Corporate “Solutions” for Alaska and Canadian Natives

Journal
Native Language and Education
In the Context of the Different Corporate Solutions
To Native Claims Settlement in Alaska and Western Canada

2001

Thomas A. Burns, PhD. Chiloquin, Oregon

For six weeks in the summer of 2001 Inger and I traveled to Alaska from Chiloquin, Oregon with two other couples, all utilizing campers, ours a pop-up camper [48 sq. ft.] in the bed of our 1989 Ford F250 pick-up. We remained together for the first two thirds of the trip and then returned on slightly different schedules and routes. The separate time on the return trip provided me with the opportunity to focus on the cultural issue of interest to me: how successful the two different “solutions” to native claims settlement had been in Alaska and Canada from the native point of view. Both national solutions arose relatively recently – 1970’s and 1990’s respectively – and both were responses to the failed 19th century reservation solution. The Alaska oil pipeline was the motivation for the corporate based solution for the Alaska native groups in the United States, while Canada’s 1st Nations approach took 20 more years to mature and had the advantage of observing the results of the corporate approach in Alaska. I was interested particularly in whether the result of these solutions and the independent control it returned to the American and Canadian tribes had resulted in their adopting curricula based on an experiential education approach. It was clear from my research, reading, and experience with the Narragansett of Rhode Island and the Klamath Tribes of my home territory in Oregon that on the one hand trying to create an artificial wall of isolation and attempting to educate children only in traditional language and lifestyle was not viable or sustainable in the modern setting, and that on the other hand educating native children in standard classrooms where western basic skills were focal channeled young natives into assimilation and sacrificed both the identify and the strengths of native culture. And trying to teach western skills in classrooms and subsistence knowledge and skills separately in the natural environment was both inefficient and lacked integrity. Experiential education seemed to be the best way to achieve bicultural competency in a single educational setting by training native children in subsistence ways while also deriving from these traditional hunting, gathering, and craft experiences important mathematical concepts and encouraging reading and writing skills.

Some form of true and sustainable biculturalism, or some creative fusion of western and native cultures were the only approaches I could see as viable to

address the challenge confronting native cultures. With regard to the cultural fusion option, I have thought for a very long time that the strengths of western culture [science and technology, rule of law, regulated capitalism, and democratic polity within complex social organization] could be combined with the strengths of native culture [communal values, pervasive spiritual/sacred awareness, balanced and respectful relationship in nature] to produce a culture more substantial, holistic, and productive than either one alone. Instrumental in initiating this notion of a creative cultural synthesis had been reading Jamake Highwater's The Primal Mind [1982] in which the two mindsets and worldviews of native and western cultures were presented as complementary rather than necessarily competitive and hierarchical.

In light of the long and tortured history for native cultures in the North American setting, I was well aware that both language and culture for most native groups had taken a huge hit. And, given the key role of language in promoting and sustaining the worldview of all cultures, I wondered whether either of what I saw as the two viable approaches to native education was really tenable any longer. The question was whether the 150 years of cultural "terrorism" had so diminished the tribes that they could not take advantage of the window of opportunity that had finally opened for them, if indeed the two new "solutions" to resolving native claims really allowed for this opportunity at all. I had been building impressions of what seemed to be a wide range of tribal vitality through the first two thirds of the trip. I had seen signs of both very depressed native conditions and possibly flourishing conditions.

What follow are my journal entries for my experiences with different native groups over the twelve day period from August 22 to September 2, 2001. These entries reflect my emergent thoughts as the experiences collect. I end with a summation of what I discovered. Of course, this overview report would only qualify as an opening move in suggesting a direction for more substantial research. But, allowing for both this reservation and the fact that I will not pursue the matter further, I have decided to share this "opening."

August 22 – Manley Hot Springs to Yukon River on the Dalton Hwy.
We stopped in the native Alaska village of Minto, a native Athapaskan village in the Tanana River flats area, a broad water pocked valley between the Alaska and Brooks ranges — 75 miles from the confluence of the Tanana and Yukon Rivers — 120 miles from Fairbanks on the Elliott Hwy. The Milepost – 2001 described a Minto Lodge and Arts Center, but it was necessary to "cruise" the village to locate this facility. In the course of this cruise, the village physically showed all the signs of pervasive depression.

With persistence, we located Laurie — the native director of the Minto community center. Laurie is the daughter of a Minto mother and a white father, the father long gone. She has had some schooling in Fairbanks , but she considers the village as her "home." Laurie is raising her two boys in the Minto village but tells them to get an education so they can make it in the white world — then come home. To stay in Minto according to Laurie is to be trapped and to have limited opportunities. The problem is that there are no real opportunities in Minto for educated tribal members. Those that stay are those that could not make it outside and they are "lost" - alcohol and drugs and lethargy, with a few administrators and professionals and elders trying to hold it together so the band and village can survive.

Since the Minto village moved to the highway side of the Tanana River in 1971 - in response to constant flooding problems on the flats, the Minto have come in for more contact, and they feel the pressure of the dominant western culture. The local Minto Village Corporation controls some land as does the regional Athapascan corporate consortium, but the Minto do not control their former territory on the Minto flats — the extensive system of lakes and braids of the Tanana River, which is rich in fish and wildfowl. The area is open to all to hunt and fish and is under the control of Alaska Fish and Game. Without control, the Minto people see their native residence area open to "outsiders" who use and abuse it with minimal concern for the Minto. Whites — like us, arrive in pickup campers, which tag them as problematic outsiders. No surprise that the greeting we get is cool — at best, at least at first.

All the paradoxes are here — especially with the tribe lacking control of the resources of the Minto flats. The native language is spoken by elders only, and while there is a desire for the young to learn the language, there is no substantive program to teach it in spite of the fact that the Minto control the K-12 school in their village. According to Laurie a great many of the young people are the children of dysfunctional families, and the clan will is not there yet to design a creative future for the children. Most are caught in limbo, ambivalent and without clear motivation. Elders and professionals are struggling, but the core of the band seems to be dying — slowly.

If they controlled the Minto flats, the Minto could control white access and manage the area so their economy and ecology could be sustained and their ambivalence toward whites turned to a positive orientation — licenses and guide services, tourism, etc. As it is, there is no future prospect of control of the resources of the flats, so the likelihood for improvement for the group is slim. SAD. I hope others groups elsewhere are doing better, maybe under more conducive circumstances.

It would help greatly if the Minto leaders knew what the essential principles of their traditional native culture were, but it seems that the best they can do is announce the social values of community participation and responsibility and respect for the natural world. These values contain the principles, but the spiritual underpinnings for these values seem lost with the loss of native language and spirituality. Mostly Christianized and English speaking, ritual for such native groups becomes social ceremony and sacred art becomes secular art and craft for sale. Laurie respects and participates in the various Minto potlatch rituals, but their significance now is mostly social — mostly to assert the values of social relations beyond the individual, to encourage connection to family, clan, village, and tribe.

Unfortunately, the fulfilling answer for the Minto only partly lies in better houses, schools, roads, water systems, and health and welfare services, which end up being the central concerns of most of the administrators. It is the loss of the worldview core, which gives these material things and services meaning, that is the underlying problem. The tendency of the leadership is to focus on the immediate needs of the community and trying to satisfy them — Laurie included. It is a stop-gap strategy; trying to stay alive, but all the while losing more and more of the essential culture with each generation. They may have new log houses, but much chaos and confusion surround them — all the signs of physical disarray characteristic of the depressed and dependent who lack a clear sense of identity and direction. Unfortunately, this is a picture of a people struggling and with their future in limbo.

We do not have a clue what it is like to grow up and live in this “Minto” kind of situation. At worst, we may have suffered some family dysfunction within a secure sense of racial and social and cultural identity. It is relatively easy to see beyond the immediate health and welfare needs of the Minto and identify the root problem that the Minto and their ilk face — as complex as it is. It is achieving a solution that allows the Minto to recover the basis for their essential identity and that does so while preparing them to live productively and in a balanced way within the strengths of both western and native cultures that constitutes the real challenge. Our western culture has not yet recognized the need to address its lacks and to incorporate what native culture has to offer it. We get away with ignoring our weaknesses because we dominate and control the situation, but at a fundamental level our need for change is as great as that of the Minto. The outward symptoms of imbalance are merely more obvious for the long dominated and diminished Minto.

The Minto are struggling with the same issues westerners are — just from the other end of the cultural perspective continuum and from the "dominated" position. If we look far enough into the Minto, we see through to ourselves. It all comes full circle if we follow the path far enough!

August 24 — Delta Junction to Tok

Off on the Al-Can toward Tok. The Mountains of the eastern end of the Alaska Range — Mt. Hayes brilliant snow tops in the sun. We are mostly in the clouds in the valley below — looking to 13,000 ft. from 1,300 at valley level — BIG! This is one of the major features of Alaska — the immediacy of the mountains. Except for the Yukon valley, most valleys are rather narrow and at relatively low elevation, 100-600 feet above sea level, so the mountains are both close and tall relative to our observation location at valley floor level. Very impressive!

I can only take so many miles on the Al-Can before I begin to feel too much like a road tourist — the real Alaska flying by and beneath the awesome landscape vistas. Inger reads that Dot Lake is a native village with native Athapaskan corporate headquarters, so I try Dot Lake Lodge on the highway to explore what the results have been of the Alaska native corporation alternative to the lower 48 reservation. The non-native Lodge owner gives his view : some native corporations have been productive and succeeded — others less so. In his view, Dot Lake belongs to the latter. He gives us directions to corporation headquarters, down the next dirt road and into a village that is not looking prosperous. The community center is together with the health clinic. As I depart to explore, Inger remarks, "Don't be long."

I go in the clinic to find a native nurse and her patient, Dan, with his daughter. I indicate the nature of my interest, and Dan says he can take me to talk to Bill. Dan is Chippewa from Michigan, and he tells me how anthropologists “missed” a key local native burial site — until the highway department "unearthed" it, this in spite of the natives telling them repeatedly of its presence. Dan is not impressed with anthropologists!

Off to Bill's house which backs up to the Clearwater River, and an hour plus with Bill leaning on the back of his pickup with mosquitoes buzzing all around both of us — the field worker’s test. Bill is retired Air Force security — he chose to be retired after twenty plus years in Alaska rather than be moved to the lower 48 — away from his native Athapaskan Dot Lake. Bill came back to help lead restoration efforts in 1980 after the 1971 ANCSA (Alaskan Native Claims Settlement Act) set up two layers of related corporations — one regional for each main tribal group and the other, sets of local corporations to

deal with specific village tribal matters. Bill's take, after serving for years on the boards of the regional corporation, state school collective, and tribal government at the village corporate level, “It does not work; and it is not working.” He has seen it all over the years, and he is very frustrated and disappointed.

Bill says the essential problem is that the regional corporations control the assets that came with settlement, and they must operate under Alaskan corporate law, which requires them to provide maximum economic return to their “shareholders.” Local communities/villages, especially small ones like Dot Lake — pop. 46, cannot get the regional corporations to support their needs because many of these needs at the local level are social and infrastructure in nature, and as the regional corporations are set up, they cannot address these needs because there is no “return on investment” to the regional corporation. Even economic development projects go without support [Dot Lake wants an RV Park] for the same reason. The way the ANCSA system is set up, some corporations have invested much more in the stock market than in local project development because that is where the highest return is to be achieved. This situation leaves local tribal governments, the local tribal corporations, to serve the people but having few land resource assets and little support for local native needs – of all types.

According to Bill there is a parallel catch 22 for efforts in education. Local native input is mandated in the settlement for curriculum development, but actual decisions on curriculum and the hiring and firing of teachers are made by the state. The Dot Lake School is local, but locals cannot control — or agree to control use of funds and the selection of teachers. So, native villages cannot structure education to meet what Bill recognizes to be their dual needs — proficiency in western language and technology together with training in native language, culture and subsistence competence.

Bill's view is that the structural problems of multiple layers of conflicted management could be resolved — along with local design of the school curriculum. The challenge of promoting biculturalism could be handled with good results. Bill wants to see native kids trained in science and math and English, but also trained in traditional subsistence and native cultural values. Bill's assessment of this ever happening is, "Not in my lifetime." Bill is a scruffy man in his late 50's, bright and well spoken — a real talent — trying to make things better for his community — but frustrated with the system and suspicious that the whole program was designed to achieve failure — the reservation in a different guise.

So, Congress tries again! And at least for Bill and Dot Lake it has created another monster that does not serve. Trying to protect natives from exploitation, it created so complex a structure organizationally that Bill says lawyers walked way with most of the one billion dollars funded to transition natives into "self-sufficiency." Awesome. And Bill makes no apology for his "piss it all away," drug addicted brothers who cannot face the challenges of trying. Good man — a pleasure to spend an hour and twenty minutes with - unannounced.

Remember Inger's, "Don't be long." Not a demand easily met for most anthropologist/ folklorists. Cool receptions are not just from natives, but Inger tolerates and is "converted" after I relay the gist of my discussion with Bill. The venture to the banks of the Clearwater and the back of Bill's pickup gives meaning to me for what can otherwise be a scenic whirlwind tour of Alaska surfaces.

Tomorrow to Dawson City and back into Canada — the Yukon. We will see how the Canadian First Nations solution to the native settlement challenge has fared, another even more recent attempt to address this very old issue. Did they learn anything from the results of the U.S. reservation and Alaskan corporate efforts?

August 26 — Dawson Day

For me, this is a day of huge contrasts. On opposite sides of the street – Parks Canada's three films celebrating the gold rush, and the Han-Hwech'n cultural center.

The Parks Canada films are very well done — on the rush and the miner experience and the riverboat supply system. The advance in technology from pick and shovel, to drift mine, and then to dredge [placer] mining for gold is documented. Each technological step is a geometric leap in efficiency for extracting ever more gold from the land. Unfortunately, the dredges leave huge snake like gravel mounds in their wake to cover the entire river shed bottom — placer mining. The films are all about the $250,000,000 in gold recovered as "man overcomes nature." Ah — impressive western culture! The epitome — focus on tiny flecks of gold and do anything and everything to get as much as possible without regard for anything else — total tunnel vision with science and technology to support positive economic consequences. When you are "through," just pack up and leave your mess "behind." The Parks Canada films never mention the negative environmental impacts, just the glory of the rush, the technology and the fortunes made. An excellent celebration of

the golden age of Dawson without any critical evaluation of the ecological or cultural undertow.

At the Han cultural center I meet Kim, the director, a 26-year-old great granddaughter of Chief Isaac's brother. The two brothers shared political (chief) and shaman duties. The cultural center is a symbolic structure, which incorporates the structural elements of the Han summer fish drying racks, and winter circular lodge with center smoke hole (sky light). The Han put the center together in 3 years. It is an impressive structure, presentation and displays. The entire center is intentionally low key, "You come to us — with questions" — not the "Sell ‘em" and "Wow 'em" approach of Parks Canada. The center presents the gold rush history as the beginning of tribal disintegration as the Han are displaced multiple times to accommodate the shifting interests of whites. Land taken by the crown, rivers despoiled, game hunted with abandon, and land denuded of trees — cut for wood to feed the huge appetites of the ever-larger riverboat boilers. After the gold rush came and went, the Han went through the separation of native children from their families to live in residential schools with the goal of achieving enforced assimilation. Language and culture were literally "beaten" out of this generation. The Center is gentle in its presentation, but the message is clear — the Han were screwed while whites stripped the land of its gold and resources, and then departed leaving their mess in their wake.

Tragedy vs. Celebration — just a matter of point of view and experience from different perspectives. The truth is that both versions of history are accurate, and neither deserves to be presented without the other as a counter balance. In this case, you have to cross the street and spend a little quality time with Kim to get the alternative. It is a small minority of visitors/tourists that make it across the street and pay the $5 for the native view. Very few talk with Kim long enough to discover she is more than a summer native "interpreter." Most visitors to Dawson get just the Parks Canada celebration and the "rush" of the Dawson recreation/restoration experience. How many learn that the modern town of Dawson divides at the corner where the Han Center is located, with all property beyond the Center being part of the Han corporate holdings that were secured by the tribe in the later 1990s as part of their First Nations Settlement?

Canada came late to the native reparations table — 1996. The First Nations Settlement Act returned 1000 square miles — 640,000 acres — to the Han, and another 1000 square miles were set aside as preserve where only the Han have access to the resources — but without ownership. The tribe took all land; and none can be sold. The Han selected the lands they wanted and negotiated for some significant parts of what they selected — including about 1/3 of residential

Dawson City. Imagine what a comparable situation would mean for Minto or Dot Lake in Alaska.

Kim says the Canadian version of settlement is working well for the Han. There is no corporate structural conflict comparable to the Alaskan Dot Lake Athapascan report. The local tribal groups indicate what they want through their selected local leaders and representatives, and the corporate structure above is designed to meet all reasonable requests. Cultural and social needs are recognized in an entire division of the corporation that exists to serve only these needs. The Canadian First Nations corporations are not defined in solely economic terms as in Alaska. The Han control their 1,000 square miles — locally. Han Hwech'n also own many businesses in their territory and locally in Dawson with the income and its use belonging exclusively to them. The quality of housing in the Han part of Dawson is impressive. About 360 of 980 Han live in Dawson, and while we see some native “derelicts,” most of the Han natives seem in much better shape over all — for sure. And the First Nations settlement has only been in effect for five years, though it has been in process since 1992!

I talked to Kim for about an hour after the museum presentations. Her parents are mostly subsistence, traditional Han, leaders in teaching hunting and fishing ways to the tribe's youth. Kim feels the settlement was the best they could get – land, preserve, and federal support for many services. Their focus now is on making it work!

We talked about language, and interestingly, there is a prominent video in the center which addresses the key role of language and the need for all Han to learn it. Kim indicates that all Han children are taught the native language in school from K through 8th grade, but this does not result in fluency. We talked about the need for the early language and culture immersion experience — Kim knows about this option.

In light of the Han Hwech'n's effective negotiation through their recent settlement history, it would seem that they have a reasonable chance to remain viable as a native culture. They control resources and can direct funds to their priorities, and they benefit from federal services and Chief Isaac's range of local and regional businesses. Since 1992, when the Settlement process began, the Han in Dawson have achieved a great deal. If they can solve the language acquisition issue for their children, Kim thinks they can design a way to live in both worlds. I agree. The super culture that is possible takes the best of western and native cultures and requires each to illuminate the other. Kim agrees, and though she recognizes the need and benefit of western science

and math and law and technology, her emphasis personally is more on the traditional native component. Kim has ambitions to go to college and First Nations will pay her way, but she has spent the last 8 years working for First Nations and participating in the settlement and the transition of the Han under that settlement. She may well not make it to college, but we talk about how she might structure her higher educational experience to get what she wants and not be overwhelmed by the "western" structure of the classroom and book based learning.

Kim is a fine person with the best interests of the Han at heart. She understands the whole and the relevance of the spirit and the sacred in it. She says the Han were totally puzzled by the fascination of the white man with gold and their willingness to disrespect and abuse "all" to get it. Kim is bitter about the past and the losses her people have suffered, but she is positive and looking to the future and working creatively to "make it work." That is the combination that can be successful, and the support structure seems to be there from the federal government to assist, not diminish her effort. Great! Nice to see a native settlement "solution" that has a chance of succeeding. This is my first really positive read on the native settlement issue. Super! Maybe, after so many abuses and blunders, First Nations shows the positive way forward, at least for the scraps of native culture that have survived.

August 27 - Stewart Crossing to Whitehorse

We head south on the Klondike Loop and stop in Carmacks at the Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation Northern Tutchone Interpretive Center on the Yukon River. The center is a ways off the highway and manned by one woman, Ceshea'. There is little visitation — 3 others in the two hours we were there. As with other visitors, Ceshea' welcomes us, but does not lead — waits for inquiries. Other visitors look around at the good set of exhibits and leave. The Center is the result of local work and First Nation settlement money. Ceshea' is an active tribal member and a native speaker, whose English is good but clearly secondary. In Ceshea's case native language primacy comes from being raised as a young girl by her grandmother. Conditional statements and complex tenses in English are not easy for her; these complexities probably do not correlate well with the grammar of her native language.

Ceshea' confirms for her tribe Kim's earlier assessment of the success of the First Nation settlement in Canada: it is working and she is hopeful. Ceshea' is active teaching the language to adults and preschoolers, and she is getting her diploma (GED) so she can teach in the schools. While we are talking, a radio news broadcast, which is on in the exhibits, indicates that a new program has just emerged to address the needs identified by First Nation peoples for

changes in the standard education curriculum. Ceshea' says education should be split — half subsistence/experiential/native language, half-western classroom — English. If done right, Ceshea' thinks her people could be educated to live in both worlds. Ceshea' is working toward this goal. One such curriculum exists for one group, Ceshea' suggests.

Ceshea's personal story is most interesting. She is now in her sixties, and she lived through the time when she was raised traditionally with the native language. Then came the period of 6 years of separation in a residential school where Ceshea' was taught that the worst thing she could be called was "Indian." She remembers that during this time she never wanted to be an Indian. All of her native language, belief and worldview was denigrated in the residence school context. In spite of her strong traditional experience in her own family, Ceshea' was of an age where she took the anti-Indian attitudes promoted in school to heart and well into adulthood. One result was that she only taught her children — all five girls – English. They learned some subsistence, but Ceshea says the focus of the period from the ‘50s to the ‘70s was for native people to get a good western education and a good job and assimilate. All five of Ceshea's girls are currently doing well, but now Ceshea' regrets her own children's loss of the native language and many of the details of traditional subsistence life. She is trying to make up for this loss with her grandchildren, teaching them the language and traditional ways. One daughter is in law school in Vancouver and wants to become a judge, but for all her accomplishments, Ceshea regrets that this daughter is not as grounded in native ways as Ceshea' would like her to be.

The turnaround in attitude toward native culture began in the ‘70's and matured in the ‘90s with the First Nations settlements. Now, Ceshea' can see a future with youth growing up — competent in both worlds. But she says few are fluent in speaking the native language; mostly they just know the lexicon. There are some intensive summer language and culture programs, and if the new curriculum allows what Ceshea' wants, fluency may really be an attainable goal for young people. Clearly the hope is there and Ceshea' is actively working to make it come about. She is pursuing her own teaching and education after 20 years raising her own five children and caring for her paralyzed husband. Her husband died in 1997, and Ceshea' has emerged since then in her own right. Her youngest daughter just left home this last year — the one she watched over and who studied all the time. Now Ceshea' is on her own and very involved in her community's reemergence under First Nations structure.

The craft shop in the Tutchone Center was shut down for lack of business —

moved to the Five Fingers area 7 miles up the road where the tourist traffic is better. Ceshea' says it will take some "aggressive" marketing, but plans are in the works for First Nations to revitalize a trading post next door to the Center and set up an RV park and motel. The craft shop will return with this development. This is the kind of economic development support at the local community level that Bill wants in Dot Lake and Laurie needs in Minto but that neither can get his Alaska corporation to support.

On the road again, Inger and I talk about Native issues — how to understand the lethargy among natives as perceived by whites. There are many causes, but there is an interesting parallel between native experience in history and the rituals of identity reconstruction — as in the military. These identity rituals first tear down the existing identity, then rebuild it in terms of what is desired. Native cultures have been through this process – long term. Historically the tribes have been broken down with a series of debilitating hits. First, a succession of diseases reduced populations by as much as 90% - with loss of leadership and severe stress on social structure and cultural continuity. Then came the missionaries to expunge native spiritual belief and to Christianize the heathens — substituting the individualistic Christian religion for native spiritualism, which supported the social structure and tied native identity to the community and the integrity of the natural world. Then with full on contact, there was the loss of land and loss of control over resources, governance and lifecycle activities – giving rise to all the problems of dependency in the U.S. reservation system. In the 1950's with the reservation system not working, conservatives pressed for enforced assimilation which resulted in native children being ripped from their families and communities and put in residency schools where native culture and language was systematically shunned and beaten out of most of them. The result was a generation adrift, not knowing who they were with many losing themselves to drugs and alcohol. The task of sustaining native culture fell to a generation of grandparents, many of whom had to bridge across their own children to raise and teach their grandchildren the language and culture of their tribes.

The combination of these experiences over time would be enough to break most individuals, and paralyze most groups! It is a wonder the tribes survived to see the 1970 - 2000 period of renewed respect for multiculturalism, reinstatement of assistance and the return of some lands and control over resources and governance. Enough native individuals and tribes persisted through it all to make a restoration movement possible — if challenging and very difficult. No wonder the current difficult path to reclaiming vitality is entertained with a lot of hope. The present sure looks better than the prior century! It seems that many will survive; the question is how many will make it

to a really empowered form of biculturalism. Not many from what I have seen so far in the northern environs. Western culture needs to keep this thorn in its side.

August 29 — Skagway to Haines and back, then on to Johnson's Crossing

We are now at the top of the southeastern inland waterway of Alaska at Skagway. We take the fast Ferry to Haines, and during the trip a native guide gives an effective interpretive presentation of Kluckwan Tlingit native culture. At the end he mentions that he is the headman for the Raven clan and the clan spokesman. I wait to be the last to get off the ferry and talk briefly to him. He is on duty until 1:00 p.m., then off for 1 1/2 hours. He is Ray Dennis and he says we can talk during his break. He gives me his business card and then is off to prepare for the next ferry trip.

From 9 am. to 1 p.m., Inger and I explore Haines on foot . We stop at the Seward Fort where the Totem Art center is located in the old hospital. There is a nice craft display and sale area where I find the center coordinator to talk to. The regional Tlingit corporation owns the center, and it is the master totem carvers from the Chilkat and Chilkoot tribes who are doing great work at $1,000/ft. There is an apprentice program to train young tribal members in the craft, which clearly can be quite lucrative, but I am told that the center cannot recruit native trainees. The regular financial distributions to young people from their tribes are so generous that there are few young men willing to put in the time and effort to apprentice with the elder master carvers — even for pay. Some families have done so well through settlement that the young do not need to work. They just hang out and "piss it off."

I talk to Tresham Gregg who is a workaholic/alcoholic and a very talented artist in many media — graphic and plastic. Gregg is from the non-native family that owns much of the old fort. He runs a gift shop in the buildings that are in the center of the Fort parade ground, and he also operates the salmon bake concession in the area. All of his art work is derived from and a celebration of native northwest coast motifs. Gregg started Chilkat Dancers many years ago and has been an important force in preserving native art and craft for most of his life. Now he says the tribes want to take over and push him and his family out. Gregg and the tribes are caught in a tough spot now as both the regional tribal corporation and the individual tribes have flourished and become powers to be reckoned with, especially since settlement and the vastly expanded, cruise oriented, tourist economy. It is troubling to discover the conflict that a long time native supporter like Gregg finds himself in presently. It is entirely possible for the once disenfranchised natives to become powerful and lose a sense of restraint. It seems there is truth for Everyone – white and native – in

the adage: “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

There is a lot of "native inspired" art in Alaska — by natives and non-natives, and Gregg’s work is in the top echelon, in my view. The best of this native inspired art is more interesting from my perspective than the more regimented and replicative native forms; it is more fluid and kinetic and graceful.

In downtown Haines, I talk to a native art and craft shop owner. She relays that it has been a tough year since the large tour/cruise boats ceased stopping in Haines because of protests that made the tour passengers feel unwelcome. The protestors are environmentalists talking about the harm caused to marine life by the ships. This native shop owner has had to let five assistants go and now runs the shop herself — alone. In addition, her husband has had to leave to get work elsewhere. She says just a few rich newcomers have caused the problems — trust fund kids and early retirees who want the area all to themselves.

It is 1 p.m. and I talk with Ray Dennis over lunch in the noisy Bamboo Curtain restaurant in downtown Haines. Ray confirms the view of the native craft shop owner. He says a lot of people in Haines are suffering this year — tribes included — because of the drastic tourism loss. Ray indicates that native people depend on the sea more than anyone else and have always been especially sensitive to the area ecology. He indicates that any damage to the sea is the result of past, not current, tour ship practices. Moreover, Ray claims that paid outsiders were brought in by the Sierra Club to protest at the tour ship docks. He says, unfortunately locals were too slow to respond and to stage an effective counter demonstration — before the sensitive tour boat companies decided to bypass Haines and stop only in Skagway, where they are welcomed with open arms. Locals are trying to make it through the year and renegotiate with the tour companies — now with strong local involvement and support.

No doubt there is truth on both sides – just look at the tourism take over of Skagway with streets lined with shop after shop selling highly inflated native art on the one hand and “native” souvenirs made in China on the other. The effects of unrestrained tourism are not pretty, but neither are communities caught in the circumstances of economic depression. As always: it is so easy to lose Balance and Respect on one side or the other in this equation.

In general, Ray says the Alaska settlement solution is working for the tribes of southeastern Alaska. SeaAlaska, the southeast regional native corporation, is sensitive to local needs and even has a separate language and culture division

to promote social/cultural development. Ray indicates that the local Kluckwan corporation, of which he is a part, is a major force in the Haines area, owning several businesses including the Fast Ferry line between Skagway and Haines which amounts to five boats carrying 125 passengers each — no small capital investment. Ray's main criticism of the 1971 settlement act is in terms of the very limited land returned to the tribes and the fact that most of the land that was returned was marginal land. Ray says in the early '70's with the rush to get the oil pipeline through, the tribes were told to settle for what had been negotiated or likely face getting nothing. Now the tribes find themselves stuck with limited and lesser lands, but they are trying to add to what they have with additional claims on federally owned properties. Ray does not think that these claims will produce much since in Alaska there were no treaties with natives, no reservations; the natives were just "over run." So, in 1970 with the pipeline to be constructed and the requirement in the law for natives to be consulted, it was finally necessary for the native issue to be addressed. Overall, Ray says that native tribes got 12% of Alaska — a lot of acres by other standards, but not by Alaska standards. And it is all a matter of which acres you get, and few of the prime acres in which whites had an interest were returned!

Ray, who is in his late 30s, has an interesting personal story. His parents were taken to residential schools and went through the cultural shaming and language beating process, but his grandparents were strong traditionalists and his parents rebelled. They raised Ray in the traditional way, with exclusive use of the native language. But when Ray entered school, he was so intensely shamed by other native children for his native accent that he finally, consciously, determined to totally deny/block his native language and become a Standard English speaker. And he has! But his problem now is that he cannot break through the block that he put in place with such intensity as a young man, and to this day he cannot speak his native language. He understands native speakers perfectly and is even aware of the mistakes that are often made, but so far Ray has not been able to speak himself. So, somewhat akin to Ceshea' among the Tutchone, Ray denied the native language in himself as a young man and has carried the burden of this decision forward into adulthood. He wants to retrieve native speech, but it is difficult because he must be willing to make mistakes "publicly" to do it. But as the young headman and spokesman for his Raven clan, Ray feels it is risky to be seen as anything other than fully competent. Still, he knows he has to find a way.

In Ray's traditional Kluckwan village, they decided to integrate the Tlingit language into all of the school curriculum, in spite of the "English First" law in Alaska. In other local schools the native language is extra — but at least it is offered. Ray recognizes the importance of the native language in the tribes'

restoration. His view on language and other cultural aspects is that he must do all he can with all those who are willing to preserve as much as he can, but in the process it is inevitable that some things will be lost. In Ray's view, it will take 2-3 generations to bring the tribe back, and everyone must have patience!

Native language centered, subsistence education with a strong English, math and science component is what Ray wants to see instituted comprehensively for native people. He is committed to the fact that his people must be able to operate in both worlds. We talk about experiential education as a way to design a field oriented curriculum where the field experience can be used to teach both subsistence and science and math concepts and literary skills. Otherwise education is split between field (native) and classroom (western) and the suggestion inherent in that approach is that the two worlds and perspectives cannot be unified. Ray is very interested in exploring this option.

Ray is trained as a master eyeglass technician. He is not an optician; Ray is the one that actually runs the machines that make the lenses in the automated world of eyeglass production. Ray says he gave up a very lucrative future in the white man's world in Anchorage to return to become headman of his Raven clan house; but he says the future of his clan and tribe is at the core of his heart. He has returned only after obtaining a written commitment from the clan elders, legitimizing him as the selected headman. Ray indicates that one thing he has learned from his experiences among both whites and native people is to avoid the uncertainty of oral, "consensus" commitments. Two years back from his optical work in Anchorage, Ray says being a good headman is a tough job, but he is committed. Ray has a very strong communal sense and takes his hereditary responsibility very seriously — to guard the tribe's rights and traditions. Ray is no CEO with an eye to a huge salary, bonus and benefits package!

As our time concludes, Ray and I both discover that both of us are in trouble with our wives; he forgot to attend a funeral, I failed to locate Inger to be part of our talk. We part, and it is very clear to me that Ray is a truly quality person. I can't imagine the joy that will descend in his life when his native language speaking competency reemerges; this event will make him whole again and retrieve the denied but highly valued essential behavior that most identifies him as a native of his tribe, clan and house. When it happens, Ray will fully model what it is to be truly accomplished in both the native and western worlds.

We take the late afternoon ferry back to Skagway. A long day, but good to discover a Native American Alaskan option that is working. Ray says 2 to 3 of the regional native corporations have got it together. Another 9 or 10 are in

lesser states for various reasons: the conflict with local village needs, the quality and value of the returned resources, the area where the returned resources are located relative to economic developmental options, and the extent of white contact and interest in, as well as access to these native resources.

This is it for Alaska. We return for the rest of the trip in Canada, mostly on the Cassiar Highway.

August 30 — Al-Can Highway south to Teslin, on to Liard, and south on Cassiar Hwy.

After a late start, we stop at the First Nations Inland Tlingit Heritage Center outside Teslin, which just opened in June, 2001. This is a 2.3 million-dollar center with beautiful new, carved totem clan figures at the entrance. This facility was paid for from the tribe's [referred to as a council] interest on their settlement trust fund. It is a beautiful wood building, architect designed to reflect native symbolics. They have made a good start on the display area with a succinct history of the tribe. This branch of the Tlingit moved inland from the coast to supply the fur trade. The result has been that the tribe has combined coastal and inland Athapaskan cultural traditions — land/water. However, at this point the clan totems are all terrestrial — eagle, raven, bear, frog, beaver. Being inland, the inland symbols have prevailed.

Delores is a center interpreter, council member, and mother in her 30s. Inger makes this contact which proceeds with Delores taking Inger down the hall to show her the embroidered garments she is helping her nieces from Vancouver to create. I follow. Delores' first language was native, then her mother and grandmother died and in her school experience she lost it. She still understands and recognizes the importance of the native language. She says the language is being taught in the local schools along with traditional ways in classes that are open to whites under special honorary clan status.

Delores indicates that the Inland Tlingit are one of the more successful of First Nations in the Yukon. Their leaders serve as consultants for other native groups who are not doing as well. They are helping these other native groups learn the process of planning and creating organizational structure and accounting that allows them to get where they want to go and still accommodate the expectations of the government that is defined by western culture. Delores focuses on the role of elders in the tribe's success. These leaders were very strong and determined during settlement, and they knew how to back up their claims with documents. As a result, their council got much of the land it claimed. But Delores indicates that elders can also be a

source of inertia. It took 20 years to get the center approved, and the totems out front were one of the issues. Some elders were not sure these icons should be shared with outsiders. So elders are not an unmitigated benefit — as Ray also said. But the underlying principle in both cases is commitment to communal consensus and respect for ancestors and elders as the overseers of traditions. The emphasis is on identity in the clan, the homeland; that is who you are — not being a lawyer in Vancouver. One of Delores' nieces is becoming a lawyer and the plan is that she will return to the council to replace the current white Whitehorse lawyer. The tribe is looking to accomplish this with all occupations and roles — plumbers, electricians, etc.

Delores wants education to be ½ native language and tradition, ½ western — English, math, and science. She sees these as separate. I suggest that experiential education can unify them. It is not clear she understands what this curriculum option is really about. But within her pride in promoting the traditions of her tribe, Delores clearly sees the need to instruct native children to be competent in both native and western culture skills.

Delores confirms that the First Nations path in Canada is working. The native local tribe [council] controls its own resources, and the decisions are local to approve projects. She is very positive about the council's future — as is the museum display. The presentation cites the abuses of whites, but does not focus on them.

<u>September 2 - `Ksan Village in Hazelton, B.C. and on to Prince George</u>
From 10 am. to 3 p.m. - vastly longer than planned - we spend at `Ksan village. Inger and I arrive early with no other visitors in the museum. We purchase the village tour tickets and are extremely fortunate to have Dan, a center interpreter, present us with a private tour through the village - totems and houses. Dan provides a great deal of ethnographic detail. In the 1970's when the village reconstruction had just been completed at the instigation of Dan's grandmother, tours were four hours at the site and then another two to four hours at a village site upriver! Now they are an hour at the one site. Clearly there is a "grand" tour option for those really interested! But we have already "lingered" on this trip. We will keep the possibility in mind for another time in a trip focused on southeastern Alaska and southwestern British Columbia!

`Ksan is a reconstructed traditional Gitsan village, which opened in 1970. From early on it had an associated RV park, where we stayed last night, next to the Skeena River. The Gitsan Village now includes a museum/gift shop, wood carvers' house, arts and crafts house, cafè/video house, and three clan

houses displaying residential, potlatch, and seasonal "artifact/activity" set-ups. In the museum structure is a superb art and craft shop, which Laurel Mould, the center Manager, has developed over the last seven years - all northwest native crafts and art. And all the offerings are at reasonable prices. This complex shows what can be done with time, effort and vision.

Dan is 18 years old and was raised by his grandmother. He is a very rare, young, native person, who is entirely fluent in English as well as in both the traditional native Gitsan language and the vernacular native Gitsan. Dan says the traditional native language is so different that vernacular native language speakers cannot understand it. Dan just finished high school and is in line to become headman of the wolf house/clan, in part because he is so well versed in traditional language and culture from his grandmother. It is a real plus for all the interpreters that Laurel requires all of them to use the museum's archives and books on Gitsan to learn all they can in their spare time. Dan is very mature for 18 and aspires to degrees in computer science. He is clearly capable of doing anything he sets his mind to, but he is afraid he may be called as the wolf clan chief before he has a chance to attain his personal goals, which he also sees as important for his clan and the Gitsan tribe. He emphasizes the huge responsibility and demand for time and effort that accompanies being a clan house headman.

Dan says that 1958 was the break point for all native cultures in Canada. Earlier there was severe suppression by the government of native culture, but in spite of this pressure, committed tribal members continued to practice Gitsan traditions in secret. The government burned villages, removed totems, outlawed potlatches, and separated children from families and sent them to residential schools where they were beaten if they spoke their native language. Finally, in 1958 the law officially authorizing native cultural suppression was repealed. Since that time, the tribes have seen steady improvement in relations with the provincial government, but there remains active prejudice and reluctance to fully recognize area natives, especially in Lower B.C.

Dan indicates that the suppression and treatment of natives was worse in the Gitsan area than in the areas to the north because the resources of the local native groups included much desirable farm and timber land, which the whites wanted. This was not the case for groups in the permafrost zone to the north, just 70-100 miles north of `Ksan. It is notable with the change coming south from boreal into the temperate zone that western white settlement grows exponentially. According to Dan, Lower B.C. natives had it much tougher than did those in the Yukon. The B.C. government, working with law enforcement, attorneys, and economic interests, combined to actively pursue a policy of

native suppression from 1920-1950.

When we arrive back from the village tour, Dan arranges to open an exhibit upstairs in the museum for me to look at while he is conducting his next tour. This exhibit is not open to the general public and it is a privilege to experience it in this inner sanctum of the ‘Ksan facility. It is a devastating exhibit detailing the history of the abuse suffered at the hands of whites by one Gitsan extended family. The natives of the area did not oppose whites, and embraced much of white culture, but natives who tried to farm on tribal land that whites wanted were subjected to all kinds of "special" treatment to take their land away from them. This exhibit documents the story of one native family whose farmstead was burned and taken over by whites when the native family left for the annual salmon fishing, thereby inadvertently providing the whites with the opportunity to declare their farm "abandoned." After a lengthy battle in court over many years, in 1996, a B.C. Supreme Court justice wrote the opinion upholding the white take over of the native family's property. His opinion is so laced with demeaning racial stereotypes it is astonishing, and this in 1996!!! This Justice actually references in his written opinion 18th century authors on the “brutish" nature of the cultures of the “unwashed.” This in a recent, published, Provincial high court decision – representing the position of the court as a whole!! The exhibit is an exposé of the treatment of the native "owners" over the years by a non-native photo journalist — also available as a book. In modern times, this story reveals official B.C.’s decent into native holocaust territory. It will be interesting to see what the ultimate consequences of the exposé are, but for sure the events reveal that the dominant white culture is still actively doing its dirty work, right up to the top of the legal system. Of course there are always two sides to any story, but this exhibit is so potentially explosive and revealing, it is no wonder that it is housed in a separate area and made available to only a select few.

I talk to Dan and Laurel through the day, as they are available. When one is busy, I am able to locate the other most of the time. Both are very committed to see the Gitsan culture and language revitalized, but both realize the very difficult task that lies before the tribe to realize this dream. Laurel describes the negative conditions that they have to fight — alcohol and drugs, depression and suicide. Dan talks about this but stresses the number of his friends who are coming to him to learn the language and the extent of the teaching of native language and culture in the schools. Gitsan children are 70% of the school population and the tribe has a much greater influence on the local school curriculum than seems to be the case elsewhere. There are now

eight Gitsan villages in the area, three of these revitalized since the 1960’s

after being lost to disease in the early contact period of the 19th century.

It is a fascinating challenge to answer the question of how cultures like the Gitsan managed to survive their century long history of debilitation and active suppression by the dominant western culture. One important reason is the communal nature of these native societies. In this communal framework, commitment is to clan and clan structure, and individual identity has meaning only in this context. Whatever the individual's independent merits, he or she has no real identity separate from the identity of the clan or tribe to which he or she belongs. Traditionally this is reflected in the warrior code — all must be willing to die to protect the clan chief, or be killed afterward if chief is killed and the warrior survives! The rule is: to the death for the survival of the clan and village. With identity so fundamentally tied to the group, if only a few members of the group survive, the clan continues to exist. So, while individuals may be lost — indeed many, like the anthill or beehive the clan survives if the queen remains protected, or another queen can emerge. The clan may be significantly diminished in vitality, but it can persist if a few individuals with the mindset of identity defined by the group can sustain.

In this regard, we can look at other cultures where there is a similar emphasis on group or family identity rather than individual identity – many Asian cultures. In these cultures individual identity is subservient to family identity, a fact that is reflected even in how individuals are named. "Wu Y-djen" is Inger's name in Chinese. It is the last name, the family name, that comes first. Only once this family name is declared does the individual name have "meaning." The family context has priority in identity. Modem western culture, with its emphasis on the individual, does not understand the strength that lies in communal identity. The Gitsan exemplify how clans, communities and tribes can persist if but a few communally identified individuals survive to perpetuate the "idea" of the group.

So, the big question: why bother to sustain traditional native cultures? In a world that is slowly unifying and headed in the direction of becoming a single organism, why try to sustain diversity? In the ideal sense, there is no reason because all diversity will be lost eventually — if a unified world culture does emerge. But in the pragmatic sense, even if social and cultural unification does occur, what that world culture will look like is still up for grabs. And until it is determined, I suggest that native culture has too much to offer to this potential "Super" culture. To give up on cultural diversity before humankind can consolidate the best that all cultures have to offer is to lose the full array of potential inputs that need to be considered. Western culture has great strengths [law, science, technology, democracy, secular humanism, regulated

capitalism], but it also has great weaknesses. And interestingly, the areas of Western weakness are the areas of strength in native culture [community, spirituality, connection to and respect for the whole of nature]. The fact is that Western culture needs native culture although it does not realize it — yet. So, I say, “Hang in there Gitsan Tsimshian, and Inland, Kluckwan and Chilkat Tlingit, and Han Hwech’n, and Tutchone, Dot Lake and Minto Athapaskan. Even though your culture will likely to be lost in the final unification, some of your cultural principles may survive to be an important part of the unified, cultural whole that arises.” That, in the ultimate sense, is the reason that I think that the Gitsan struggle to survive, and similar struggles worldwide, deserves our respect and support. Whatever we admire about native groups and their art and culture, the justification for supporting their continuation at the highest level lies in our own recognition of our need for cultural humility and our awareness that the evolution of the "best" unified culture will occur if it draws on the "best" elements from all human cultural "experiments," western and non-western. We need to retain cultural diversity now precisely because we are not there yet and there is much to be winnowed out before we do get there.

And it must also be said that if humans are not a species destined to achieve Gaia level unification, and if instead civilization disintegrates and humans return to tribal conditions, then humans will need all the cultural diversity they can muster to continue to survive in the varied ecological niches of the world. So, our present cultural diversity serves to insure our future whichever path cultural development takes.

Overall Evaluation

As a whole, our trip through western Canada to Alaska and back was a wonderful experience, well worth the expense and effort. I was extraordinarily fortunate to encounter excellent native representatives at virtually every stop during my exploration of the results of the two different, more modem solutions to the native settlement challenge that have been developed in Alaska in the 1970’s and in Canada in the 1990’s. Although I was totally unannounced, these native representatives and spokespersons proved willing to spend a good deal of time with me and to openly share their views and experiences. I am very grateful for the privilege of their generosity.

What I learned. In general, the Canadian First Nation option seems to be set up to avoid some of the "corporate" problems of the Alaskan solution with more consistent examples of groups that felt the settlement approach was working. Among groups in Alaska, the only place where the corporate arrangement was

said to be working well was Sea Alaska in the Southeast — also the most prosperous area economically.

My other points of interest with native culture were the retention of the native language and the extent to which the curriculum in education included native language and culture and took advantage of the experiential approach to education. In general, I found, as expected, that fluency in the native language by the young correlates directly with the vitality of the culture. And in most of the native groups that I contacted few of the young are fluent in the native tongue. Different local tribal groups are more or less aware and active in trying to address their language loss. Those groups that have the greatest awareness and activity to restore the language seem destined to have the best chance to achieve restoration. No group has implemented a full experiential education curriculum, but a few are aware of the option. For me, getting this kind of curriculum in place — and quickly — is essential to native cultural survival and viability as well as achieving in an efficient way the bicultural goal to which all aspire.

Presently, almost universally, the tribes recognize the positive aspects of Western Culture and the need for their members to be truly bicultural. They are on the cusp of making what can be “One Giant Leap for Mankind.” If they could grasp the underlying principles of native and western approaches to natural and social reality and place their emphasis on developing ways of embedding these combined principles in a unified manner in their members, they could develop and demonstrate a model for a truly integrated and holistic world culture. If in pursuing this embedding goal, they employed an integrated curriculum based on experiential education, they could model both a unified culture and how to inculcate and perpetuate it. In the process they could avoid getting bogged down in struggling to perpetuate the details of each group's specific traditions [e.g. these colors in this season go with these designs for this artifact for this clan] while failing to transmit basic principles [the seeing the woods for the trees problem].

Short of recognizing, pursuing, implementing and achieving this cultural unification ideal, which being betwixt and between the native tribes are ironically closer to being able to do than their dominant cultural brethren, the best we can do is to support continued cultural diversity in the hope that one day some “enlightened” humans will draw upon the positive aspects of native cultures in reaching for the best possible consolidation of world culture.