then went back to the dining room and asked my table mate, "Who's that one over there? With the wild hair? My table mate says, "I think they call her Addie," and I said, "Oh, I've got to get to know her."

Fast forward through three years of getting to know each other. The couple were enjoying a celebration lunch following Addie's convocation ceremony at Vancouver Island University – she'd earned her BA at age 64 – and the two became engaged. A year later – the multicultural union of the season! Friend and wedding guest Emma Edmunds said what really stood out for her about the evening, was that "it wasn't just Gus and Addie hosting a wedding, it was a whole generous community hosting an event. What a mix of people it was, coming together to celebrate!"



Mei's Northern Story Summer Journey to Pond Inlet

by Catherine J Johnson

Mei Shiozaki arrived in Pond Inlet, Nunavut, in 2016 for July and August – two of the three warm months – to immerse herself in the culture, the landscape, and, she hoped, in the day-to-day lives of the town's inhabitants. She'd studied fashion design at university in her home country of Japan, but rather than the haute couture of fashion runways, she studied historical and cultural fashion, with a focus on northern communities.

"My graduation project in university was researching the Inuit and how the people use natural materials to make the parkas. I studied Inuit culture and history and wrote a paper about why the people wear this type of parka." Because Mei created articles of clothing for her class projects, she took her own photos of the clothing being modelled. Mei had been a wedding and celebration photographer in Japan and had worked for a photography company that had a studio.

"After I graduated from university, I still had an interest in northern culture and the Inuit people, so I kept reading books about the Inuit while I lived in Japan. I had been kind of dreaming about going there [up north] but I didn't have enough confidence to go there by myself. "I was still not sure about my photography, so I decided to work and learn more photography skills before going, and after about three years I decided to do my own project. I loved film photography at that time. I thought it would be fun to use my SLR 35mm Nikon when I went up north."

The project was to get to know people living in the community of Pond Inlet, experience the culture there, and document the visit through photography. The project was a personal and social journey.



Addie's bridal bouquet. Tzinquaw Dancers wear a band of shells around their ankles which create a unique and beautiful sound while they dance.



Catching raindrops in Pond Inlet.
Mei Shiozaki photo

“I feel there are not many chances to know about northern cultures ... and I think it’s better to know a bit of culture up there because it’s changing. Some people in Japan think that all Inuit people still go hunting and do traditional style of living, but it is changing so much up there.

“I searched online and found a website for... not tourists, but for information, so I contacted someone and told them I was a photographer interested in Inuit culture and looking for a place to stay. A guy replied and was willing to help. He found a family – a mom and dad and three kids – who spoke English and Inuktitut and had a room for me. Nearly everybody speaks English, and, if they are young, they speak both. If they are older, like the grandmas and grandpas, usually they only speak Inuktitut.”

The family took Mei on daily outings and introduced her to their friends, relatives, elders, and neighbours. “I thought I should not do photography all the time ... so in the beginning, I’d go outside and talk first, and make friends, and I’d ask them if I could take photography while we are walking. Most people wanted me to take photos of them.” Mei always asked permission.

She had felt though, that some of the older people were suspicious of her at first. “I’d say people were usually friendly, but in the beginning, they were, how can I say, not scared of me, but [for example], one lady who was 58 or 60, asked me why I was there, not scared but, a little bit suspicious. I told her I was very interested in Inuit culture and that I used to learn Inuit culture when I was in Japan, and after that I saw a little smile.”

Mei made many friends and acquaintances during her stay. “One was a young lady my age, a relative of my host family who came over. We had interest in each other’s lives and traded phone numbers. We hung out while I stayed there. I [also] had dinner with two ladies. I have pictures of them.



Mei models the parka shell she created.



Mei Shiozaki photo

“There was a Japanese guy there, he’s not living there but visiting, he’s an outdoor guy, and he introduced me to the family. He’s gone hunting with the husband. He’s been going there for many years, so they are very close. There was one girl my age, Anna, twenty-four, and we walked with her dog. The dog was always refusing – he didn’t like the leash. Anna and I became close friends and when we went walking, we’d talk on a personal level, and we shared ideas.”

In Pond Inlet the homes have oil furnaces, as there are no trees there for wood heat. Mei enjoyed the treeless landscape, no matter how different from her homes of Japan and Duncan. Her host family’s home was close to the water, and she could see an island and a mountain with a glacier. “The view was amazing, and there were cotton flowers growing all over; so many tiny flowers on the ground, only centimeters in size.” In 2016, the year Mei was in Pond Inlet, the population was approximately 1600. She remembers deciding to take the trip and thinking, “For me, being from Tokyo [population 13.5 million], I thought the number is so small, but after I got there, it’s a pretty huge village, and some people know I’m there, but probably some of them don’t even know because there are so many houses spread out.

“Honestly, many people thought I’m Inuit when I was there. Like at the grocery, local people talked to me in Inuktitut. We are similar looking. Our genetic roots are the same I think, Mongoloid. An old guy asked me about the groceries at the co-op and I told him I’m so sorry I can’t speak Inuktitut, and he was so surprised. I was happy with that. I felt I was suited to the community.” The term “Mongoloid” can be defined as a broad division of humankind including the Indigenous peoples of East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Arctic Region of North America.

Mei was also addressed in Inuktitut at the weekly flea market and clothing swap, and while she was out walking or attending events in the community hall. “The dad of the family took me to his workplace; he showed me how he works and introduced his co-workers. It was an office job in a place something like the city hall in Duncan.

“In Pond Inlet, cruise ships come every year, a couple of times, and he made schedules of when each ship is coming. I think he welcomed people too. There are no cruise ships in the winter because of too much ice. The mom was taking a course at a college, and she looks after their one-year-old baby. I would say they are a modern family because they don’t rely on hunting, and are really good at tech – Facebook, cell phones, etc. My host mother did show me how to prepare a seal skin after hunting though. How to clean it. Some people up there still do that.”

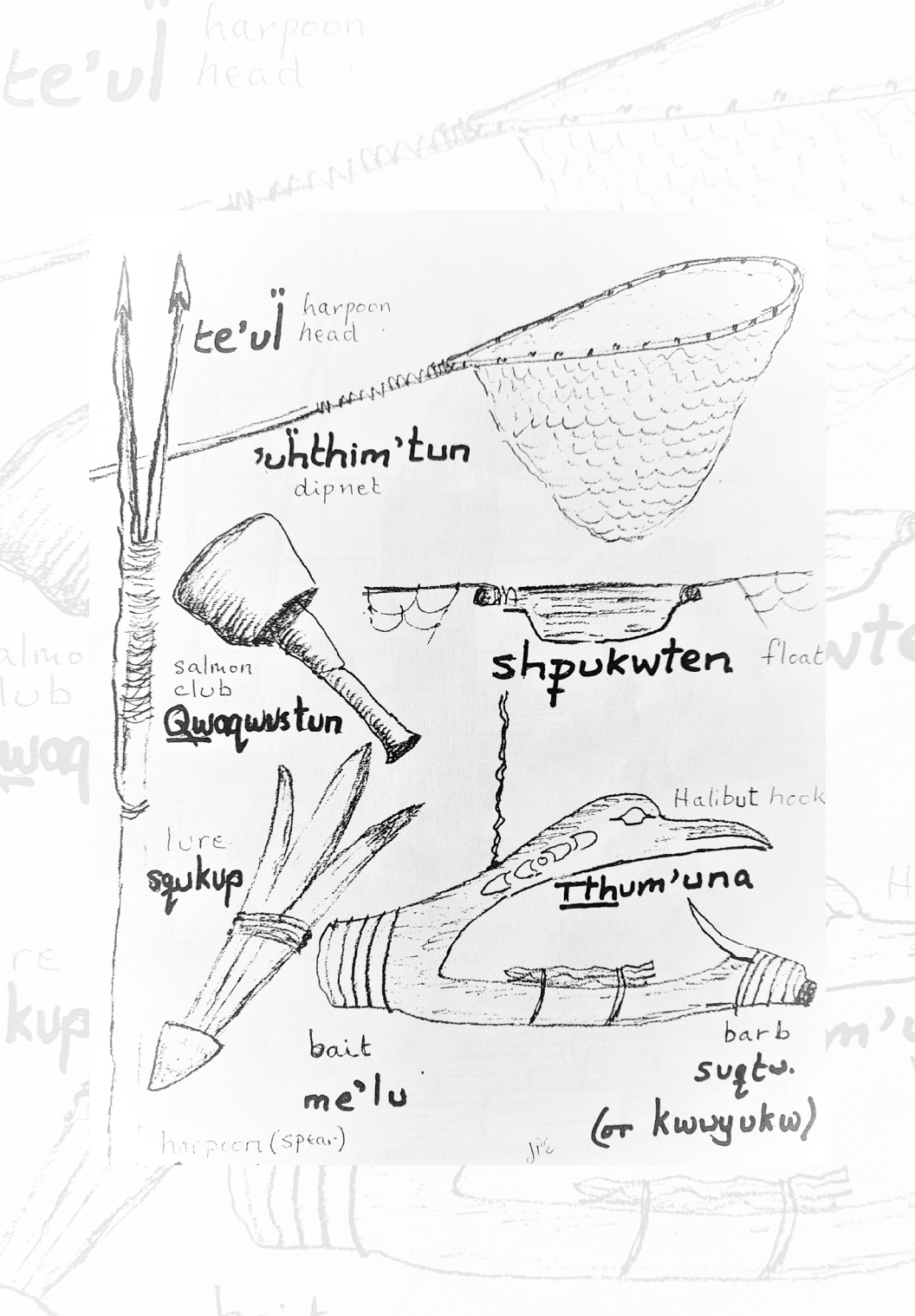
Mei talked with many teenagers and children and said the kids were proud to live in Pond Inlet, that they liked where they lived. She spoke to one older teenaged girl who wanted to know all about Japan. She asked Mei if there is still samurai and is Japan a really scary country. The girl said she’d heard “some people are killing each other there, and there are samurai living there.” Although the timeline was inaccurate, Mei was surprised and pleased that the girl knew some Japanese history. She explained about present-day conditions in Japan and appreciated that the girl was curious. “Culture shock” and the insights it brought became common for Mei while she was in Pond Inlet.

“My host family offered me raw seal meat. It was surprising but I wanted to try, and it was pretty good. Another family offered me caribou stew that they hunted. I have pictures of boots and mittens that they make [from the caribou hides], but most people use modern winter boots.” Mei was guest on a hunting trip with her host-dad’s brother, who, Mei said, was hunting seals with a gun “but it didn’t work,” and they returned home empty-handed. The ice was still thick enough for snowmobiles and was checked regularly to keep hunters safe—the big melt does not happen until late summer. She was also guest on a fishing trip with her host-dad’s co-workers and their families.

“They ate seaweed [for a snack] and the kids went swimming – it’s super cold water!” There were patches of ice on the ground in July, and it snowed a couple of times while Mei was there. “Even though it was summer, people all wore toques and jackets with hoods. July is the warmest, the high is 11 C and the highs in August are around 8 C. Here, [in southern BC] we are in the Hawaii of Canada.

“If someone is going to have a baby [in Pond Inlet], they have to fly to Iqaluit, a few hours away by plane. There are no doctors in Pond Inlet, but some nurses I think.” Mei discovered that there are no vegetable gardens or greenhouses because of the short growing season, so people of Pond Inlet rely on groceries being flown into the stores about twice a week. “There were so many culture shocks for me. We have the same [expression] in Japanese.

“Before I left for Pond Inlet some people told me it was too dangerous because of drinking and drugs and crime. But I learned a lot. It’s the same as here, there is some alcohol and drinking problems. But I am very happy, very glad to have gone there. I learned that stereotypes are just stereotypes. I hope to go to Pond Inlet again.”



Hul'q'umi'num' Curriculum
 Khowutzun Educational Enrichment Program

By Catherine J. Johnson

In 1987, Philomena Alphonse, Chief of the Cowichan Band at the time, spoke with the Superintendent of the Cowichan School District about developing a syllabus for a Hul'q'umi'num' language program. She was concerned that so many families were losing the language. The Superintendent contracted Peter Elliott, originally from Britain, and a (then) teacher at Maple Bay Elementary School.

Peter was known to have developed a meaningful First Nations component for the social studies curriculum there. Although there were no First Nations students attending the school, Peter felt that “considering we live alongside the largest First Nations society in BC, we need this.” Some historical content was found in the main curriculum, but Peter felt it was angled strongly toward settlers. In 1987, the general populace did not have knowledge of residential schools and other atrocities committed against First Nations people. Knowing this, Peter focused on local Indigenous history and culture hoping to shed light on the broader picture and provide students with some truths.

Peter and Philomena sat down together to draft up a framework for the project, with Ruby Peter, Norah George, and Muriel Joe—fluent Hul'q'umi'num' speakers — joining the group as translators and language advisors. With just a six-month budget available for the project, Peter was able to develop a teaching model for K-6 based on phonetics. The work of Peter's group helped lay a foundation for the next teacher hired for the project, Margaret Roome, who was given a two-year contract to focus on grammar, syntax, and the cultural side of the language. She met with local Elders, listened to their stories about the language, and incorporated the material into the project. Margaret presented a preliminary version of the final project to Peter, much to his delight, as he was in the hospital recovering from surgery at the time.

He spent the rest of his stay cross-referencing project materials for the joy of it. And now, 36 years later, School District 79 includes an entire Indigenous Education Department with a wealth of Hul'q'umi'num' language and cultural resources.



Jasmine Rose Oberste & Qwiyahwultu-hw

The Khowhemun Community Garden



by Jasmine Rose Oberste & Qwiyahwultu-hw

This article was originally published on the Permaculture Institute of North America website. The project placed first in the 2021 Best Permaculture Designers contest and was awarded \$5000 towards supporting food sovereignty and action-based reconciliation work with Quw'utsun First Nations.

For years, Qwiyahwultu-hw has worked with young people around the Cowichan Valley, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, sharing Quw'utsun culture and traditions. He has also taught the Hul'q'umi'num language, led a native Garry oak and wildflower meadow restoration project, and, more recently, created a medicine wheel of painted rocks. He and I met in 2018 and soon after started working together with youth on native ecosystem restoration projects – we used a heart-centred connection to the land, plants, and animals.

Some of the students who Qwiyahwultu-hw has worked with are helping him realize a dream of creating a community garden to serve approximately thirty people living in eleven houses in the Khowhemun area of the Cowichan Tribes Reserve. As the vision unfolded, we realized it would be meaningful to create a permaculture design for the whole area that included caring for the cemetery and the small playground and helping to rebuild a sweat lodge.

Beginning this past fall, 2021, we have led a series of field trips to help clear space for the garden, measured and created garden beds, and cleared invasive ivy from the forest to build the new sweat lodge. So far, this work has brought in 7th and 8th graders from the Sunrise Waldorf School; high school students from the Grove At-Home School program; and students in their second year of teacher training at Vancouver Island University. Our intention with this work is in the spirit of Qwiyahwultu-hw's late parents, who always had an open door, and focused on building community throughout their lives.

They welcomed people from all over the world to their home and became extended family to many visitors, performing cultural adoption ceremonies to be grandparents to people from many countries. Our work together follows the Quw'utsun teaching that Qwiyahwultu-hw's parents embraced, that of Nuts'a' maat Shqwalawun – working together with one heart and one mind.



Photos submitted



Adobe stock photo

Our project included:

- Creating opportunities for action-oriented reconciliation work where students and teachers of nearby schools could be of service in support of local First Nations community
- Creating a community garden that provides the surrounding families with nutritious food and meaningful outdoor connection
- Creating a food forest that will be self-sustaining once established, and provide fruits, nuts, and berries to local families
- Caring for the playground that is now run down (rusty slide, missing swing seats) and could use some attention
- Caring for the cemetery, adding a carved arch sign from a local carver, and planting deer-resistant flowers along the perimeter
- Helping build a sweat lodge for cultural traditional practices

Local Support: Challenges and Solutions

We started off with a clear vision, but with few materials and no financial resources. As we've moved forward with trust, we have been fortunate to receive a variety of support, first with a grant for berry bushes, fruit and nut trees from Tree Eater Farm on Denman Island; a grant towards fencing through VIU; another grant from the Jane Goodall Institute supporting youth to address environmental inequity; and most recently we won the Permaculture Institute of North America's annual contest which will pay for irrigation, carving, fence posts, and more.

Our project strongly embraces all three core aspects of permaculture ethics: earth care, people care, and fair share, with an emphasis on reconciliation, intergenerational connection, food sovereignty, and care for the native wild environments of forest and river surrounding and adjacent to Khowhemun. In terms of caring for and sustaining the community garden and food forest, local professional farmer Cam of Ol' MacDonald Farm has volunteered to help plan, plant, and care for the annual vegetable garden; the Warmland Irrigation team has offered a discount on installing a water-efficient drip irrigation system. And, of course, the field trips themselves have accomplished immeasurable amounts, with many focused hands working together.

Context and Setting: Watershed and Bioregion

About 29,000 years ago, a cold, snowy climate resulted in a period of glaciers, which, when they retreated, formed the deep depression of Cowichan Lake, the channels of the Cowichan River, its tributaries, and the Cowichan Estuary. As the climate warmed, plants recolonized land. Salmon came to spawn in the Cowichan River.

The first people reached the Cowichan Valley not long after the glaciers receded. The Cascadia bioregion, also known as the Pacific Northwest, sits on the east coast of the Pacific Rim. Defined through the watersheds of the Columbia, Fraser and Snake Rivers, stretching all the way from Alaska to northern California, as far east as the Yellowstone Caldera, and for as far as the salmon swim.

Cascadia contains the largest tracts of untouched old growth temperate rainforests in the world, including seven of the top ten world's carbon absorbing forests, the world's tallest trees, thousands of volcanoes, hot springs, rivers, lakes, inlets, islands, and ocean, and some of the last diminishing, though still impressive, wild habitats of salmon, wolves, bear, whale, and orca.

Traditional Territory

Quw'utsun (Cowichan) Tribes is one of the many Coast Salish peoples of the Pacific Northwest. Traditional Quw'utsun Territory on Vancouver Island was historically 929,844 acres from beyond Lake Cowichan in the west to Cowichan Bay on the east coast of the island, across the Strait of Georgia to Vancouver and up the Fraser River Delta. It also included many of the Gulf Islands and two smaller islands now part of US territory.

"Our oral tradition states... every year we were assured great riches as the spawning salmon returned to the Cowichan, Koksilah, and other rivers and streams", says Qwiyahwultu-hw "Their capture and distribution was carefully managed by our Elders through the use of fish weirs, a gift from the First Ancestor Syalutsa. The weirs ensured abundant fish for our people to eat, while allowing enough fish to reach the spawning beds to ensure future returns.



Quw'utsun residence, Cowichan River: from an album presented to Queen Victoria by the photographer, Frederick Dally, on July 6th 1883.

“Other resources were equally managed with an eye to future abundance. Our ancestors touched the lands, rivers, and oceans in our territory lightly and with respect. We used only what nature provided, and only what we needed. Today, you can walk on ancient village sites and see little evidence of our ancestors’ presence because of this respect for the earth.”

The governments of Canada and BC took without treaty 667,184 acres, about 2/3 of Quw'utsun Territory, and gave it to the E&N Railway Company to help finance it. This was a vast section of southeastern Vancouver Island.

Today, in 2022, the total Cowichan Tribes Reserve size is: 5,903 acres, comprised of nine reserves, 0.006% of the original territory. Unlike other parts of Vancouver Island, no treaties were ever signed with the Hul'q'umi'num peoples.

Moving Forward

We plan to have more field trips before the end of the school year, and continue again in the fall when school resumes. It's our hope that this model can be recreated locally and beyond, with students helping to create food sovereignty and supporting cultural traditions of Indigenous people everywhere.

We see this model as an important step in building relationships across divides created by the history of colonialism. The model offers action-based reconciliation with a vision of equity: to create health-promoting outdoor gardens, gathering areas, and tended wild spaces where we can honour the ancestors, support direct relationships with food production and native ecosystems, provide access to nourishing food, and foster meaningful connection with each other and Mother Earth—source of food and life.



Ally Easterbrook photo

Cultural Insights in Cowichan

by Catherine J Johnson

The Intercultural Society invited Audrey George to speak to one of their intermediate English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, as the students had expressed an interest in learning about local First Nations history and culture. Audrey is a member of Cowichan Tribes and works as the Assisted Living Manager of M'akola Housing Society—she is known for her compassionate community leadership. Audrey coordinated the “Every Child Matters” march for the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on Sept. 30, 2021.

“We all have similar problems and successes,” she says. “I think it’s really important for us, our agency, and other agencies to work together... it’s important for me to build bridges within the community, sharing information.” Audrey works diligently at building bridges and relationships in the Valley. She actively networks and shares information as she did with the ESL class. Her hope is that the bridge-building she does will be carried forward.

“M'akola honours and recognizes all cultures and beliefs, very similar to the Cowichan Intercultural Society.” Audrey is hoping that local people, especially students, would like to do presentations of their cultural celebrations for M'akola residents. “Possibly things like Chinese New Year,” she says, as this would be a way of sharing and passing on traditions and knowledge.

“I thought it would be a very good idea to learn from First Nations about the whole history.”

- Ilona, Latvia

“I heard at my church from some First Nations people how much they were struggling, and I wanted to know more. New immigrants [like me] don’t know what’s going on.”

- Jack, Korea

“I understood that First Nations people are really from the land and think the land is sacred. I feel like that too and wanted to learn about the similarities and coincidences with my culture.”

- Raquel, Mexico



Audrey George



Newcomer Welcome Ceremony

by Paulina Kee

In the winter of 2022, Qwiyahwultu-hw, also known as Rob George, an elder with Cowichan Tribes, invited my employer, the Cowichan Intercultural Society, for a welcome ceremony at his family's home. His intention was to decolonize the way newcomers are welcomed to Canada. This ceremony was for the Society's clients, staff, and volunteers to be welcomed to the Cowichan Valley, Qwiyahwultu-hw's people's land, a land they have taken care of for thousands of years.

Exchanges were to take place between hosts and visitors through song, dance, words or gifts. This ritual, Qwiyahwultu-hw said, was to honour the exchange of energy between host and visitor now sharing the land. The ceremony took place on May 19, 2023. It was a very special event. Volunteers arrived to prepare the space. Tents, tables, chairs, and a sound system were set up on the grass. A beautiful arch was built and decorated with flowers and greenery. This arch now lives in Qwiyahwultu-hw's orchard where grapes and wisteria will climb.

Guests brought plenty of delicious food to share. Cloony, Qwiyahwultu-hw's sister, opened her home, formerly their parents' home, full of family history, as an area to set up and serve the food. Over 100 people attended. The George family welcomed all of us – young children to the elderly; new arrivals as recently as three weeks prior; descendants of settlers from five generations ago; refugees, permanent residents, naturalized Canadians, first generation Canadians, and temporary foreign workers.

Our hosts did not ask for any kind of eligibility. Status did not matter. Application forms, fees, wait times, tests, and sponsors played no part in this gathering. Instead, we shared a meal, and were generously gifted with songs, dances, and blessings. We held hands and prayed together. The humanity, heart, and unity of this gathering was undeniable. The family then invited us, the newcomers, by family or by individual, to approach the arch and ask permission to enter the land. When we were granted permission, we walked through the arch and members of the George family brushed us with cedar and water and offered more blessings.

Afterwards, we, the newcomers, shared our gifts, songs, and dances. These offerings came from Germany, Ireland, Scotland, and the Philippines. The George family offered even more presents! Many of them were handmade. There were bookmarks, key chains, bracelets, and even a cedar hat. We closed with another circle where Mena, the oldest sibling of the George family, said prayers and invited us all to consider the George family as our own family; to say hello when we see each other in town; to pray for one another. She encouraged us to learn about the land we now share and to take care of it. What would the world be like if we all connected this way with the people of the lands we lived on and visited? What would the future look like?



Woven cedar hat (Ally Easterbrook photo); Traditional animal hide drum (Ally Easterbrook photo); Two guests join hands as they approach the arch and prepare to enter the land. (Cameron MacDonald photo)

Contributors

Johnson, Catherine J

Catherine is a magazine journalist and co-author of *Welcoming Wildlife to the Garden: Creating Backyard and Balcony Habitats for Wildlife* (Hartley & Marks Publishers, 2004). She holds an undergraduate degree in Creative Writing, and a certificate in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL). She is a substitute ESL teacher at the Cowichan Intercultural Society where she also coordinates the English Language Mentoring program.

Kee, Paulina

Paulina is the Employment Specialist at the Cowichan Intercultural Society. She was born in what is known as Canada and is of Filipino heritage and Filipino and Chinese descent. She loves to learn about different cultures, especially regarding the traditional foods and dance, and was very honoured to be a participant in the Newcomer Welcome Ceremony.

Oberste, Jasmine Rose

Jasmine studies the health of people and the earth, through systems, patterns, and the intersection and interplay of disciplines. Her work is part-time clinical – offering integrative medicine consultation as a doctor of East Asian and Functional Medicine – and part-time land-based, designing and leading the creation of community-based regenerative agriculture projects. Jasmine works toward increasing access to holistic healthcare and supporting the development of youth and community gardens through the Three Treasures Institute in CA. She completed her Permaculture Teacher Training in Spain in 2023.

Qwiyahwultu-hw

Qwiyahwultu-hw (also known as Rob George) was born and raised in Cowichan Tribes territory. He is a father and grandfather, and he believes in connecting cultures through respect, honour in ceremonies, and circles. For many years he has worked with youth on pride of culture, in drum and dance, storytelling, sweat lodge and sports. He always turns to nature for learning, teaching, healing and understanding, bringing back ceremony with respect for water, land, air and environment.

Vance, Amanda

Amanda is the executive director of Cowichan Intercultural Society (CIS). Prior to joining CIS, Amanda was executive director of the Downtown Duncan BIA, where she coordinated bilingual Hul'q'umi'num' and English street signs in downtown Duncan. Amanda has also worked as a project manager and teaching assistant. She deeply values intercultural exchange and learning in all forms.

Resources

Blacktail Creative

www.blacktailcreative.com

Cowichan Intercultural Society

www.cowichanintercultural.org

Cowichan Tribes

<https://cowichantribes.com/>

Khowhemun Community Garden

<https://pina.in/khowhemun-community-garden/>

M'akola Housing

<https://makola.bc.ca/homes/vancouver-island/>

Royal Collection Trust

<https://www.rct.uk/collection/2368832/quwutsunnbspresidence-cowichan-river-quamichan-indian-rancherie-cowichan-river>

Sheila Fowlie, Shetland Lacemaker

<https://www.shetlandlaceshawls.co.uk/>

Stock Photography

www.stock.adobe.com

Tzinquaw Dancers

<https://www.cowichanvalleycitizen.com/news/community-mourns-tzinquaw-founder-ray-peter-sr-776253>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoVfgeLp6XU>





Where Cultures Mingle is a “living document.” We want this book to grow! Watch for upcoming calls for stories and story ideas via:

cowichanintercultural.org; Facebook; Instagram;
and in our monthly newsletter.

Please send any comments or questions to catherine@cis-iwc.org

Where Cultures Mingle

Sharing stories builds a caring community. This anthology is a means of sharing stories of the diverse groups of people and cultures in the Cowichan Valley, both historically and present-day.

By highlighting personal stories that reflect relationship and interaction between immigrant, refugee, and First Nations, this book strives to encourage a deeper understanding of our intercultural community.



COWICHAN
INTERCULTURAL
SOCIETY

IMMIGRANT
WELCOME CENTRE
OF COWICHAN

