

Our Home, Our Food, Our Resilience



A CITIZEN SCIENCE AND PHOTOVOICE FOOD ASSET PROJECT

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PHOTOVOICE FOOD ASSET PROJECT



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In collaboration with Kitselas Lands and Resources



FOOD
SYSTEMS
LAB



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was led by the Food Systems Lab, a research and innovation hub at Simon Fraser University that works on solutions for equitable collaboration to support sustainable and just food systems. We gratefully acknowledge that the Food Systems Lab at Simon Fraser University exists on the traditional, unceded, and ancestral Coast Salish Territory; the traditional territories of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and Səlílwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. The region is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in the community, and on this territory.

The Food Systems Lab team is deeply grateful to the citizen scientists who generously shared their photos and stories as part of this participatory research project. We are also deeply appreciative of Dr. Clifford Atleo (Kam'ayaam/Chachim'multhnii) whose research collaboration and support was integral to this project. We would also like to thank our research assistant Samantha Jung, who was integral to interviews, transcriptions, and other aspects of the project. This project was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council New Frontiers in Research Fund.

FOREWORD

Western science and Eurocentric approaches to land use planning often fail to recognize culturally and ecologically important food infrastructures as key to Indigenous peoples' well-being and community food security. The resulting impacts of colonialism on communities, particularly Indigenous communities, have been, and continues to be, devastating. The loss of language, knowledge, intergenerational trauma, food insecurity, and poor health outcomes are directly related to unjust policies and regulations. Informed with this context, our team at the Food Systems Lab started with the intention of centring the voices

and knowledge of Indigenous peoples around the issue of Indigenous food sovereignty in food system planning.

It is within this context that we (The Simon Fraser University's Food Systems Lab Team) are truly fortunate to have had the opportunity to partner with the Kitselas First Nation Lands and Resources Department and Dr. Chelsey Geralda Armstrong on the "Our Home, Our Food, Our Resilience Photovoice Food Asset Project" funded by the Social Science Humanities Research Council New Frontiers grant. It is through this partnership that we seek to ensure that the voices of Indigenous peoples are included in the field of food system planning, particularly in how food assets are defined and what food assets are identified. Food assets, commonly referred to as the local food infrastructure that maintains food-secure communities and region have thus far included infrastructures such as grocery stores, community gardens, food programming centres and more. However, it is often unclear who gets to make decisions



around what should be included and whether or not the current definitions of food assets have taken into account the diversity of voices, lived experiences, and most importantly the colonial context (in the case of Canada and Kitselas Nation in particular).

This photobook leverages the voices and lived experience of residents residing in Kitselas lahkhyuup (territory), which surrounds the City of Terrace and encompasses the bulk of the Mid-to-Lower Skeena River. We sought to embark on a journey to support citizen scientists in identifying important places, knowledge, and meaning that shapes everyday food practices for those who live, eat, work, and



play in Kitselas Nation. The 6 citizen scientists generously shared their perspectives and insights through photovoice, a method of merging photography with storytelling. This work seeks to support a call for more investment for food-related infrastructures (programming, funding etc.) needed by the community, and recognition of

cultural keystone species that are key to the community's survival and well-being.

The photos and stories in this book are a reminder that there are layers of meaning embedded in food, some bringing wonderful memories of harvesting, traditional practices, and celebrations, while others a reminder of hardship

and trauma. Food assets also go beyond infrastructure alone. As you will see throughout the pages, culture and tradition are weaved throughout the presentation of photos and text.

The citizen scientists in this project bring an important perspective on key food barriers but also offer pathways towards stronger and more resilient food systems for the Nation. They candidly share emotions, teachings, family and cultural ties, life-long learning, and hopes and aspirations for how we can stretch beyond our current industrialized food systems to support a decolonized, sustainable, and just food system for all.

Food Systems Lab

(Simon Fraser University)

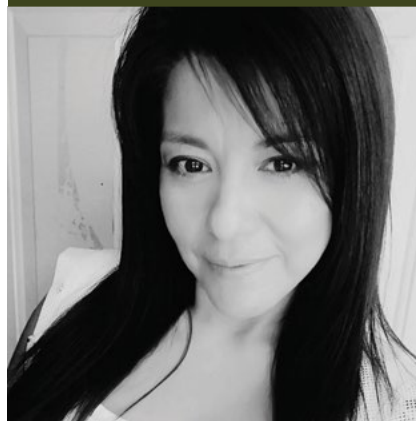
OUR VOICES:

Desiree Bolton



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Desiree Bolton

Desiree Bolton lived her younger years in Hartley Bay and Old Masset BC. Her family moved to Terrace BC in 1991 and shortly after became members of Kitselas Nation.

Through the years Desiree has worked in a few different fields of work from social service, early childhood education and barista just to name a few.

Working in the environmental field was always an interest to Desiree and it took a few years to get into this field of work. Currently working as an Environmental Field Technician (with Wai Wah Environmental) has been truly an honor and privilege as most of the field work is on the Traditional Territory of Kitselas Nation.





These are blueberries and salmon berries that grow within our territory. They make me think of being a little kid and stopping wherever to pick and eat the berries. That was one of our snacks we used to eat.

These were probably from a field day for work. I saw them and had to stop and pick some.

When we would be getting to be a little too much, our parents would ask us to go pick berries to help occupy our time.

My parents and grandparents would make pies and freeze them... What we used to do even if there wasn't a feast, we would mix the berries ... with oolichan grease and a tiny bit of sugar and that was one of our desserts.



Those are bunch berries.

I don't know how familiar Kitselas members are with bunch berries and that you can actually eat them. When we were in field school, I showed everyone that you could eat them, and they're like 'no, you can't eat them.' And I said, 'yeah, you can eat them.'...

Bunch berries grow pretty much anywhere... I found these berries while hiking around, checking out some areas for work... It's different when you see it on a map compared to when you actually go out and see where your territory is... I'd like more Kitselas members to be aware. I guarantee that probably the older of our generation... know what they can and what they can't eat. I don't think the younger generation realizes that.





k'alaams

Rosa nutkana (Wild rose, rosehips)

K'alaams was traditionally used as food – hips (round red bulbs) can be eaten in fall but make sure to remove seeds. Pink leaves are also edible and some Tsimshian groups picked and ate tender young shoots in the spring. Today it is used in tea (leaves or hips for numerous vitamins) and the hips can be infused for a salve. The salve protects against skin aging and sun damage.

I'd always been interested in learning our traditional medicine. What started that journey was that I got eczema on my hands from one of the workplaces... When it started it was all over my hands. I was looking for hand lotion that had no alcohol in it because alcohol makes it even drier and makes it even itchier. So, I tried to find natural products and figuring out what I could use rather than the western medicine.... I remember having this conversation with my dad. "I know you can make something with devil's club," he said, "I'm pretty sure it could help." I asked who do I talk to? He said, "Well, I don't know, just figure it out." Haha.



My dad knew the old ways. He grew up with his grandparents and they took him out of the village and hid him when residential school was starting so that he wouldn't go. He learned the old language, the old traditional ways. We're pretty fortunate; me and my one brother paid attention a lot. I was always interested in learning our traditional ways - why things were done the way they were.

It's hard to find an Elder who remembers doing any of the harvesting. I find that the Kitselas community, living so close to Terrace, a lot of it was forgotten. A lot of it just didn't happen again. I have a feeling it has to do with residential schools, and when the parents got out the knowledge was lost.






Those are highbush cranberries... It's got a really unique taste... I can't even explain it. I was out doing the stream walks. I hadn't tasted one in years. So I taste one. I'm like, oh, yeah, yeah. It's kind of pungent. I think we used to make a jelly. I am sure at some point we probably used to mix it with oolichan grease.

Even my kids don't learn traditional items like this, and where to locate them, and what benefits they have. Just with the way the world is today. I know from experience living on reserve and being so secluded, we had lots of time. If our parents wanted us to help around food gathering, that's what we would do. These next generations need to know where they can harvest these things.






 This is one of the pink salmon. ... My dad taught me that death is a natural occurrence. So, he made sure a couple of us knew the signs of death and how to start preparing other family members... The next generations after me, I don't believe they were taught this. I would like to see a lot of those kinds of teachings coming back. But, I mean, it's just life, right? Everyone's just busy trying to make a living... You don't stop and think about; oh, this person needs to know this or this person needs to know that. My hope is to help people slow down when it comes to moments like this and think about what needs to be taught.





 This is Salal berry. It's one of those items that you can harvest and we used to make jam out of it. Way back when they used to take all different kinds of berries... they would smash them up and make a fruit leather.

They would use bent wood boxes and lay the berries flat in there and then use bigger leaves on top and make another layer. They would continue like that until the box is full and then have a weight on top of it. Then, just let it do its thing. They would have the fruit leather that they can carry with them when hunting or fishing.

When I was living in Hartley Bay... berries were abundant. Back in my time, we could just walk along the boardwalk, and there's berry bushes growing six feet over the boardwalk. We could just stand there and pick, that was our snack. It's heartbreaking that even my kids didn't get to experience stuff like that.



Over the past 15 years Terrace and area has had various construction take place such as Vallard, LNG and CGL pipeline, and numerous other projects (that require a fair amount of bush work). This is a moose bone... Over the past 15 years, we had Ballard Power come in with BC Hydro, so they did a lot of bush work. We've been seeing a lot more wildlife activity within Terrace and within the surrounding communities. A lot more wolves, coyotes, and black and grizzly bears. We're not the only ones that eat moose who were displaced by the BC Hydro bush clearing. This was taken up around the airport area, which is about five minutes out of town. Moose is an important part of the community and peoples' lives. A lot of people go out hunting. I hope the younger generation gets to experience, if not the hunting part, the preparing of the moose, so that they can realize... they can go hunting for food and not just go to the grocery store.

I worked on the pipeline Coast Gaslink. They didn't realize I knew all of this information. I was like, oh, we're coming to the end of October. And they were blasting. and I was like, at the end of the month, or November 1, you can't do that anymore, because the mountain goats come back. They're like, oh that's not true. And I pulled up my book. I was like, I have the information right here. Then they get frustrated because it interferes with their construction. But, they're trying their best as possible.






The Skeena River provides for so many people, not just our community, but so many people within Terrace and the surrounding communities... because they would have grease camps. People would come together and harvest and then process oolichans into grease. There were all of these different villages working together... Around February is when oolichans come in, that's when people were most happy. That's their first fresh feed that they would get to harvest and feed their family with. ... I don't think people realize how important the oolichans are.

I think the old people would base the oolichan run on weather patterns. Just by looking at animal scat and dead animals, they would examine them and see what was going on. By those few things, they were able to tell if it was gonna be a good year or a bad year. I know with the Nisga'a up here, for the oolichan run, they base it on the moon, whichever way the moon is facing, you know, the crescent moon. If its face like this, it's going to be a plentiful year. But, if it's more tipped over, it's not going to be a great run.

But Kitimat people haven't been receiving oolichans since the Kemano power station was built. Their oolichans numbers; there was years upon years where they weren't even getting any.



 This is red cedar. At some point, you can eat the cambium. ... The trunk itself is used for carving, totem poles, masks, packing sticks. I use the bark for weaving. Weaving used to be a really big part of our daily lives as some of our clothing was made from red and yellow cedar... Many people in in our community know the purposes of cedar trees, but they need to become more aware. I mean, it's easy for me to know these things given my field work. We've been seeing more and more red cedars becoming more red in colour, which means they're dying. So, I'm concerned that it's going to be hard to get over the next 10, 20 years... It's not getting cold enough, so there might be bugs or disease that contribute to them dying.





When I was in grade school my family lived in Hartley Bay. For a week out of the year within our school, there was a whole bunch of different craft slots that that we could attend and cedar weaving was one of them... My Sm'algyax teacher was getting the cedar ready and I was standing there watching her and I got intrigued... From then on, I was obsessed with learning how to weave. It took awhile to learn because I was used to asking out loud if I wanted to learn something. I became frustrated. Of course, I was young and didn't realize this was the source of peoples' income in Kitselas.





Clarisa Spencer

My name is Clarisa Spencer. I grew up in the city and relocated to Kitselas at the age of 16, which was my first experience living in a First Nation community. The food, culture and feast protocols were all new to me, but throughout the years I have taken part in our cultural duties which includes various food processing activities, taught to me by my Late Mom, my dad, aunties, uncles, and fellow community members. And in turn, I have passed this knowledge onto my children.

"Food security is a chance to pass on knowledge, skills and our culture, just as our ancestors did."

Clarisa has worked for the Kitselas Nation on the Treaty Negotiations Team as well as served on the Governing Council. She most recently landed a role in film called Monkey Beach the Movie, an award-winning film featuring an all-Indigenous cast.

Clarisa's Traditional name is Biiltsiik, which means the crimson red in the sunrise when change in weather is about to come.





We have something called the community garden, which is a huge greenhouse. Inside, they grew tomatoes, potatoes, green peppers, a whole bunch of stuff. I thought it was amazing that families were able to work together, learn together, and create some food sustainability together. Anybody could go to this community garden, it was open all the time. You could go in and pick your tomatoes, you could take them home, and you could cook dinner with them. So, the fact families in our community were learning together and creating meals together was great. They got to enjoy the fruits of their labour.

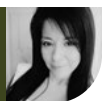


We call this swaaniik, herring eggs on kelp. There's different things that are used that the herring attach their eggs to; it could be branches, needles, grass or kelp. People make herring egg stir fry too. They add bacon, celery, carrots, and other ingredients. My value system is that I don't want to add anything to it to wreck it, so I just eat it as is. This one makes me drool.





My uncle, as the chief of our house, our Eagle clan, our Laxsgiik clan, he takes it upon himself to teach us how to harvest seaweed. We've gone out seaweed picking with him outside of Metlakatla, BC. He's teaching us how to pass on our traditions to our kids; this is what his grandparents taught him... We exchange a lot of food informally because we are in-land. We don't have a lot of resources to go get it and it is pricey to get out there on the ocean... That's the trade, we're helping them with the gas... We're just helping them to go get it, that's how we see it.





This is all of my preserving stuff. My late mother, God rest her soul.


I never paid attention to when she was preserving fruit, until she passed away. And then, I started to do preserving myself because I felt closer to her when I did it. Fruit salad is something that I can take to my family dinners. It keeps our tradition and her memory alive.



These are huckleberries.

The reason why I took this picture was because of the leaves on my hand. I had a grandmother, who was my mom's aunt. We used to come to Terrace in the summertime when I was a child. Of course, we knew my grandmother would be harvesting berries. She would have huge totes of huckleberries because they would take the whole family out to pick them. What [my grandmother] would do, and she never knew I was watching, was slowly move her hand through the water, and she'd bring it up and these leaves would stick to her hand. That's how I cleaned those leaves out of that water, so you wouldn't have to pick them off.



 I buy moose meat, or I have it given to me if I'm lucky enough, or I trade it for seafood. I use my dehydrator [to dry the meat]. I take it out of the freezer and I thaw it just enough so that it's easier to cut. I put layers [of meat] in my dehydrator, and I dry it overnight. I like to sing while I am preparing my moose meat. I have these little outbursts of music lyrics, so I sing a song with my moose meat.




My late mom, this is her house I live in. ... this was our gathering place. this was the place where my mom cooked all of our big dinners, so I try to keep that going for her. It's been really hard this past year because we haven't been able to gather [because of COVID-19 restrictions]. I have grandchildren, my nieces, you know, children who I haven't met yet. It almost feels like COVID-19 has affected our culture because this is how we celebrate, this is how we grieve, by gathering together.

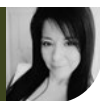




This is one of my favorite foods. It's called a cockle, and you dig for them on the beach. These are the ones that I get from where my late mother is from in Kitkatla. I've got family who harvest it there, so I feel very fortunate when I receive it. It's a First Nations joke when you have somewhere where you get big cockles like this, and people want to know where you got it, so you tell them Area 13. That means that, "I'm not telling you." So, these are cockles from Area 13.



 This is Labrador tea. The leaves get harvested at a certain time of the year, and you have to dry them out. Our youth group harvests these because we've got some leaves down by the canyon there where they go and pick. Then, they put them in baggies and then they give them to our elders. I've my friend from Kitsumkalum who is an Elder and harvested with his late wife. They would scale mountains to pick mushrooms. He is over 80 years old. He swears by this tea, it's just amazing.





[We have] a modern-day grease trail. It's all word of mouth. I got swaaniik from some harvesters from Bella Bella. They had an offer for a group of people in Prince Rupert to buy the whole lot for twice as much as they were willing to give it to us. And they said no to the other people. They said no because they knew the importance of having to share it. They wanted that cultural significance of being able to trade and share, you know, because we would have had nothing that year if they had sold it to the others.





When we can't get seaweed, this is what I do for my seaweed fix. My friend from the Nisga'a Territory was going down to Vancouver for work and he said, I'll take you there for three days to see your sister. We're gassing up, we're getting ready to leave Terrace. He goes to the trunk of his vehicle and plops down this huge bag of the salmon strips. And then he opens a bag of ripple chips. And mixed the two together. So, he raised the bar. And what happened with me is that I had the worst stomach ache when we hit Hope because this bag was in front of me, and I couldn't stop eating it.





I love asparagus, but it's so darn expensive. I took a picture of empty shelves in Walmart one time, because the whole meat section was empty, empty, empty. It was such a profound scene for me. We have to wait for the truck to come in up here. When the shelves are getting bare, you know that they're waiting for another shipment. Anything that takes a certain amount of days to arrive, which means it is going to take an extra couple days to arrive for us [at a Terrace grocery store]. I can eat a whole plate of asparagus by myself, which is usually what I do when I buy it. I can't buy it all the time because it's quite pricey.



This is called a Koola pop. I've been eating these things since I visited family as a young child in Prince Rupert. Koola pops are made of half Jello and half Kool-Aid, so you can bite into it. Back in the day they used to sell for a quarter each. This one was \$1.50 and I got it the other day. My neighbour around the corner makes Koola pops. When she's selling them, they go fast. This is what I love about living on the rez; you can't find these in the grocery stores. I love it.

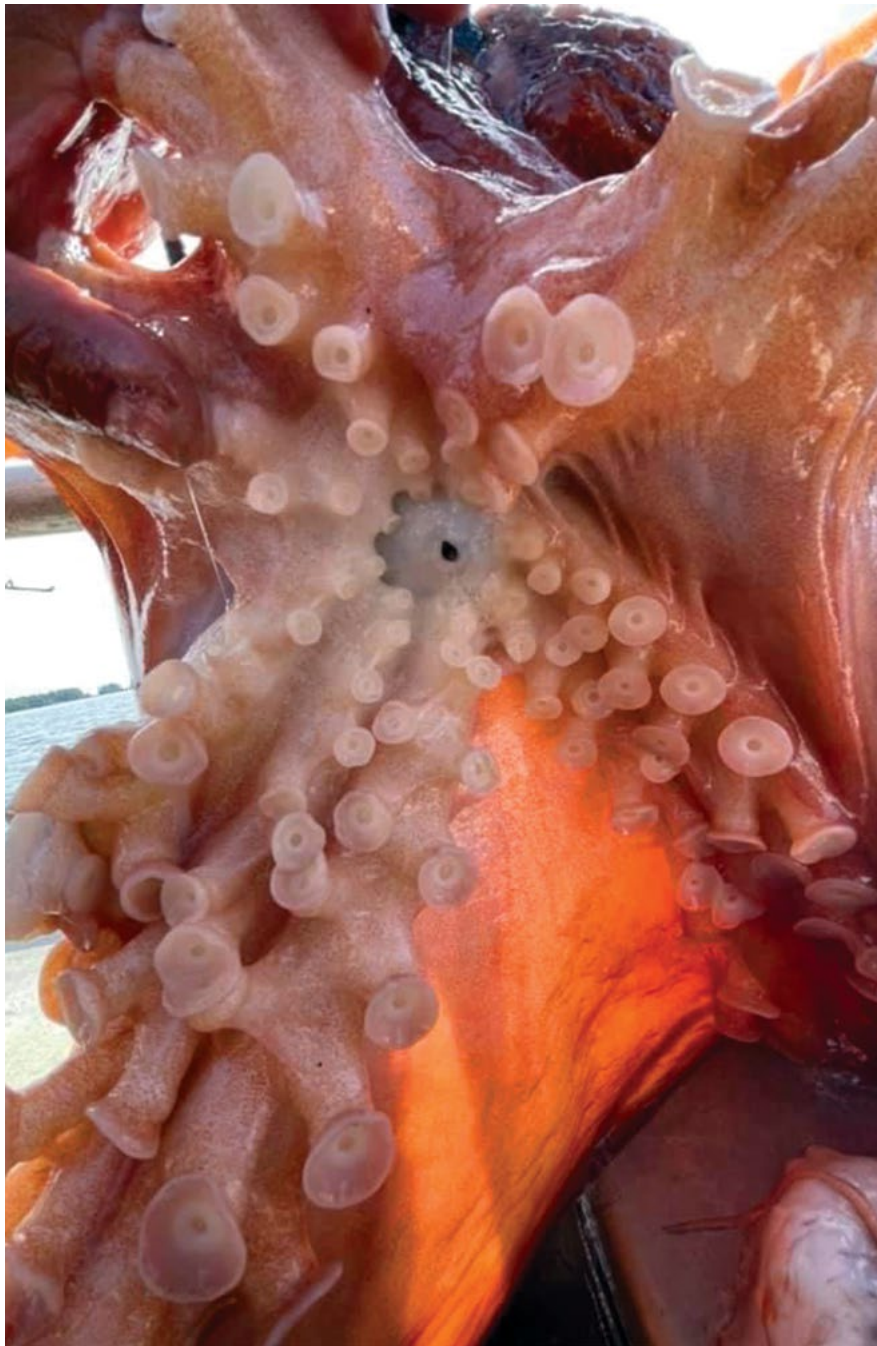




Darren Bolton

Darren Bolton spent his earlier years in Hartley Bay where his family foraged off land for most of their food. He learned respect and traditional ways from helping his Elders and family members to harvest and listening to their stories. He is every grateful to them and has harvested everything from seal to seaweed and cockles to crab. He has also worked in silviculture, gone to art school, and led cultural tours in the region. As a long time Kitselas community member, his goal is to share his stories and knowledge with his grandchildren and interested community members.





The octopus. This is royalty food to me, to my people. Because it's hard to come by and they're smart. And we have so much respect for them. I was taught when I was a young kid to not celebrate the death of the food we harvest. I didn't want to ask why, and then finally one day I asked. And they said, you didn't find this animal, it came to you and it offered its life to you, so that you can live strong.





You have to get up with the oolichans, and you have to sleep with the oolichans. You have to work in wet weather, soaking wet all day in cold weather and pack the fish into a big bin. The bins gotta be about six feet high, about 15 the depth... What they do is they let it soak in the bin for 10 days... I learned when I was there that you can't prepare anything for cooking until... after 10 days. The elders say that's got to do with bad luck... And oolichan grease is like a medicine as well. I remember one time I was 12 I had pneumonia... My dad put grease with a bit of Vicks and mixed it up. Made me drink it. It cleans and it stops pain from your throat.





It started with residential school... It distorted our stories and our lives. All of a sudden, we gathered to survive. Now, everybody's gathering to make money, which is depleting our stash... So, I talked with my Elders... And they said, ...every day is a treat that you get something out of the ocean [cockles are an example], because one day they're gonna poison it. He said, they're gonna find a way because white man's greedy and their greed is overflowing. I watched this movie and it reminded me what the Elder said. He said, the Earth gives so much. They asked for so much from Mother Earth. So, one day, she's gonna have nothing to give. And that's how we apply our thoughts.

I remember the day we had cockles like this big, as big as my hand. You'd be lucky to get that now, but you still can get some.



This is a harbour seal...
this is another delicacy.

We hunt this... you need to learn when to shoot them. And the best way I can explain is when not to shoot them. If you notice a seal, it's always just the head. But if you see the back come up, you know it's pregnant, so you don't shoot them. We eat this and we take the fat and render it down to make grease out of it. The grease is good for when you're a sick or you feel cold.





This [meal] is unreal. In Hartley Bay as we were growing up, nine o'clock at night, no matter whose house you were at, we had a coffee. This is when the spread like this stuff was brought out. Sit down. Enjoy this with us. Stuff like smoked meat or fish. Nine o'clock every night. It's always been a ritual.


I tell you, you sit there. And you listen to them, [the Elders]. They eat and they talk and they laugh. And to hear it in your own language, Sm'algyax, is something else. That language is disappearing. I hate to say it, but it's disappearing. I'm trying to teach my granddaughters everything. But this is an excuse for a gathering, an excuse to renew our bond between each other as humans.



We had a fish camp, and there was only Willie, myself, Queen [my granddaughter], and Willie's wife. We did 90 cases of fish. And that little girl, Queen, stayed every step. ... She got a case. Willie said, Queen, look, here! And she grabbed it and put it by the other pile. And he goes, that's your case to take home. That's what you did. And she looked at me, and she said, "it's mine?" Yes, I said. Now, when you go home, Queen... you have the right to tell everyone on that table, "I made this for you." And she did... I'm entailing that information... every chance I get because it's my job. I became the head of the family after my father passed... Now I'm a teacher.





 All we do [with urchins] is we turn it over, chop it, rip it open, and take the eggs out and eat it raw. I've seen people simmer or cook it. No offence, but I never grew up with it being cooked. It was like sushi, I guess you could say... There's places where we can go at low tide to grab it up. There's some spots we can grab, like 10, 15 of them. And once again, Elders come first... That's the eggs inside... I can't describe it, but it's a delicacy.



We were taught to harvest. It's hard and excruciating work. But it got to the point where we couldn't wait to do this part. We got a place called Kee'el, seaweed camp, where we go and harvest; halibut, abalone, seaweed... The kids from the community have heard me [talk about camp], and I can't wait for the kids to come here. I hate to say it; nowadays, the kids are into Nintendo and all that stuff... So, my job is to teach. And I teach the younger ones. As an example, for my granddaughter, I said, "Queen - don't you ever make fun of fish. The fish gave his life. Show him respect. You honour him because he died so you could live." One time, her mother was making fun of the fish. And Queen turned around and said, "I won't make fun of fish. And I'm going to tell mom not to, too." She's only four years old.





When I was growing up as a young kid, man, I wanted everything seafood. But we weren't allowed. We weren't allowed because the Elders had it at night just as we were getting ready for bed. And I said, "why can't we get crab?" "Because it gives you nightmares." But that was it. And we're like, what? "Yeah, you get real bad nightmares if you eat crab." It wasn't until the next year or so I said, "Mom, how can you guys eat this before you go to bed and don't have nightmares?" She goes, "no, it's just, it's not enough for sharing." See what I mean, tricksters!





Now that I'm up there in age, I talk to the young ones that are still doing [harvesting]. I got friends that send me some fish. In fact, I have a friend from Hartley Bay. He's about 10, 15 years younger than me... He dropped off a whole bunch of stuff last year, like chopped seaweed, halibut, abalone, ... smoked halibut, fresh halibut, cod, and bellies. He's going to do that this year, too. So, they show me respect, and I'll show them respect...

If you need money or gas, I'll buy your gas. And they say, don't worry about it. But I would offer it.



The way I learned was just get out there and do it. The elderly ladies asked me to help them to lay out [the seaweed] into big squares... Generally, you put rocks on each corner of your patch. So, when a wind goes through it, it doesn't fly away. I learned the hard way because I didn't do that one day. I had about 40 squares flying all over and I had to pick them up. And then the elderly lady said, put rocks on each corner and weigh it down. So, I learned the lesson there.



These last few years our harvesting on the Skeena River has come to a really sour end. The last year and this year, the oolichans came on the other side of the river because the river changed so vastly that the sand came over and filtered in on our side and made it too shallow. So, [the oolichans] were on the outside. Last year, we ended up buying a couple of totes from the Nisga'a and we handed out to the people. And this year we couldn't do it. It was too late.






I'll tell you a story of my poor mom and dad. They're both gone now but great spirit looks after them.

Anyway, they were young and they got married. They were harvesting cockles. They were going to smoke them. So what they did, they went down to the woodshed and started cracking shells, sticking them on there. They filled up the whole woodshed full of cockles. And a friend of ours looked over, and he said, "What are you guys doing?" And he looked at the cockles and all of the cockles were like this, wiggly. They didn't steam them. They're supposed to steam them first. So they had to take them all off and steam them and then put them back. My old man said, "Ugh, I didn't know!" Haha. But, he chuckled about it.



 I was ashamed to be First Nations. I'm Haida from my mother's side. She moved to Hartley Bay to be with my dad, so we grew up Tsimshian... There's a rough time on both sides because sometimes you're just a Haida or you're just a Tsimshian. Then I try to go hang out with non-Natives and then [they say], "Oh, you're just a long haired, beep beep beep Indian, you know?" I was left in limbo. So, I learned a lot from the Elders. I made it a habit. I worked [hard]. I'd go out on the weekend... I'd end up helping somebody else ... [by] going down to the beach at six o'clock in the morning... That's how I kept my sanity. [The Elders] told me, "What you're doing is good. ... never mind what people say. There's always gonna be somebody who's gonna say something about you."







Leanne woods

My name is Leanne woods. I am Tsimshian/thaltan from Kitselas First Nation. I am from the killerwhale clan from the house of Nistahuk. I am the oldest daughter of Darlene Seymour of Kitselas and John Woods of Telegraph Creek. I am the oldest granddaughter to Willard and Rhoda Seymour, my maternal grandparents. My paternal grandparents are Fanny Woods and Andrew Dennis. I have 9 children and 14 grandchildren.

Since I was a young girl I remember my family preparing fish for our winter supply. My whole family would all come together to take part in this huge task. My grandmother Rhoda taught me how to tsal fish. She would teach anyone that wanted to learn. My grandmother Fanny Woods was also very good at preparing fish. I feel as I have it in my blood to be able to work on fish like I do. My children all come together now and we all prepare our winter supply every year. My boys catch the fish and my girls help us in the smokehouse. I want my children to all know how to prepare fish for the winter supply.

All the pictures we provided shows the hard work my long-time partner and I do in our magic smokehouse.





Fredrick Robinson Jr

My name is Fredrick Robinson Jr, I'm a Nisga'a from Lakalzap, Greenville BC. All my life ever since I was a young boy I've worked in the smokehouse. I started at 9 I'd go and attempt to give my grandmother (jiji) a hand and she'd shoo me away until I reached the age of 12. I always loved the smell of jiji when working in the smokehouse, since then I've always been drawn to the work, the smell and overall good feeling of providing something so tasty and in so many different styles of fish.

The wife and I have really clicked together as a good team and our style of making smoked fish is quite well known throughout Terrace and the northern region. We built our own smokehouse in 2005 and it's one of the best moves we ever made. It's so fulfilling to be able to provide a loved food such as kyuuwks, lalt, bellys trips – half smoked and dry-dry. It comes in really handy in winter and it draws my family together, my sister usually comes to assist, and all my children love the work and the finished product. I wanted to share a bit of our culture and style of preparing salmon.

It's our magic smokehouse, my husband built it. We were both raised with smoking fish. My grandmother taught me, his grandmother taught him, so we're a good team at it. Basically, our fish is famous. We put a lot of hard work into it. I gut and pack the fish, and he does the same. I do the cutting and taking the strips off. He looks after the smokehouse and the fire. The fish that are right on the top that are hanging on the poles, those are a different stage. We dry, dry them, [which] will take about four or five days. – *Leanne*

Depends on the weather too. If it's raining, then generally [it] will take anywhere from 7 to 10 days [to smoke the fish]. When the weather cooperates, the drying process speeds up. Our smokehouse is like magic, we can be done in about 18 to 20 hours. – *Fred*





The fish I'm flipping there, that's called lalt. That's the very first cut off of the fish that Leanne does... and it squares up the fish before starting to cut off the kyuuwx. That first cut piece, there's no bone in that lalt part, and that's a real delicacy. That first cut there. – *Fred*

I think that we're one of the few people that actually do it like that on this reserve out here, that take that first piece [the lalt] off. – *Fred*

In Kitselas, we have quite a few people [from different First Nations] that are teaching each other. Like there's Gitxsan and there's Nisga'a. There's Tahltan. There are different ways to prepare fish, it just all depends on what suits you. – *Leanne*



When we did the fish camp, the community members participating got a taste of part of the process. They learned how to make the strips. If you wanted to get a true taste of the whole thing, then a person would stay right from taking the strips off, right until we're actually putting the strips onto the sticks.

– Fred





I think we lost quite a bit of our culture. In Kitselas, we're getting it back. Not many people know how to smoke fish. So, I think that was one reason for doing the Fish Camp. And we were happy to help teach our people how to do part of the process.

– Leanne


Like I always say, fish don't wait for nobody, right?

Once you get it from the river, you have to be on the go, go, go until it's totally done, or else the fish will get sour. You don't want your fish to wreck. By the time this is done at the end, we're tired. But it's a good tired. We're just so proud. Like, look at all this. It's addictive. We just can't believe we did all that, right?

– Leanne





 This is right in town. It's what they call the point underneath the old bridge in Terrace. It's on Kitselas land, and quite a few community members use the spot. It's a super awesome spot to catch fish. – *Leanne*

That's me and my oldest son, we're checking and pulling the net there ...We got around 70 sockeyes.
– *Fred*

That's my son's net... He helps us out every year to get fish for our smokehouse. – *Leanne*

I hope that the weather starts to get better for future generations. So, that way, the fish don't deplete right out. So that every one of my kids are able to participate in some of the stuff that Leanne and I have gone through. We've been blessed with all this food, this food productivity. – *Fred*






 This is me tsaling the fish. So, all of those are stacks of strips. Fred and I work awesome together at this part. We can do 50-70 fish at a time. – *Leanne*

He basically does everything such as flipping fish, tending the fire, stacking kyuuwx, and passing me fish. I'll just sit there and cut and cut and cut. It's the only way we can get through that many fish. The night before, we cut [the fish] down the middle, and we hang it in our magic smokehouse overnight. There are little flaps on each side where I got to cut the bone down. And then I'll take the lalt off the corner, the top part of the fish. Then, I'll cut the strips off. – *Leanne*

We are looking at the big picture, too. When it comes to the quality of the fish, I've noticed over about the past five years now that the waters have been getting warmer, right? So, there's a worm inside of the gut of the fish that has been becoming more and more rampant with a warming of the waters. ...If we can remedy climate change, that'll be another big thing. This year we got fish closer to the coast and they didn't have worms. – *Fred*

Because we know that worm is there, we... gut the fish right away. Throw it in our gut bucket, and then make sure that everything is out of out of the fish. Right? And then we keep it under cold and running water. – *Fred*



 If we're going into July and we don't have any jarred fish [from the previous year], I'm worried. Even at the end of June, I'm bugging him. We need to get the net and we need to get some fish. Once my jarred fish is done, I feel okay. The rest is easy to me, like making the smoked fish, because we can totally just slay them. But the jarring takes a little more time by cutting, stuffing, jarring, pressure cooking, so I worry. But once they're done, then I feel the security. – *Leanne*





So, one year when the kids were younger we didn't have much money. We had seven kids at home and we had fish all week. I would make sure and do different dishes like fish patties, or boiled or soups or gravy or fried rice, you know, all different kinds.

Our youngest girl at the time... We always giggled about how she was the one that didn't really like fish. And that's all we had. And you know, she was craving cutlets one day and one of the other girls told the one that complained, "just pretend its chicken cutlets. Just close your eyes and pretend it's cutlets." – *Leanne*

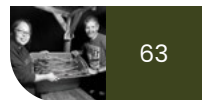




These are oolichans and we smoke them in our smokehouse, too. They're called digit after they're done being smoked. You put the stick through the head or the gill, then through the mouth. We use cottonwood for the fish and alder wood for the oolichan. They make oil. Oolichan grease it is called. There's a different process for that.

– Leanne

That's another super drawn out process. You let oolichans rot in the bin for about 10 days. Once they've rotted... then you do your first cook. We fill up the pots, they're [on] 4x8 timbers. They have a big seal on the bottom, and a fire pit underneath. Once the water comes to a boil you have to wait for the oolichans to boil, too. So, it's a super drawn out process. It takes about 18 hours to do. You have to stand over the pot and keep on stirring... You kind of get used to the smell after a while. Heh. The taste and the medicinal qualities that you get out of the actual oil, it's just unreal. We add it to our fish meals. – Fred



I didn't see my grandparents much for about 10 months of a year. And then summer vacation... I would always go back up to Greenville for two months straight. So, in that amount of time I would go fishing with my grandfather on the river. And then, probably in the same day, I would pack all the fish up to my grandmother's smokehouse and I would help my grandmother. She would shoo me away, right? I always wound up going back to my grandmother. I just love when my grandmother would come out of the smokehouse. She'd have that aroma about her, like someone fresh out of the smokehouse. I would make up an excuse to go and hug her. To be able to go up and get a good sniff of her. – *Fred*



The fish hanging here are Coho from late August. – *Leanne*

Spring salmon is the first fish that we catch. At the beginning of June is the time for the spring. Towards the middle of June, right up to the whole month of July is the time of Sockeye [salmon]. From August to the first couple of weeks of September is when we get start getting the Coho. The Coho is my favorite. – *Fred*

Last year Coho [fishing] was shut down due to shortage of the fish. They were trying to get the numbers up last year. There was a closure for the Coho last year, as well as for the Spring [salmon]. – *Fred*

[The fish] were late this year, too. Spring didn't come until later, same as Sockeye salmon. Plus, the waters were higher this year, so we'd have to pick and choose and figure out what days are their best. We couldn't get to the river because it was too high. – *Leanne*





Lynn Wright- Parker

Lynn Wright-Parker is married and has four children. Although her family lives in Kitselas (Tsimshian), her and her children fall under the matrilineal tribe of the Gitxsan. So, she lives in her father's nation (Tsimshian) and is guided by her mother's nation (Gitxsan). Lynn and Daniel with their children live the modern life, but also ensure that the heritage of their cultures still get honoured and respected. The harvesting they do is usually fishing in the summer and harvesting cedar in the early spring. They also ensured their families live close-by so their children can be raised together.





I love fish. I love everything to do with [them]. My husband thinks I'm crazy because every year, I always say, "I need to at least touch the fish, because I love the cutting of the fish and the preparing of it." And, it's been part of my life, my whole life. When I was younger, we would go fishing in Kitsegukla, where my mom is from. My mom's mom, my Tsiits, had a smoke house, and I would always, always help. When I was there, when we would go visit. My mom's mom is my Grandma but we called her Tsiits.

I treasure all of the memories we had harvesting fish and making what we called [huux]. It's h-u-u-x in Gitxsan. I'm Gitxsan under my mom and Tsimshian under my dad. I've lived in Kitselas, which is the Tsimshian, for all my life.



There are a few areas where we fish. Under the bridge there's what we call piers, people also use their boats and that's where they also place their net which goes right across the river. We also go down to the canyon. So, there's many points where people go. This is a picture of the Skeena River, right under the old bridge, and it's called the main point. There is a big rock, where we go fishing. That's where a lot of the Kitselas people go fishing.

Kitselas has jurisdiction over that traditional area, so no other First Nation is allowed to go fishing. It's for the Kitselas people. We go by what's called the two-day rule. Two days you go fishing per family.

We only take what we need. That's the thing. So, when we fish, we fish

for our whole family: my parents, my sister, my two brothers, and my family. It means a lot of work and harvest together. I love being on the river. It's a part of building. It fills your cup. And when I watch them together, it means a lot to me and means a lot to our family just to know we're teaching one another and we're doing it for the

family. It means a lot to the guys. Because they're providing for us.

There were years we could not harvest because the fish rock wasn't high enough, so when we were not able to do that, it gets scary because we don't know what fish we'll have for the year and what it means for the winter.





I will tell a story of what we all do together. My sisters. I cut the fish. Someone is washing the fish. Then we will cut into pieces. Then my daughter will wash the cut pieces. Once they're cleaned a second time, they're put in jars. That is to help prepare for jarring fish. It takes that whole system. They must be cleaned... So that's the process of us. When all of us are together.

This is me; I like to freeze some fish for the winter. This is me in my mom's kitchen, vacuum sealing fish pieces for the winter stock.



So, when you harvest [berries], one of the biggest things is that family bonding time. I'm so grateful for the time that I spent with family. That's where you get to nurture one another and get to know one another and learn how to respect and honour your Elders. And, in doing the whole process, it does have its cultural tie-ins. The berries, we must have a lot of berries because we use them when it comes to feasts throughout the year. We use the berries, as a dessert, to serve our guests at a feast we are hosting. And that's just another story with our food.





The first inkling is from childhood memories with our grandparents, our Tsiits and Ye'e. I think my favourite memory is of Tsiits making it with her hands in a big bowl. To get the berries, we would all go by Cranberry Junction. We'd all sit on the side of the big hill and pick berries, and by the end of the day we would have buckets and buckets of berries. They're small, the soap berries. In our language, it's called iss. I-s-s-.

We haven't made soapberries forever, but my husband was the one who wanted to have the honours. So, he started the process. First you smoosh the juice out of them, then you start whipping them. And then you just keep going. And then it started working... after 5 minutes it gets thicker. And then when it's done and ready, it's called Indian Ice Cream. We eat it right away. It's creamy and smooth. They're like little bubbles; if you know lemon meringue pie, it's like that. It's whipped like that, just from whipping it with your hands. It's used as a dessert and because we harvest it... we only use it during special times. We have to ration it. Just like we're taught, you only take what you're going to use.





This is in the smokehouse. This is inside showing you how we cut the fish and then we what we call huux.

The process to start is to put the cleaned fish in whole. And then you let it hang. And then it smokes a little bit. And then once they dry enough, you take them out. Now it's time to cut them and prepare them, to hang upside down to finish smoking. You then hang the fish strips and fish bellies on poles and smoke them too. You take them out after a day of smoking. Once they finish, you flip them and let them hang for another day of smoke, all smoke. You let it breathe when you check the smokehouse. You let the air in. The next day, you hang them on sticks and let them dry. Once they are done drying, they are ready to eat! The four-day process is complete.

My brother takes care of the smokehouse, throughout the night, because you have to have continuous smoke. I make him a case of fish and some other jarred goods for looking after the smokehouse for us.

That is the most delicious thing you'll ever do with fish.





I teach the kids and tell the kids how important it is to harvest, because they need to learn how to harvest themselves. My daughter loves it. My family came in and gave her some fish from the Nass, she was so proud. She cut up and harvested her own fish. This is her getting our fish ready for our own little chief smoker.

With the other fish she had left, she went and delivered fish to family who hadn't had their first feed of fish yet. Her ten fish she started. She handed out five to my family. So that's how proud my children are to handle fish. They want to learn how to cut fish, want learn how to process it, to learn how to harvest fish in the ways we have for generations.







I'm taking each fish and I'm making fish strips. After they're dry and after the huux are ready, then they come out of the smokehouse like this. I cried when they came out because I was so proud. It was me and my sister who spent a good part on the preparation.

My mom tested us this year. I had my cousin fish for us, so we had the fish and we traded with her for fuel. My mom would come out of her house and ask what we're doing. My mom would come to the tent and ask us what we're doing. There's our test. And our huux came out and our half smoke came out and she looked at it. And she was so proud, as I cried and seen all the fish laid out after we were finished a whole week of preparing the smoked fish. She said how proud she was of us. And that meant the whole world to me and my sister. I'd rather get a bouquet of fish than a bouquet of flowers. lol



We have a smoker on the porch. We bought it from Canadian Tire, it's called the Little Chief Smoker. We use apple chips, and we smoke our candied fish for four hours [at a time]. I use maybe five smokes.

I fill the bowl up at the bottom of the little chief smoker, plug it in, and then it smokes the chips that are in the bowls and then that smokes the fish. We use my husband's brine that he has perfected. He brines it for a day.

This is how it looks before it goes into the smoker. My husband puts each piece on a toothpick and lets it dry each. And it dries overnight so that it's ready to smoke by the morning.

So when you're finished, it air dries for a little bit before you bring it in or else the house smells smoky.






We have a lot of family dinners. When it's somebody birthday we have a family dinner. The family with the birthday, they host the dinner. Then our immediate family comes, and we all share dinner together. My sister is so lucky. Her birthday is September 16th. After we finished our harvesting for the year, she is usually the one who had at her dinner with a feast of all the different kinds of fish, so she is lucky.

What we do after each dinner, is we have what's called a su'h, which is a dish you take with you, so you have something to eat on your way home. Always take a dish. Always make sure you take a su'h with you. If you have company, then you make sure you send them home with a su'h.



 This is the cooked version in the jar. A sense of security, for sure, knowing that you have fish for the winter. I'm so proud. I cut the pieces and we make sure; we triple clean our fish so that there's no blood or anything after when they go into the jar. We usually do a teaspoon of salt either at the bottom of the jar or the top.

My husband is just showing me how it looks coming out of the, the pressure cooker. As long as they are sealed, they are good. This is some of the cooked fish jars that I did. You want to be sure to stay away from the blood. The blood discolours it when it's cooked inside the jar. This is one of my favourite ways of eating fish.









KITSELAS NATION – FOOD ASSET PROJECT – 2021