

Identity Through A Journey With Our Ancestors

by

Marie Loreen Hunt  
B.A., University of Victoria, 2009

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Anthropology

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## Abstract

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Relationships and connections with our traditional, spiritual, cultural practices, and the physical landscapes of our traditional territories are inherent to our Kwagu'ł being. This thesis research explores how developing relationships with landscapes contributes to cultural identity. My research project focuses on using digital video to document an experiential journey of Kwagu'ł community members as they experience a Kwagu'ł origin site in their traditional territories of T'sax̓is (Fort Rupert, BC), a small remote village on northern Vancouver Island. I specifically examine how being in a particular place might influence their identification processes as they reflect on Kwagu'ł practices, values and beliefs. According to our Kwakw̓ak̓a'wakw *nino 'gad* (knowledgeable ones), wellness balances and integrates the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual elements of our being. The disruption of these fundamental elements of wellness is a legacy of Indigenous people's encounter with colonialism. These factors ultimately affect our behaviour, and therefore, our identity.

In this film, titled "*Identity Through A Journey With Our Ancestors*", I explore: 1) how an experiential journey to Kwagu'ł origin sites contributes to a Kwagu'ł person's perception of who they are and where they come from; 2) how Kwagu'ł people develop a coevalness with their ancestors, their ancestral ontological practices, teachings and ideologies; and ask 3) how Kwagu'ł people should embody this knowledge so that it

creates meaningful connections to Kwagu'ł identity in light of socioeconomic and cultural changes of our contemporary environment?

This paper accompanies the film and elaborates on the deeper understanding of cultural identification practices of aboriginal people that stems from a discussion of origin sites and their meanings. *K'waxalikala* (tree of life) frames this inquiry, and it illustrates relationships and connections that are important to our life-long learning both on an individual and collective basis.

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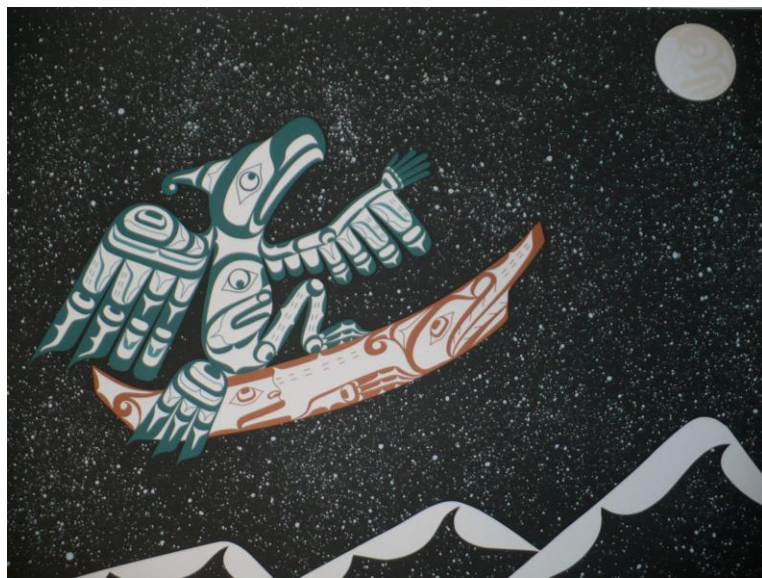
## Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the Coast and Straits Salish peoples, and to recognize that I have lived in their unceded territories for the past eight years. Gilakas'la!

I am indebted to the many people with whom I have engaged in countless discussions about our culture, our language, where we come from and who we are. I am incredibly grateful to my husband, Calvin A. Hunt, who has supported and encouraged me throughout this very enriching and challenging journey to a different education, and to our *k'wala'yu*, our children Jordan and Ferrin, Nolan and Kat, and Ali, and grandchildren, Liana, Scarlet and Emaeya who are my motivation who are our future leaders. I would also like to thank my supervisory committee, Dr. Andrea Walsh and Dr. Ann Stahl for their kind assistance and support. I acknowledge the Kwakiutl Band Council, New Relationship Trust, as well as Calvin and the Copper Maker Gallery for their financial assistance. Gilakas'la to our Kwagu'ł Band Council and staff for their support as we realize our educational goals. Thank you to my Hunt and Nelson families. Gilakas'la to our singers: Kaleb Child, Tom Child, Jordan Hunt, Nolan Hunt, and Ross Hunt Jr. Also my thanks go to Violet Bracic, Wata Joseph, William Wasden, Jr. and Wedlidi Speck for sharing their knowledge, and to Devin Tepleski for his editing expertise and artistic talent. And, to our cohorts in the film – Mervyn Child, Sara Child, Coreen Wilson-Child, Ross Hunt Jr. and Calvin.

Gilakas'la 'Walas Gigame'! (Thank you Creator!)

## Dedication



*Ha'idadul* - Reaching for

the Stars, original silk-screened print by Calvin A. Hunt 2007

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Chief Tłasutiwalis (Calvin A. Hunt); our sons Sibacola (Jordan Thomas) and Di'mala (Nolan Leslie); our daughter, Tłukweł (Ali Michelle); and our granddaughters, Nalagi'lakw (Liana), Tłakḵ'waga (Scarlet) and Anislaga (Emaeya).



## Section 1

### 1.1 Introduction

*In shifting from temporal concepts to spatial terms, we find that a revelation is not so much the period of time in which it occurs as the place it may occur.*

*Revelation becomes a particular experience at a particular place, no universal truth emerging but an awareness arising that certain places have a qualitative holiness over and above other places. The universality of truth then becomes the relevance of the experience for a community of people.... Holy places are well known in what have been classified as primitive religions. The vast majority of Indian tribal religions have a center at a particular place, be it a river, mountain, plateau, valley, or other natural feature. [Deloria 1973:81-82]*

Cultural identity loss has effectively disrupted ties between the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical life of aboriginal<sup>1</sup> people. We continue to suffer intergenerational effects of colonial projects such as residential schools and the legislated potlatch ban that lasted from 1884 to 1951. This historical trauma experienced by all the generations presents itself in “complexes of behaviour and mental attitudes that reflect their colonial situation” (Alfred, 2009:42) manifesting itself in social determinants such as poverty, unemployment, poor health, lack or failure of education, family violence, lateral violence, physical, sexual and substance abuse, and poor housing, all of which perpetuate a cycle of dysfunction.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term *aboriginal* to refer to all Aboriginal people of Canada, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, status and non-status.

This research project centres on cultural identification practices in relation to how an experiential journey to an origin site influenced Kwagu'ł community members' perspective on who they are and where they come from. The project is grounded by its association with landscapes, oral traditions and ancestral practices and acts as a departure point for investigation into identification processes. The results of this work are presented both in this paper and in a 15-minute film titled *Identity Through A Journey With Our Ancestors*. This film documents four Kwagu'ł community members' as they embark on an experiential journey to a place of Kwagu'ł origin sites located in front of our village, T'sax̄is (Fort Rupert, BC), which lies in the bay of Beaver Harbour, off the east coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. T'sax̄is is the main permanent village of the Kwagu'ł people, with about 350 resident community members.

Following this introduction in Section 1, I provide an overview of this research and the questions that guided the project. I also situate myself as researcher, participant and community member. I provide a brief overview of who the Kwagu'ł are and where we are located within the Kwakw̄ak̄'wakw community. A brief synopsis of the film follows.

Section 2 of this paper discusses methodology and methods. In this section I talk about the theory of *K'waxalikala* (Tree of Life) that guides my research, along with Indigenous<sup>2</sup> methodologies I employed throughout this project. It is difficult to describe the full essence of the meaning of *K'waxalikala* in English as the term embodies a deeper meaning than the English words "tree of life." It illustrates relationships and connections that are important to our life-long learning both on an individual basis and the collective.

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term Indigenous when I speak of the descendants of the original inhabitants of a territory.

The cedar tree, in its physical form, is central to the material culture of our Kwakwaka'wakw way of life, and is considered our tree of life, thus the significance of using *K'waxalikala* as a methodology. I have drawn from Indigenous scholars Margaret Kovach (2009), Shawn Wilson (2008), Leanne Simpson (2011), and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) whose knowledge in Indigenous research is paramount to any Indigenous researcher. These authors have made significant contributions to the field of Indigenous peoples and research. I also discuss why I chose film as medium for this research, and discuss film's contribution to the social, economic and cultural issues that concern identity, family, education, land and language specific to Indigenous people.

Section 3 reflects on what I believe has been the outcome of this journey, a reflection of my journey throughout this project, as well as ideas for future research projects that stems from this video project.

## 1.2 Research

This research considers relationships and connections with our traditional, spiritual, cultural practices, and physical landscapes. I focused on how an experiential journey to an origin site influenced Kwagu'ł community members' perspective on who they are and where they come from. It is grounded by its association with the cultural practice of Kwagu'ł oral tradition of remembering, speaking and visioning about our ancestors and the teachings they have handed down through the generations. This project allows for a unique entry point into a discussion about identification practices of individuals and a community. Key to these practices is development of a sense of Indigenous time that creates a sense of coevalness with our ancestors and their teachings.

This project challenges what Fabian (1983:25) refers to as the denial of coevalness, which is the long-standing tendency in Western practice and scholarship to distance the Other in time. Historically, this time distancing reflects a Western temporal framework based within the universal frame of the Enlightenment and its naturalized notions of linear, progressive time. Developing coevalness with our ancestors requires a collapse of time that places us within the same dimension. This epistemological dimension of time and space is an identification process we believe our ancestors practiced. This research project explored how these practices are inter-generationally transmitted and seeks to find ways to connect our past to the present throughout this journey.

It is important that Kwagu'ł people embody this knowledge to create meaningful connections to our identity. The Kwagu'ł continue to suffer the intergenerational effects of colonial projects, particularly from the residential schools and the legislated potlatch

ban (1884-1951). Colonial practices left a legacy of socio-economic dysfunction, language loss, and disconnection to traditional territories, family and community, effectively reducing or terminating autonomous existences within indigenous ways of life that subsequently put this subject in the forefront of de-colonization. Our community can begin to shed the colonial cloak and cognitive imperialism by embracing ancestral ontological knowledge and re-centering it to our Indigeneity as we walk in two worlds. Alfred (2009) argues that meaningful change “can only be achieved through the resurgence of an indigenous consciousness” (48) in an “indigenous way according to indigenous needs values and principals” (48). This renewed consciousness has the capacity to transform ourselves and our communities when it is consistent with our Indigenous teachings.

*Identity Through A Journey With Our Ancestors* documents four Kwagu’ł community members as they embark on an experiential journey to a place of Kwagu’ł origin sites. The experiential journey takes place at the *awakawis* (a place to sit and talk), located on our beach in T’saxis, directly in front of our village in the bay of Beaver Harbour, which is in the proximity of three recorded origin sites. These community members voice their thoughts and beliefs, and express their emotions of what being at an origin site means to them and how these sites connect them to their ancestors. Alfred and Corntassel (2005) argue it is our individual and collective experiences that will “yield the clearest and most useful insights for establishing culturally sound strategies to resist colonialism and regenerate our communities (2005:601). I believe this process guides us as we navigate social change and cultural transformations within the context of contemporary colonialism.

The research questions that guided this video project were: 1) how an experience of a journey to a Kwagu'ł origin site contributes to a Kwagu'ł person's perception of who they are and where they come from; 2) throughout this experiential journey, how do Kwagu'ł people develop a coevalness with their ancestors and their ancestral ontological practices, teachings and ideologies; and 3) how can Kwagu'ł people embody this knowledge so that it creates meaningful connections to Kwagu'ł identity in light of socioeconomic and cultural changes of our contemporary environment?

### **1.3 Researcher**

My role is researcher and participant; I married into the Kwagu'ł First Nation, and have lived in T'sax̄is for 33 years with my husband, Calvin A. Hunt. We were married in a traditional Kwakw̄ak̄'wakw wedding ceremony in 1987. Our three children were born and raised in this village, and we have three granddaughters. All our children and grandchildren own inherited rights to secret societies, names, dances and songs.

My husband is the son of Hereditary Chief Thomas Hunt, and is a fifth generation descendant of Robert Hunt, and fourth generation descendant of George Hunt who was Franz Boas' assistant. Calvin's mother was a noblewoman from the Mowachaht First Nation of Yuquot in Friendly Cove whose father was the 4<sup>th</sup> seated Hereditary Chief known as Dr. Billy. Calvin now holds this Chieftainship. I am the daughter of Hereditary Chief Leslie James Nelson of the Dzawad̄'enux̄w from Kingcome Inlet, and am the daughter of Mae Nelson who is Tahltan from Telegraph Creek, BC. We own an art gallery and carving studio on the reserve in T'sax̄is. We practice our Kwagu'ł culture

within our *gukwdzi* (bighouse) and are respected members of our north island community.

## 1.4 Who are the Kwagu'ł?

*Kwagu'ł* means, “Smoke of the World.” We are a Kwakwala speaking people (see Figure 1) who were originally four closely related tribes, the Komkiutis, Kwagu'ł and Kweeha/Komoyoi and Walas Kwagu'ł, who are now collectively called Kwagu'ł since our four tribes relocated to Fort Rupert in 1849.

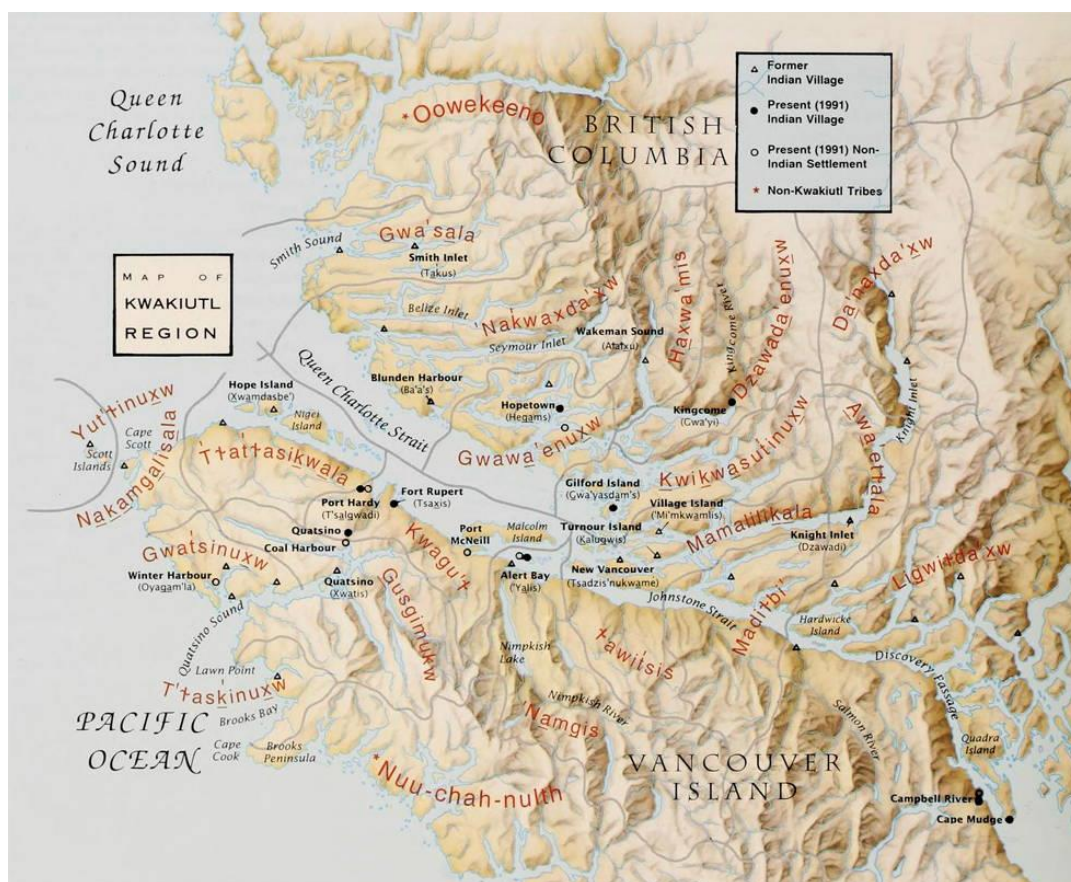


Figure 1: Map of Kwakiutl Region. Jonaitis (1991:18)

Courtesy American Museum of Natural History



The central social organization of the Kwakwaka'wakw is the *pasa*<sup>3</sup> (potlatch), a living heritage of a complex network of ceremonies and oral traditions that situates and identifies each person through inherited privileges of societies, names, dances, songs, legends and *numaym* (family units) which have been passed down through the generations. The *pasa* was prohibited by the Government of Canada in 1884.<sup>4</sup> Even though the Kwakwaka'wakw tribes resisted the law by going “underground” until the prohibition was deleted from the Indian Act in 1951, we still feel a cultural disruption of our relationships to our origin sites, which subsequently questions our relationship with our landscapes and our cultural identities. Individuals socially construct this system of cultural knowledge of the *pasa* which is relational to language, names, ceremonies, rituals, storytelling, myth, legend, song, dance and conversation, which ultimately creates and expresses a sense of place, developing cultural perceptions of the individual and community (Hall 1996).

There are several origin sites connected to the Kwagu'ł people in T'sax̱is,<sup>5</sup> and the one we filmed at is in Beaver Harbour where T'sax̱is is located (Figure 3). Origin sites come into being with the first ancestor, who came down in mythical form to a particular place, and took off their supernatural cloak to become the first human being to exist in the Kwagu'ł world. The sacredness of these places are linked to our origin stories that tell us who we are and where we come from and become symbolic of our connection to our ancestors. Since time immemorial, the origin names of the Kwagu'ł can be traced through

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix C for definitions of all Kwakwala terminology used in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> For information about the outlaw and suppression of the potlatch, see The U'mista Cultural Society's webpages, [http://www.umista.org/masks\\_story/en/ht/potlatch02.html](http://www.umista.org/masks_story/en/ht/potlatch02.html)

<sup>5</sup> See Galois (2012) for detailed listings of all Kwagu'ł sites.

these creation stories, and through genealogies, names, societies, positions, legends, song, and dance attached to these sites.

In efforts to create a wellness that is holistically balanced, the knowledge that stems from these sites is essential to developing a contemporary relationship with our landscapes in our journey of deepening our Kwagu'ł identity. It is this “renewed consciousness” (Alfred 2009) of our connection to our lands that will guide our people as we alter our basic perceptions of ourselves and our community.

### 1.5 The Film

Participants in *Identity Through A Journey With Our Ancestors* are Kwagu'ł community members Ga'axstalas (Mervyn Child), a Kwakwaka'wakw artist, traditional singer and teacher; Tilinukw (Sara Child), a student in the Language Revitalization Master's Program at the University of Victoria, and also a teacher, singer, and dancer; Yakawilas (Coreen Child), a University of Victoria Language student, our elected Kwakiutl Band Chief Councillor, singer, dancer and historian; Tlakwa'gila (Ross Hunt Jr.), an elected Councillor, singer and dancer; and Chief Tlasutiwalis (Calvin A. Hunt), who is a Kwakwaka'wakw artist, small business owner, singer, teacher and mentor. This group of people hold a vast amount of cultural knowledge, are known for their passion to learn, teach and share, and are highly respected by Kwakwaka'wakw people.

The film begins with images of T'sax̱is, accompanied by a narrative by Chief Tlasutiwalis (Calvin Hunt) who talks about the film's themes, accompanied in the background with a traditional Amlala song. Chief Tlasutiwalis, whose name means “always looking” welcomes you, shares what you will be witnessing in this film, as he

introduces film participants Mervyn Child, Sara Child, Ross Hunt Jr. and Coreen Child. Woven throughout the interviews are photographs and film footage that provides a visual of the places and people mentioned by the participants.

T'sax̱is is a magical place set in the bay of Beaver Harbour, where eagles perch high above in tree tops, and lapping waves sound on the shores below. An elongated sandbar stretches out toward Shell Island, the smallest of five islands in our bay where T'sax̱is is located. Our small village is the heart of our traditional territories today. The landscapes of the village and surrounding territories carry the legends and stories of our ancestors as they potlatched, feasted, danced, walked, slept, played and lived on this territory.

Through the oral traditions of our parents, grandparents and Elders, this experiential journey takes our film participants to a place called the *awakawis* (a place to sit and talk), as shown in Figure 4, where they discuss the important relationships of origin sites. There are three origin sites situated in this bay that connect us with our ancestors. Embarking on an experiential journey has its challenges; we are apprehensive because we are delving into the unknown as we look to assert our identity; we are anxious and excited to discover something new and joyful, and exhilarated as we engage on a path that is unfamiliar and familiar simultaneously. Where do we come from? Who are we connected to? What are we connected to? How do we connect and develop relationships with our ancestors, our families, our landscapes, and ourselves?

My research is grounded by cultural practices that generate knowledge, and act as a departure point for our investigation into our identification processes. Origin sites are unique and special places because they carry the answers to many of our questions about

our beginnings, our present, and our future. When we are in place at such a site we embark on an existential journey, delving further into our ancestral knowledge of being in and engagement with place; what our Elders have taught us about our aboriginal identities.

## Section 2

### 2.1 Methodology: *K'waxalikala* (tree of life)

The metaphorical significance of *K'waxalikala* (tree of life) is significant to our ways of being as the teachings emanating from this concept originate with our ancestors. Our ancestors were not colonized; therefore, their teachings come from a holistic worldview without the interruption of Western contact. It is difficult to fully translate the true essence of the meaning of *K'waxalikala* in the English language, according to our fluent Kwakwala speakers (Sara Child, personal communication, July 13, 2013). *K'waxalikala* illustrates relationships and connections that are important to our life-long learning both on an individual and collective basis. Our Indigenous worldview acknowledges the principle that trees are people, and people are the forest; they are community. We are all one – the land, animals, and everything that grows is family. A healthy tree is a healthy forest; therefore, the healthy individual is a healthy community. Elders consistently reinforce and guide us in this belief by teaching us that we must look within ourselves and within our own communities and use the teachings of our ancestors to realize our paths and to sustain us as we navigate our Indigenous and Western worlds. According to the Aboriginal Learning Report by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), Elders “transmit the community’s culture through parables, allegories, lessons and poetry” (CCL 2009:20). The “organic and self-regenerative nature of the model” (CCL 2007:2) is reflected in the interconnectedness of the learning perspectives represented in the elements of the tree of life.

The cedar tree, in its physical form, is central to the material culture of our Kwakwaka'wakw way of life, and is considered our tree of life. Every part of the cedar tree is embedded in every facet of our lives. The roots provide material to make baskets, chilkat blankets, cedar bark cloaks, rope, cedar bark hats. The trunk of the tree to the very top provides wood material to build canoes, houses, cooking utensils, tools, ceremonial masks, and the bark is used to make baskets, dance regalia, medicines and clothing, and, finally, the branches are used in ceremonies and spiritual cleansing rituals. Based on the metaphorical structure of *K'waxalikala*, this framework embodies our learning and knowledge systems of our lived way of being in the world within the physical structure of the tree and its environment.

Also fundamental to *K'waxalikala*, and to assist me as I carry out this research project, are the teachings of the principles of *hase'* (breath of our ancestors) and *maya'xala xa wi'la* (respect all things). In the Kwak'wala language *hase'*, according to my late mother-in-law Emma Hunt, is a term used to describe our life cycle here on this earth as Indian<sup>6</sup> people; we live our life by the breath of our ancestors and through the breath of our ancestors. It is each individual's responsibility to perpetuate our *hase'*, and it is a fundamental value that we carry on for our *gwigwalayu* ("for all children – my reason for living"). The concept of *maya'xala xa wi'la* grounds our experiences in life-long learning of our spiritual, emotional, mental and physical being. *Maya'xala* is our responsibility; it is how we treat everything and everyone; it is our way of life. *Maya'xala* is taught by example from infancy, by our parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and

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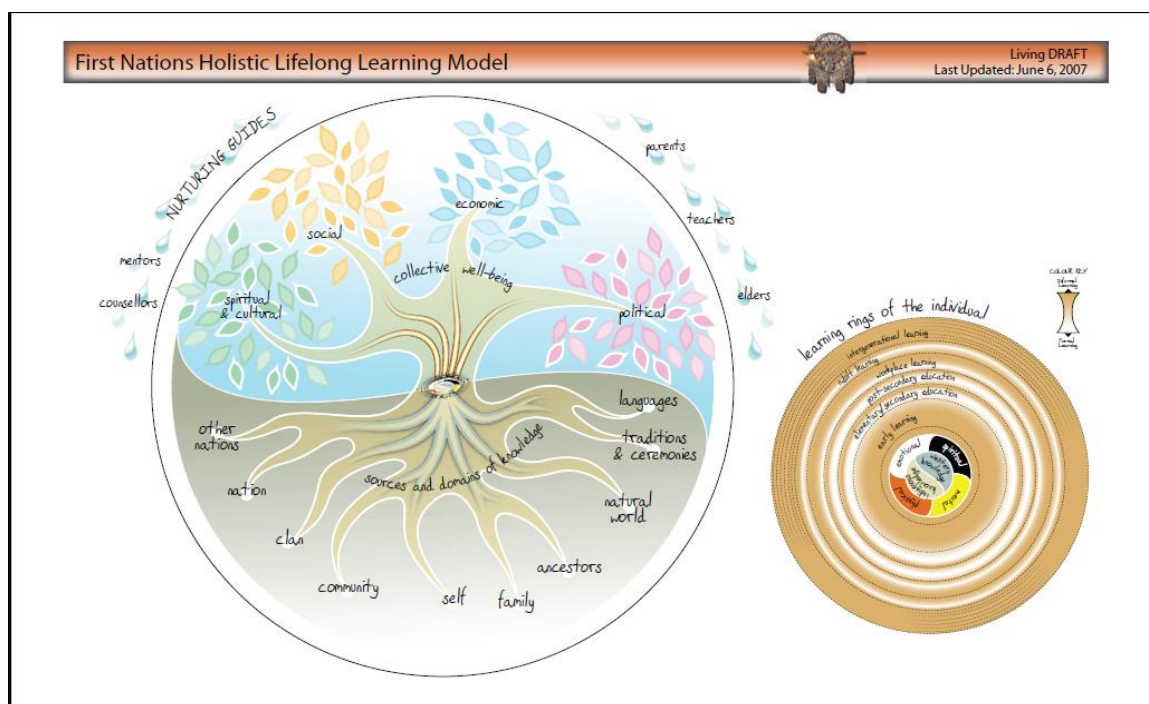
<sup>6</sup> *Indian* is a terminology used by our Elders and by First Nations people when we refer to ourselves. *First Nations* is the contemporary equivalent.

our extended families. The entire community teaches and shares this concept because it is everyone's responsibility.

The structure of *K'waxalikala* is drawn from CCL's stylistic graphic of the First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model (FNHLLM) (CCL 2007), and I have applied the elements of this model to situate this research. This model was developed by the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Center (AbLKC) of the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL). *K'waxalikala* depicts spiritual, emotional, mental and physical lifelong learning and our relationship with community well-being as shown in Figure 2. Each aspect of *K'waxalikala* is relational. Mother Earth wraps her arms around *K'waxalikala* and nourishes *K'waxalikala* through the elements of the soil, sustaining life through the elements of the environment. Life is nourished and sustained through our relations with our sources and domains of knowledge, (CCL 2007) and sustained through our collective well-being. Everything continually changes in growth within a holistic worldview that is inclusive and cumulative over time through the learning rings. Our ancestors, Elders, parents, teachers, our language, counsellors and mentors are the nurturing guides that support our cultural, social, political and economic collective well-being.

The Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (ABLKC) was co-led by the First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium (FNAHEC) and the Aboriginal Education Research Centre (AERC), College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. The ABLKC's mandate is:

*"...to effect individual, community and institutional change in learning to advance the social, cultural, economic and political development of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples; recognizing Indigenous peoples' relationships to Canada, their relationships to place and naturalizing Indigenous world views, knowledge, experiences and perspectives."*



**Figure 2: First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model**

2007 [http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/RedefiningSuccess/CCL\\_Learning\\_Model\\_FN.pdf](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/RedefiningSuccess/CCL_Learning_Model_FN.pdf)

Our journey to experience and discuss origin sites, land, language and oral traditions lies within this domain called the Sources and Domains of Knowledge. The knowledge we gather from Indigenous and western traditions is depicted in this root system, which is the foundation of our cultural identities. These sources of knowledge come from our ancestors, language, *nino'gad* (knowledgeable ones), Elders, traditions and ceremonies, the natural world, *numaym* (family units) and other First Nations Elders, and community members. The root system of any tree can become intertwined or grow in all directions depending on the sources of nourishment. The metaphor of sound foundation of self and community is encompassed in this root system.



In *Identity Through A Journey With Our Ancestors*, memories of relationships, oral traditions, importance of history and language were triggered when we visited the landscape in T'saxis, which we know to be one of our origin sites. This was a place where our first ancestors came down, shed their myth time cloaks and became human. In the film, participant Ross Hunt Jr. remembers the U'mista Cultural Centre's exhibit titled The Tribes, and the creation stories and legends of each of the remaining Kwakwaka'wakw tribes. As he speaks about Fort Rupert's creation story, he realizes he has become conscience of his lack of cultural knowledge, and that he is "just starting to learn the additional ancestors that we have as Kwagu'ł" (Hunt 2014). Because of colonization, Ross is now learning his creation story of the Kwagu'ł from the U'mista Cultural Centre, which has the following story in their Tribes exhibit:

*At a great feast given in T'saxis, the Kwagu'ł Chiefs were discussing the creation of our ancestors. At first no one spoke for a while. Then Malid spoke, saying, "It is the Sun, who created our ancestors of all the tribes." And then the others asked him "how this was possible, for the Sun never even made one man." Others said, "It is Mink, who made our first ancestors."*

*Then spoke the Great-Inviter, saying, "Listen Kwagu'ł, and let me speak a really true word... it was the Seagull who first became man by taking off his mask. That was the beginning of one of the groups of our tribes. And the others were caused when the Sun, and Grizzly Bear, and Thunderbird also took off their masks. That is the reason that we Kwagu'ł are many groups, for each group had its own original ancestor. "A Chief visiting from the Nawitti disagreed, and the Kwagu'ł became angry. For the Nawitti believe that the Transformer (or Creator) went about creating the first ancestors of all the tribes from people who already existed. But the Chiefs of the Kwagu'ł scoffed at this, saying, "Do not say that the Transformer was the Creator of all tribes. Indeed, he just came and did mischief to men, when he made them into raccoon, and land otter, and deer, for he only transformed them into animals. We, of the Kwagu'ł, know our ancestors were the Seagull, Sun, Grizzly Bear and Thunderbird." [U'mista Cultural Society, <http://www.umista.org/kwakwakawakw/tribes.php>]*

The Chiefs discussing the creation of our original ancestors had different ideas of who took off their masks to become our first tribes. In the U'mista exhibit, this story is accompanied by a black and white photograph of Fort Rupert—site of the story--and

because it was recorded by Ross' great grandfather, George Hunt in 1905, the story has validity in cultural knowledge given this family connection and George Hunt's high status in his Kwagu'ł house.

The FNHLLM situates the learning process of an individual, depicted as rings at the cross section of the trunk of the tree and the root system, and it is within these rings I situate our participants' experiential journey of identity. These are the sustainable learning rings of the individual in their wellbeing. At the core of the learning rings lies Indigenous and Western knowledge, surrounded by the four dimensions of personal development – our spiritual, emotional, mental and physical selves. According to the teachings of *K'waxalikala*, lifelong learning takes place in all stages of our lives and in all places that encourage growth and stability. Ancestral teachings provide the necessary tools with which to walk in both worlds. Smith (1999) argues that to make sense of our world, part of this exercise is to reconcile and prioritize “what is really important about the past with what is important about the present” (1999:39). I consider the questions I ask in this research project to be of such importance because origin sites, and how they become meaningful, are foundational to cultural identity.

## **2.2 Why Film?**

I chose film as a methodology because it is a tool that best captures our experience of our epistemological journey. Pink (2007) states the “direct and immediate audio-visual representation of video is capable of evoking empathetic response in audiences in ways writing cannot” (Pink 2007:175). Although written prose can also embody the multi-sensory experiences of the film participants, film provides me with an

opportunity to give back to my community by sharing this work through a medium which everyone, no matter their age, can understand.

Furthermore, film provides a venue to take the viewer to our Indigenous place, which is a place where our voices are heard, with what we know to be our truth. It is a medium that visually conveys the recovery of the importance of our stories, makes sense of our past, and presents how we develop relationships within our realities on a local and global scale (Wilson 2008). For instance, Sara Child, one of this film's participants, collaborated with her daughter and nieces on the 4:36 minute video *Awinakolas*<sup>7</sup> about traditional foods. They uploaded the short video to YouTube to share with community members. Their message about the need for aboriginal people to return to their traditional foods and to learn about their traditional lands and the resources is shared through their memories of teachings they learned from their Elders.

Film also offers an alternative method of disseminating curriculum in education settings about Indigenous ways of learning and teaching when brought into the classroom. Participants in this film talked about how they were taught by their grandparents, which was by observing, listening and then doing, and that this method of learning should be introduced in our schools, either through active participation or through films about their territories. There are very few curricula rooted in "Aboriginal languages, content, processes, perspectives, philosophies, knowledge, and Indigenous methods of teaching and learning" (Simpson 2002:14). Non-aboriginal programming focuses primarily on non- aboriginal learning needs and non- aboriginal ways of learning.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwCECJIMBZI&index=24&list=FLYS9zLFLoactzEsgqWLtOMA>

According to Leanne Simpson (2002), aboriginal educational philosophies that are culturally appropriate and culturally inherent must reflect aboriginal learning and teaching mechanisms. This struggle to incorporate aboriginal learning and teaching mechanisms in school curriculum is reflected in the Government of Canada's February 2014 announcement of Bill C-33; the new First Nation Education Act the Canadian Government believes would recognize First Nations control of First Nations education. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) does not agree and on May 27, 2014 issued a unanimous statement in a Special Chiefs Assembly, "Canada must withdraw Bill C-33 and engage in an honorable process with First Nations that recognizes and supports regional and local diversity leading to true First Nation control of education based on our responsibilities and inherent Aboriginal and Treaty rights" (AFN, 2014 [http://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/unanimous\\_statement.pdf](http://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/unanimous_statement.pdf), accessed August 22, 2014). Similarly, BC's First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) believes this one-model approach is "entirely inappropriate and contrary to First Nations control over First Nations education" (FNESC 2013:1) given the diversity of BC's 203 First Nations. Observing, listening and doing are most effective outside the classroom, grounded in aboriginal ways of knowing, however, it is not always possible to go outside the classroom. Film is an alternative method with the potential to provide a tremendous support for culturally appropriate programs that would provide a lasting impact on students because of the visual and emotion connections created by the visual image. *Identity Through A Journey With Our Ancestors* could contribute to this important body of cultural knowledge if used in the classroom.

### 2.3 Film's Contribution

Films by aboriginal filmmakers are created to educate, inform, and maintain history and culture. They speak to social, economic and cultural issues that concern identity, family, education, land and language. These people speak from inside themselves as they present their voice.

Film is also an important medium as we look for ways to teach our Kwakwala language, which is in a critical stage as there are very few fluent Kwakwala speakers in our village. According to the 2010 Report on the Status of BC First Nations Languages Report by the First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Council, BC's 32 languages are in a critically endangered state with only 5.1% fluent speakers. It is imperative we use all technologies available to record the knowledge of the few fluent Kwakwala speakers remaining today. There are numerous resources available that teach Kwakwala, such as the U'mista Cultural Society's language project that are available on CDs.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, storytelling about life lessons to children is available through the legends told in the Ravens Tales,<sup>9</sup> an animated television program about the antics of Raven, developed by Chris Kientz and produced by Calgary-based New Machine Studios in partnership with Vancouver Artist and producer Winadzi James, with episodes available for purchase on DVD. YouTube, Facebook and Vimeo are relatively inexpensive websites with different distribution platforms depending on the filmmaker's goals, where people can upload and share their video projects.

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.umista.org/giftshop/languageeducation.php>.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.raventalles.com/>

Aboriginal communities are presenting their arguments about resurgence and renewal in larger film productions with larger distribution. For instance, Barb Cranmer's film *'Namegan's Om Dlu'wans Awinagwisex, We are one with the Land* (2014), is a film about the 'Nāmgis First Nation's argument in support of their treaty negotiations. They highlight their ideas about their landscapes in the 'Nāmgis Valley and what these ancestral lands mean to them. Their first ancestor landed on the shores of their Gwa'ni River in the form of Thunderbird, who shed his supernatural cloak and turned into a Man. We hear firsthand from Elders, Chiefs, and community members about the importance of these landscapes in terms of their ancestors, and how their people come from their lands. Through conversation, interviews and ceremony we witness how for thousands of years the 'Nāmgis have been defined by their lands through spirit, song, dance and relationships to the land.

Cranmer's film resonates with her people's voices and communicates their stories from their perspective. She has co-produced, written and directed several other film works that document traditional knowledge and cultural renewal in films such as *I'Tusto to Rise Again* (2000). This film's voiceover is entirely in our Kwakwala language, with English translation in text. The film is about the 'Nāmgis gukwdzi, which burned down August 29, 1997, and about the devastation the Kwakwaka'wakw people felt. The importance of culture, history, language and ceremony takes us on a journey of strength, perseverance and resurgence as we witness photographs of the burnt building, film footage of interviews and ceremonies that document the rebuilding of the gukwdzi.

Cranmer takes us on a similar journey in her film, *T'Lina: The Rendering of Wealth* (1999) as it informs and educates the viewer about T'lina, our prized eulachon oil

caught and processed at Dzawadi (Knights Inlet). Despite the reduced numbers in this fishery, this dietary staple of the people of the Northwest Coast is a cultural tradition the Kwakwaka'wakw continue today. In this film, Arthur Dick Sr. sums the practice of rendering oil up as, “what I do is because of my Dad. That’s what keeps us going – carrying on our tradition.” Cultural traditions and practices come from the teachings of our ancestors and nino'gad, which are passed down through the generations. Cranmer uses interviews, archival photos and film footage as she tells the story of how t'ina is made and about the people who make the yearly journey to Dzawadi.

Our ancestors have been here since time immemorial, and Cranmer with a strong voice, has written, produced and directed several other films about the land and sea in her traditional territories of the 'Namgis. She wrote, directed, and produced a documentary about the canoe resurgence on the Northwest Coast in *Qatuwas: People Gathering Together* (1996). *Laxwesa Wa: Strength of the River* (1995) discusses Stó:lo, Heiltsuk and 'Namgis sustainable fishery within a global economy. She also produced *Mungo Martin: A Slender Thread* (1991), a portrait of renowned Kwakwaka'wakw artist Mungo Martin who was instrumental in reviving Northwest Coast art. She tackles obesity and diabetes in her film *My Big Fat Diet* (2008) that documents her people’s journey as they cope with health issues related to their contemporary diet.

Known for documenting women’s experience and their resistance against oppression and assimilation, Metis filmmaker, Christine Welsh directed *Keepers of the Fire* (1994), and dedicated this film to warrior women. Seldom acknowledged for their role within their communities, this film is about contemporary First Nations women and the roles they play in defending culture, tradition and land. She profiles Mohawk, Haida,

Ojibwe, and Maliseet women and their vision, strength, courage, passion, and responsibility as they defend and protect their peoples' cultural traditions and lands. Through narration, media flashbacks, and interviews, the film identifies women warriors – the ones who bear the burden of peace, who story tell, heal, protect and nurture, teach and love – with strength and courage to do what they do on behalf of their future generations.

These filmmakers' contributions to the film industry about aboriginal people and their “cultural production, social interactions and individual experience” (Pink 2007:1) demonstrate their commitment and responsibility to their people by telling stories about ways of being in the world from their perspective.

## **2.4 Methods**

I am guided by the teachings from our Elders from whom I have learned throughout my life time. As I pointed to earlier in this section, the works from Indigenous scholars Margaret Kovach (2009), Leanne Simpson (2011), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), and Shawn Wilson (2008) guide this research through their discussions of culturally relevant and appropriate methods. Simpson (2011) argues that as we navigate our contemporary world on our own terms, we need “to engage in indigenous processes, since according to our traditions, the processes of engagement highly influence the outcome of the engagement itself” (2011:17). This Indigenous way of sharing knowledge is crucial to any Indigenous researcher as they ask questions in their own community. For this reason I could not, on an individual basis, decide what the topic of this research should be. I needed to think about what would benefit our community the most as I work



towards a master's degree. Giving back to my community by sharing this work in a medium everyone can engage with was an important aspect of this decision.

To meet the goals and outcomes of this project, it was critical that I involve community members in topic choice and in undertaking the project. Following traditional protocol when doing any work with a cultural focus, others must be included to witness and validate important events. By actively including members in the research, we narrow the gap between the researcher and the subject, eliminating potential for bias and misrepresentation, as well as involving those many support persons from the Kwagu'ł community. Therefore, when conducting this project in the community it was critical to have consistent guidance and leadership from community members in order to best meet project outcomes. *K'waxalikala* situates Kwagu'ł people within the Sources and Domains of Knowledge, and it is they who hold the knowledge base and insight necessary to make the project meaningful to the community as a whole.

The choice of topic for this project came from conversations I had with our elected Chief, Coreen Child when I worked as Traditional Use Study (TUS) researcher for the Kwakiutl Band. The Band's archive of written and audio material from interviews, books and journals has very little information about origin sites. There are, however, written creation stories in *Ethnology of the Kwakiutl* (Boas 1921), but we heard very little discussion about these kinds of sites amongst our people. Our parents and grandparents discussed the pasa, sang our songs, danced our dances and taught us about our culture, but this topic of origin sites was never discussed. These important sacred places where our first ancestors came down to earth to become who we are today were not talked about and this puzzled me. I have had several discussions about our origin sites

with Elders, community members and family, but everyone with whom I spoke did not know why we do not talk about these sacred places and their meanings. Perhaps origin sites were not talked about because maybe our Elders thought it is implicit in all our songs, dances and ceremonies? These sites are foundational to our ideas of who we are and where we come from. Through this research project, the “box of treasure” that Sara Child mentions in this film, has been opened for discussion through this research.

The need to engage in our own indigenous processes to navigate as Indigenous people in these contemporary times is paramount and foundational to aboriginal identity and collective well-being. We not only need to discover who we are and where we come from, but we need to discover the practices, and re-establish these practices that guide us. Thus, we recognize the need to re-establish, re-connect, re-engage, and re-new our relationships with land, language and oral traditions through “diverse, nation-culture-based resurgences” (Simpson 2011:17). And the way we search for these processes influences the outcomes (Kovach 2009), which is why we employ Indigenous methodologies and frameworks that community members will understand as it is they who ultimately ensure that this research is carried out in a respectful manner that honours and upholds our cultural traditions (Kovach 2009).

The origin site at T’sax̱is (Figure 3) is the place where my research is grounded by its association with cultural practices and knowledge, and it also acts as a departure point for academic research. This journey is an opportunity to experience and critically consider how we as a people of the Kwagu’ł explore the ways in which we connect the past to the present by acknowledging and reacting to teachings in a journey of self-discovery.

## Recruitment

As researcher and community member, I facilitated the recruitment process. I introduced my project to the community outlining my purpose and objectives of this research at our weekly Elders' luncheons at our Health building. I also posted a notice in our weekly newsletters delivered by hand to each home on the reserve (See Appendix B).

During my introduction at the Elder's luncheons, I asked our Elders if they would like to participate in the research project through a group discussion about origin sites and their meaning, separate from the filmed discussions associated with our experiential journey. Several Elders were interested. I set up a date and time to meet with two Elders at our Health facility, a comfortable and familiar setting for our community members. Only one Elder showed up and we audio recorded our conversation. I asked another Elder who married into the Kwagu'l, and she declined because she stated she was not from here. I believe she does not think she has the right to represent the Kwagu'l. Keeping the concept of maya'xala in mind, I did not ask her for clarification. This decision is unfortunate because she would have made a tremendous contribution to this research because of her vast cultural knowledge. She is our matriarch, Kwakwala is her first language, and she is our Nino'gad and language teacher, and remains to be an invaluable resource to our people. Several attempts were made to contact and schedule interviews with two of our three Hereditary Chiefs; however, conflicting schedules prevented their participation. Failing health prevented our other Hereditary Chief from sharing his knowledge at this particular time in his late life.

There were two Elders I approached Gundal (Hazel) Wilson and Mervyn child, both of whom agreed to participate. Gundal spent her childhood at Kalogwis (Turnour

Island, BC), an origin site of the Kwagu'ł, making her potential contribution unique to this film. However, her schedule and health prevented her from participating, and I recruited Sara Child to replace her. Even though Sara is not an Elder, her knowledge of cultural traditions, language and her language revitalization efforts made her an important contributor to our discussions. Mervyn Child was recruited as he is considered an Elder,<sup>10</sup> albeit an Elder in training. I asked Mervyn to participate in this film because of his passion to learn; over the past 30 years he has consistently spent time with and engaged in conversations with our Elders and Chiefs about our language, legends, myths and cultural practices. I asked Ross Hunt Jr. to participate because of his leadership, cultural knowledge and interest in learning everything he can about our landscapes and our history. Our fourth film participant is Coreen Child, our elected Chief Councillor. Coreen is a young woman with a fierce passion for culture, family and land and I felt her life experiences and cultural knowledge would be a very important asset to this research.

I also sought information from Chief Wedlidi Speck and Chief William Wasden, Jr., both of whom possess a vast knowledge about our cultural practices, beliefs, names, songs and family lineages. Their in-depth research has generated an enormous amount of knowledge about our social organization, and they are often sought out for their guidance in cultural protocols. They are not a part of the film project; however, they were important contributors to this research project.

The nature of the relationships I have as researcher in this project to the research group is not uncommon in First Nations communities. Although I have personal relationships with each participant (due to our common family tree) it is necessary for me

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<sup>10</sup> A Kwagu'ł Elder is someone 55+ years due to the low numbers in this demographic.

to include them in this project given their willingness to participate, interest, knowledge and expertise in our cultural ceremonies and their interest in learning about relationships with our traditional territories. Further, each of these individuals represent some of the most knowledgeable cultural teachers and leaders in our community and this pool is very limited for a project this specific, particularly as we have very few Elders left to draw from who have knowledge about origin sites. These relationships lend strength to this project rather than a limitation given the common interests and intimate understanding of cultural traditions and language demonstrated by participants. Their expertise is a benefit to any future language and cultural programs for our community.

The following relations exist within community to me as researcher in this project: Mervyn Child – Elder, nephew; Sara Child – niece, Ross Hunt Jr. – nephew; Coreen Child – great niece.

My initial meeting with this group took place at my home one evening, along with several other family members. I called this meeting to talk about my thesis project and what questions I wished to ask, and to discuss logistics of travelling to the origin site named Wak̓an̓akw, located on Gilford Island, BC.<sup>11</sup> I proposed we could make the journey logistically to Gilford Island; it was only a matter of scheduling. The structure of this meeting was relaxed and informal as we talked about our origin sites and the importance of these types of sites in our political arena. We also discussed several topics related to our origin sites, such as different aspects in gukw̓dzi protocol, how we acquire meaning to the dance societies we have been initiated into, our family genealogies, Chieftainships, Indigenous time and traditional songs. We discussed how this information

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<sup>11</sup> The origin site, Wak̓an̓akw was my original site for this research project, but everyone's schedule did not coincide for a day's trip to Gilford Island.

should be incorporated into our school curriculum, how we could embark on future projects about different kinds of sites and uses, and how song talks about our nuyums and places. We also discussed the potential this project presents in terms of discussion about blurred boundaries with our neighbouring First Nations. This session instilled excitement about discovering our origin sites, and our landscapes. Everyone left with a full heart and anticipation of what is to come about our learning about our origin sites and what they mean. We finished our session with traditional songs.

### **Location**

As a result of conflicting schedules, our trip to Wak̓an̓akw was replaced by a short journey to the awakawis, which is located on our beach in T'sax̓is. This site lies directly in front of our village in the bay of Beaver Harbour and has three recorded origin sites. My mother-in-law Emma Hunt, and our Auntie NuNu understood T'sax̓is to mean, “little birds running on the beach” (personal communication, April 1983) whereas Boas cites T'sax̓is as meaning “stream running on the beach” (Galois 2012:215). There are hundreds of birds running on our beach at certain times of the year, and there is a small stream running on the beach, where the old houses were situated. This site is a two-minute drive from home.

There are three recorded origin sites within the area (Figure 3). A Walas Kwagu'ł site #15, Ta'yaguł (Galois 2012), located in the middle of the harbour is identified in our elder Auntie NuNu's (Helen Knox) narrative in Galois' publication (2012). T'łatakūł is located on the west side of T'sax̓is and is a Walas Kwakiutl origin site. The other site #10 is Ka'k'a, meaning, “logs laid crosswise on rock” (Galois 2012:212) near Thomas Point,

located on the south side, is an origin place of the Kwakiutl, Kweeha and Walas Kwakiutl (Galois 2012). In the awakawis discussion, Sara Child refers to a site in Hardy Bay, which is K'udagala, (Galois 2012), meaning “standing on edge between” according to Boas (Galois 2012:212).

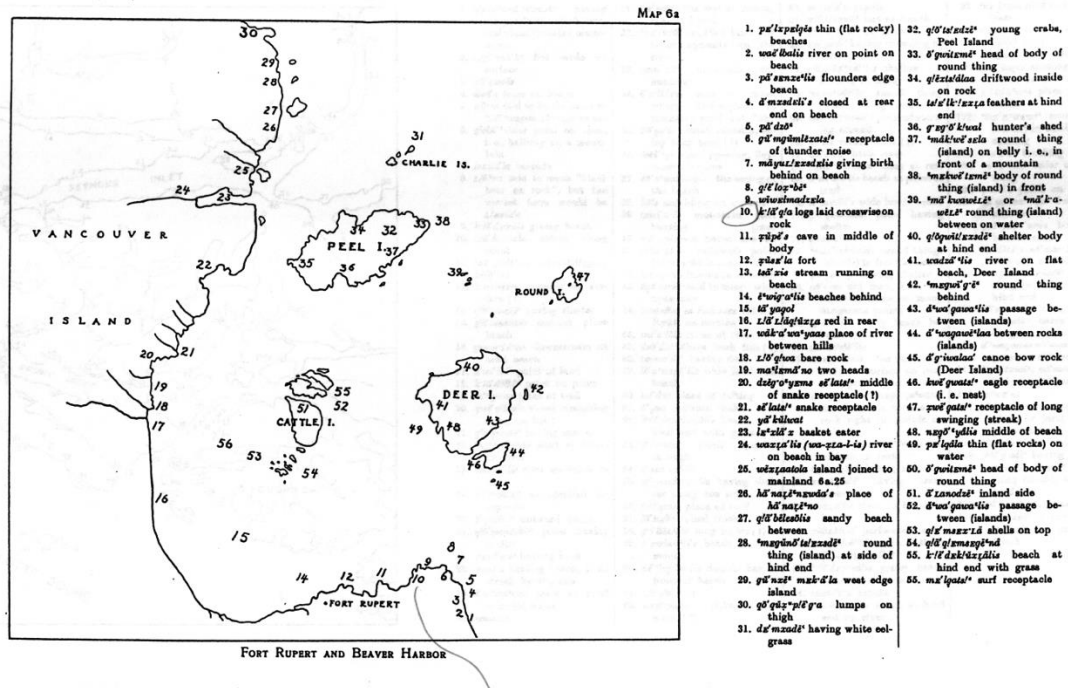


Figure 3: Map 6, T'saxis

Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements, 1775-1920 A Geographical Analysis and Gazetteer (Galois 2012: Map 6)

### Interviews

Throughout my discussions with community members about origins sites, I was open to suggestions, and collaborated with community members on their approaches or concerns that could improve or build on this project. I invited community members to participate, and once informed and consent was obtained from the participants, the

Kwakiutl Band, and the Human Research Ethics Board at UVIC, I began scheduling times and places to film interviews with the four film participants. All sessions were videotaped using the Department of Anthropology's and the Kwakiutl Band's digital video equipment. Data collected at these discussions were used in the final video project and will be resource material in the band's resource library. A copy of the film will be deposited in the Kwakiutl First Nation's resource library, copies will be given to participants and available in streamed format through the Department of Anthropology's Visual Lab web site.

Each film participant was interviewed twice; one interview before the group discussion, and the other interview after the group discussion. Through participant observation, and working within the principals of *maya'xala xa hesta'lis*, a practice of always maintaining respect for the universe--I asked seven questions (Appendix A) about themselves, their experience with oral traditions, what their sense of place is, what aboriginal identity means, their thoughts about our landscapes and origin sites, about their knowledge of our relationships with landscapes, and why they wish to be a part of this project. All interviews took place at my home, a familiar and comfortable setting. Answers were recorded on video, however, there were conversations between questions that were either not part of the project, or was information we did not want recorded. I had assumed everyone was comfortable in front of the camera, and I found I should not assume. The initial uneasiness disappeared after much laughter and small talk. I eventually covered the red light with tape to make the camera less intrusive.

The group interview took place at our *awakawis*. We sat around a fire and talked informally, while I filmed from one position on the right side (see Figure 4). It was a cool



windy day, and the fire provided warmth. The fire also acts as a connection to our ancestors through the embers that burn, and the smoke that rises.



**Figure 4: Awakawis. Photograph Marie Hunt**

For the group discussion I employed the conversational method (Kovach 2009) involving an open-ended structure. This method allowed participants greater control over what and how they wished to share. My responsibility was to be an active listener. This method becomes more about people sharing their stories rather than responding to structured questions. According to Kovach (2009), this type of method reveals the power dynamic I have with participants. I had prepared a list of questions for this discussion; however, Mervyn suggested we combine the questions, which we all accommodated. I asked one question - could you share what an origin site means to you; what's the concept that comes to mind? (Appendix A), after which the interview took the form of an open conversation.

## Limitations

We have very few Elders in T'saxis today who we would consider to be our Nino'gad from whom we could draw knowledge. Our Nino'gad are the ones whose first language is Kwakwala, and are the people we go to for advice and information. Physical and mental health is fragile, making the need for doctor appointments and hospital stays; the closest specialist is a three-hour drive south. Daily personal realities such as these ones made scheduling interviews and visiting with these people a difficult task. Since I started this project last year, we have lost several Nino'gad, not only from our community, but also from the Kwakwaka'wakw nation.

The film does not address the use of language in its focus on origin sites. The complexities and depth of knowledge about the relationship between origin sites and language is immense, and would require a separate film to do justice to the topic. Although language was not explicitly spoken about in this film, participants spoke about how critical our relationship is to our origin sites and how language embodies the true meaning of the relationship of origin sites and cultural identity. Because the true meanings of teachings and practices are next to impossible to explain in English, there is a real need to explore the use of language to explain the teachings.

As an Indigenous student researcher who has extensive knowledge of our community, our language revitalization efforts, knowledge of our culture, I have advantages that non-indigenous researchers from outside our community do not. However, working in your own community also has disadvantages. It was very easy for participants to forget our appointments; re-scheduling happened several times. Being a student does not necessarily mean we have a set schedule, and participants found it very

easy to ask to re-schedule on very short notice. Participants' schedules were very hectic as they were either working full-time, at school, or spending quality time with their families. Two participants are also in the four-year language revitalization program with intensive three-day weekends every other week. Two are Kwakiutl Band Council members who must attend a minimum of two weekly meetings as well as attend out-of-town meetings. Smith (1999) argues indigenous researchers who have insider knowledge must have "considerable sensitivity, skill, maturity, experience and knowledge" to work through these types of issues, which I found to be very true. I would also add patience and tolerance.

Another limitation is my lack of filmmaking expertise in filming and technical skills. It is not a medium I have consciously worked on until I decided to make a short film for this graduate degree. Besides being the family photographer and taking short videos, the only other exposure to film was when my daughter, Ali, and I took a two-week First Nations Intensive course at the Gulf Islands Film and Television School on Galliano Island in October 2012. This course offered a very short and intensive course that exposed us to the basics of the camera and videoing, as well as basic editing.

## **2.5 My Discussion about this Film**

In the film, Sara Child shares her memories of her grandmother telling her about where she comes from through the legends and stories about the Great Inventor. She believes these memories to be an important process of her identity today. Sara clearly remembers the warmth and comfort she felt as she recalls the sound and smell of her Granny (Emma Hunt) as she told legends of our ancestor, the Sun, and how the Sun is

our connection to our relatives and our neighbouring tribes. What is unfortunate, according to Sara, is many of our families' connection to the land have been disrupted because no one goes out onto our lands and develops relationships with our ancestors by visiting these sacred sites. In the film she says, "who we are and where we come from is directly related to our origin sites but most people, our generation and younger have no clue what that means" (Hunt 2014:4:33) because we believe this is how we came to be. Our ancestors were the Sun, Grizzly Bear, Seagull and Thunderbird. She believes these origin stories must be told to our children and reiterated throughout the generations, just as our ancestors did. It is important to remember them, as the memories embody our cultural teachings.

Sara also ties our origin stories and sites, our traditions, and our ways of doing things to our language revitalization programs we have today. For to truly know our origin sites and landscapes, we need to learn our language to be able "to walk on the land in humility and to succeed in the Western contemporary society we live in today" (personal communication, August 23, 2013). According to Sara, it is through our language that we can unearth our truths, and our history, and to do that, we need to look back to our ancestors and their teachings. Our own people must search for the truth through our voice and our eyes by remembering past relationships and stories from our Elders so that we can be a living part of a vibrant, thriving future. Language tells us about our teachings and "brings the practice of those teachings into our daily lives" (Simpson 2011:49).

Film participant, Mervyn Child, speaks about another kind of origin site that has significance for him and his siblings. Through his participation in this project, he became

aware there are places other than in our Kwagu'ł traditional territories he considers to be origin sites. He remembers learning of this other origin site when he spent time in Wawaditla, his great grandfather, Mungo Martin's gukwdzi at the Royal BC Museum's Thunderbird Park, Victoria BC. The potlatch ban of 1884 was lifted in 1951 and Mungo hosted the very first Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch in this gukwdzi. Today, it remains a place where urban Kwakwaka'wakw continue to host their feasts and potlatches. He shares the story of the cultural transformation that took place through the songs they heard and the dances he and his siblings witnessed. Cultural ceremonies and their pedagogical discourse creates roots in family, ancestors, worldview and landscape, and according to Cochran, ceremonies create a "homeland without boundaries" (1995:83), which is where place represents who you are, where you come from and where you belong (Cochran 1995; Rodman 1992). The strategy of legend storytelling sustains the community, and how Elders use these strategies demonstrate the "power and creativity of verbal art" (Dupres 2010:76). For Mervyn, it was through watching the dancers transform into their ancestors, and listening to the oral narratives of names and numaym at this potlatch held in the gukwdzi that contributed to his rootedness and contemporary Kwagu'ł identity.

Our younger film participant, Ross Hunt Jr. believes origin sites are our history; it is the birth of our people—our origins, our nuyums, and our ancestors. He believes the production of his knowledge about origin sites come from literature as well as oral traditions transmitted inter-generationally. Today, he believes we are claiming back our Kwagu'ł identity, our origin sites, for our children and our children's children, and those yet unborn by speaking about this knowledge that he remembers being told to him by his father and grandfather.

These acts of renewal, resurgence and resistance in cultural survival continue as we take advantage of new material cultures available in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Technology is an important tool used by Indigenous people to document their struggle for self-determination and cultural revival. It is a tool used in learning language, songs, stories, and ceremonies. We have been told we are no longer “authentic” Indigenous people because we eat pizza and drive cars. We are often asked where our bow and arrows are. Unfortunately, this question of authenticity remains today. The idea of “re-Indianizing”, according to Vine Deloria Jr. (1969) is a common practice of non-First Nation societies, according to their idea of what we “were like in the past and should logically become in the future” (Deloria 1969:92). Technology cannot replace our grandparents telling us stories and passing on our legends, but it is a useful tool to document and record these histories.

The number of Indigenous filmmakers documenting social and cultural change has experienced enormous growth with the advent of smaller, more powerful film equipment and software. It is more affordable to own a small camera, and with the accessibility of the Internet, uploading short videos is an inexpensive avenue for new filmmakers to showcase their work. Images are constructions, and it is we who are doing the constructing however real that may be, but it comes from within the reality of our aboriginal community. These videos and films are not just about a subject, or a story, a character, a place or a way of life, they are also our way of seeing.

Jay Ruby (1991) argues voice, authority and authorship are serious concerns amongst filmmakers and anthropologists. *Identity Through A Journey With Our Ancestors* clearly engages his concern about who has the authority to present our

viewpoint. Film participants consistently talk about speaking our voice and how our voice is represented in film. The criteria for what I selected and edited in this film came from each participant. From an emic point of view, I know the places to which they refer to in the film, I am able to input images to their words bringing their conversation to life. I did not show any of the film participants footage in post-production and editing; they declined to see the footage due to busy schedules. I did, however, email each participant a transcript and timeline of the film for their review. Our relationship is a trusting one and they have confidence I would do my best to represent us in how we want to be represented in sharing their story, through their eyes, their voice.

This film was not a total collaboration, nor was the content of the film a mutual process. I decided on the content of the film, which came from our interviews and conversations amongst the participants. These interviews and conversations generated a wealth of topics about our language, ceremony, dance, song, teaching and learning. However, I had to remain focused on my thesis topic about origin sites and cultural identity practices. Thus the decision to centre the film exclusively about origin sites and cultural identification practices.

## Section 3

### 3.1 Conclusion

This journey of self-discovery was an opportunity to acknowledge and react to cultural teachings, and to experience and critically consider the ways in which we as Kwagu'ł people connect the past to the present. By placing ourselves temporally and spatially with our ancestors, we were able to develop an ideological framework consistent with ancestral worldview that lies outside of western discourse of time and space by being on the land, using all our senses to touch, see, smell, and taste the land, water and air. Indigenous experience and storytelling are legitimate Indigenous ways of knowing in Indigenous epistemology with teachings transmitted from generation to generation. It is the spoken words that are primary in Indigenous discourse, and material objects serve as illustrations for narratives. Brian Thom argues that narratives are “associated with and embodied in the land” (Thom 2005:88) and the myths themselves are the legendary people. They connect hereditary prerogatives and establish major landmarks of property and identity (Thom 2005). The ways grandparents told stories and legends to film participants Mervyn, Ross and Sara evoked a sense of connection with their ancestors through their memories as they talked about their experiences.

Like the extended branches of *K'waxalikala*, the group discussion at the awakawis reflected ancestral teachings of reaching out to one another and supporting one another as we work towards a collective well-being within a contemporary context. Social, economic, political, spiritual and cultural beings are relational, supported by our nurturing guides – our mentors, councillors, Elders, parents, and teachers as we renew,



revitalize, and regenerate our own culture and traditions through memory work on the land. As we work to sustain a healthy community, film participants showed us through their memories of sight, sound and smell that they can embrace our ancestors' knowledge and retain their ancestral teachings in today's world.

As an aboriginal community member, I believe I presented a voice from within, using our Indigenous teachings of *K'waxalikala* (tree of life) to frame this research. "It is a strict law that bids us to dance" (Jonaitis 1991:227) as Kwagu'ł Chief O'wax̱alagalis told Dr. Franz Boas in 1886 in his description of cultural practices. This is a voice that resonates within our aboriginal communities which has been maintained through time. Chief Robert Joseph, a respected Kwakw̱aḵ'wakw Chief, Speaker, Nino'gad, relative, editor of *Listening to our Ancestors* expands, "It is a strict law that bids us to dance. It is a strict law that bids us distribute our goods among our friends and neighbours. It is a good law. Let the white man observe his law, we shall observe ours" (Joseph 2005:9; Jonaitis 1991:227). Chief Joseph also expresses the belief that our existence is for our children and it is the resilience, "balance, harmony and resolution" (Joseph 2005:13) of our ancestors that have paved the way to embrace our Kwakw̱aḵ'wakw heritage. It shows our "commitment to these relationships" (Corntassel 2012:94) when we practice handing this knowledge down through the generations. These teachings are still with us today and can be evidenced in the film when Sara and Ross share their beliefs that we need to obey our laws for our children.

"We believe we are still connected to the spirit of our traditional past, and we carry that essence through our ancestral memory. We are where we belong. We are a living culture," says Barb Cranmer (Joseph 2005:70), a sentiment reflected by Sara when

she speaks about the stories she remembers hearing from her Granny Emma. “We believe that the dead can visit this world, and that the living can visit the past,” and “that to listen to our ancestors is to open our spirits to knowledge not taught in school or learned in books” (Joseph 2005:7). According to an Indigenous ontology, time and place exist simultaneously with the now and then, passed from one generation to the next. Film participants, Sara and Ross spoke about how we need to revive our relationship with our landscapes, and bring these relationships into our schools through our languages within aboriginal ways of learning and teaching.

Participants spoke about ways they communicate with our ancestors—through remembering, speaking names, singing our songs, storytelling, genealogy and ceremony. Sara clearly remembers listening as a small child, and can still hear her Granny’s gentle voice, and visions her animated facial expressions as she shares the legends and stories of her ancestors. Elders transmit knowledge through storytelling, songs and conversation, histories, lineages and expectations of social behaviour; they are important “social guides, guardians of important knowledge, social critics, and experienced teachers” (Cole and Palmer 2009:15). Sara’s memories of the stories and teachings remain with her as important lifelong learning lessons, and she has a feeling of urgency to pass these teachings “through those beautiful stories” on to her children, grandchildren and great grandchild (Hunt 2014).

Ross believed he really did not know anything; he did not think he had any kind of knowledge to share and pass on to his children. By voicing his ideas about origin sites and how they are connected to our history, Ross remembers the teachings about respect, humility, love and truth he received from his parents and grandparents, and how that

connects him to his ancestors. This project has also been a process that helped him realize his need to create a deeper connection with his ancestors and learn about their relationship with their landscapes, and the history behind each origin site. He believes his numaym are his ancestors, the place where we come from. By engaging in this process he believes we become truer to our Indigenous selves, and for our community, which is consistent with *K'waxalikala*.

Coreen Child believes through reciprocity and responsibility to our lands, and the connection to “the birth of our people, the birth of song, the birth of creation stories, the birth of dance, the birth of so many things that our people practiced to make sure” (Hunt 2014) we maintained ourselves. She has no overwhelming feelings when she thinks about origin sites because she believes our lands are “simple facts that come about, you’ll enter a space, it provides shelter, it provides food, it usually is connected to a water system. And our people were brilliant in that” (Hunt 2014). And for her, it is “really a continuum of connections, responsibility to the land that’s reciprocal” (Hunt 2014). Johannes Fabian (1983) argues that time is a function of subjective belief systems that become lenses through which behaviour, self and structure are mediated and performed. There are multiple levels of time and how people place themselves temporally reflect their worldview. Coevalness with our ancestors requires a collapse of time and to place ourselves within the same dimension, and this epistemological dimension of time and place is evident in Coreen’s statements about her embodied connection with her ancestors, through reciprocity and responsibility, and practices that have been in existence since time immemorial that are contained in names, songs and dances.

While Mervyn talks about origin sites in T'sax̱is, he is reminded of another origin site up in Dzawadi, a place where the Kwagu'ł own a site in a sacred village far up Knight Inlet here our ancestors traveled each spring to fish and process eulachons. Our late Hereditary Chief Peter Knox shared the story of This̱lag'lakw, the mink who came down as a supernatural earthly being, who was the son of the Sun. The practice Mervyn engages in, in relating this story, demonstrates how our oral traditions become meaningful when he says “as I came to know that nuyumbe, that great story delivered to me through story you know, it became very rich, so, the idea of origin place origin for me is about, is about that beginning, that first time our ancestors ever got a foothold on earth” (Hunt 2014:6:35). These learning opportunities become profound and meaningful when we think about the foundations of our identities. Oral Traditions are stones that ripple through time (Simpson 2002).

Cultural praxis ascertained through agency, culture and history produces meaning of place and establishes relationships with place. Important ceremonial practice, and how Kwagu'ł community members relate to these practices ultimately creates a sense of identity between the individual, community and spiritual worldview. Through the epistemological discourse of language, memory and interaction with ceremonial practices, people possess the agency that allows for an ontological sense of identity that situates them within their culture. It is also the sense of experiencing, embodying and sharing within the context of ancestral knowledge that lies within the strategies that people employ. The ontological practices remain and continue to be reinvigorated within Kwakw̱aḵ'wakw society.

The experience of filming discussions around our aboriginal identities has “opened a beautiful can of worms” according to Sara Child (personal communication, September 1, 2013), that encompasses identification practices that have been dormant for a very long time. This research project and film have demonstrated the need to discuss origin sites and their importance to our identification practices. Community members are intrigued about our ancestral knowledge and curious about origin sites and what they mean to our identities.

Language remains a major obstacle in learning about our landscapes. It is evident from our participants that the true meanings of our identities are created from our relationships with our lands and our language. Our ways of knowing, socializing and non-verbal communication allows for other elements of language. Kwakwala is the second language of the majority of our people. Will the language shift to English affect our understanding and speaking of Kwakwala and impede our ability to create meaningful relationships? Yes, it will. Sara Child talks about uncovering our truths, our histories and to be able to teach our children this knowledge. But, the lack of language remains problematic in attempting to regenerate our Indigenous worldview towards landscapes through language.

Or will something else occur? Will individuals discover other ways of creating meaningful relationships within Kwagu’ł cultural practices that lie outside the parameters of language? The Kwagu’ł are similar to the Hopi where the transfer of history, cultural and spiritual knowledge is severely threatened due to the lack of fluent Hopi language. The significant language shift to English as a first language leads to an identity issue when cultural socialization is in jeopardy (Nicholas 2010). Nicholas’ (2010) study

amongst her people focused on the process of oral traditions and identity to examine what connects language, epistemology and identity, and asks why these processes remain salient. She coins the term *affective enculturation*, which she identifies as a process of Hopi identity through active participation and involvement in Hopi way of life where an “emotional commitment and allegiance to the ideals of the Hopi way of life is formed” (Nicholas 2010:128). By following in the footsteps of their ancestors, the Hopi have strong convictions “that there is a spiritual return to the remote past that is lived again” (Nicholas 2010:141). Thus, practicing Hopi cultural ceremonies and traditions instils the values of their culture, effectively identifying them as Hopi; it is the way they were brought up. Nicholas (2010) argues that language is one way to experience culture, although identity is not complete without language. Affective enculturation is a process that encourages language revitalization. Their language revitalization efforts are similar to Kwagu’l language initiatives, and Sara talks about the importance of language to cultural identity. The practice of following in the footsteps of our ancestors is a practice our film participants engage in as they speak about grandparents’ story and legend telling, as well as following in their footsteps in song and dance.

Even though our Nino’gad are willing to share their knowledge, it is the language fluency that impacts the practices embedded in cultural knowledge. By listening to our Elders relate narratives about our ancestors and our cultural traditions, and how we came to be, is an exercise of affective enculturation. Those who do not know any Kwakwala, or have very little fluency, should, according to Nicholas (2010) be able to practice being Kwagu’l by being an active participant. So by being a member of our community, living on the reserve, knowing our relatives in our community as well as relatives from other

tribes, encountering all the colonial impositions that have been forced on our families, we still consider ourselves to be Indigenous. Stories and legends passed from one generation remain an important discursive practice that contributes to our identification practices. We practice connecting our past to the present by getting out of the classroom and the comfort of our homes, and going out onto our lands and experiencing the empowerment of these relationships with land, ancestors, environment, family and community.

Through an anthropological lens, this project allowed for an entry point into a discussion about how individuals and a community develop a sense of Indigenous time creating a sense of coevalness with our ancestors by remembering cultural teachings and practices. Cultural practices provide a context that I believe informs anthropological discussions about time and space. There are many practices our people engage in that develop coevalness with our ancestors. For instance, the fire in the middle of the awakawis connects us with our ancestors and spirit world through the smoke that rises. The songs, dances and ceremony that film participants speak about connect them to their ancestors through the representation of names that stem from our first ancestor, which has been passed down through the generations.

This project also contributed to case studies about methodologies used by aboriginal researchers conducting research in their own communities. By focusing this project completely on our home community and cultural perspectives, there is opportunity to attribute Kwagu'ł identity, values and culture to our own practice and resources. Using our Indigenous ways of learning---looking, listening, and learning--I hope we can develop a deeper understanding of identification processes that connect landscapes, ancestors, and cultural practices as we integrate our traditional knowledge

with our contemporary globalized world. Through this visual means, we are able to validate and repatriate our complex oral traditions that are layered within culturally specific contexts (Hulan & Eigenbrod 2008).

Potential project outcomes we discussed that came about as a result of this project are:

- We demonstrated capacity to conduct research and filmmaking according to our cultural contexts and our interests.
- The reclamation of this knowledge provides a place to begin research about Chieftainships, houses and numyams historically attached to Kwagu'ł sites. Through our research of written documents, interviews with our Elders and other First Nation Nino'gad provided rich material from which to work.
- We provided a setting for community members to work cooperatively together where youth developed relationships with Elders. For instance, a Traditional Plants film project has begun with Elder Wata Joseph who is sharing her knowledge.
- It serves as a pilot project to build capacity in our community for other video projects about other Kwagu'ł sites which can be shared through our resource library and band website.
- The practical knowledge and experience gained in this video project will be used in youth summer and science camp programs that explore Kwagu'ł landscapes.
- This research material can contribute to local school curriculum which currently lacks information about Kwagu'ł place, history and identity. The Kwakiutl Band Council is currently in the midst of building our own band owned and operated elementary



school, and this material will contribute to the school curriculum when it opens in September 2015.

### **3.2 Reflection**

Throughout this journey in academia, most of my learning took place within a non-aboriginal place. It is a place where I struggled with academics throughout my undergrad and graduate years. In particular, I struggled with theory as I worked on my graduate degree. It was like looking through a veil when I researched theory, making me feel academically inadequate, and I felt littleness in this world because I could not fully understand. I realized, with help from my peers, this was happening because the theories I read about were not within an Indigenous context. We did not embark on a journey like one that I described in my thesis proposal, but nevertheless, we did go on a journey. It just was not only the physical one; it was one through academic halls for me and cultural identity practices for all of us.

Approaching Elders and Chiefs about my research topic with the questions I have about origin sites was difficult. On the one hand I think I know our people fairly well, and on the other hand it is intimidating to ask them for knowledge they may know or may not know, or they may have knowledge they might not want to share. Although everyone seemed to want to share, they were shy about expressing what they know, and I believe were intimidated with being in front of a camera. The project events and timeline did not move along as fast I would have liked at times, but I should have been more prepared for that. After all, I am Indigenous and have lived in this community for a very long time. There is a pace that sometimes cannot be overcome.

I think I would have been more successful in a conversation if I were a speaker of Kwakwala in this project centered on origin sites. I have very little knowledge of Kwakwala and I believe this lack of speaking our language limited this project in terms of speaking with our Elders, our Nino'gad. We are fully aware of our urgent need to learn our Kwakwala language. Kwagu'ł member, Dr. Patricia Rosborough (2012) believes our efforts “must be rooted in Kwakwaka'wakw contexts and practice to achieve the most lasting and positive impacts” (169). She believes we must acknowledge value and trust past, present and future relationships concerning language knowledge and language proficiency and to host our language in the same way we pride ourselves on being good hosts (Rosborough 2012). The relationship we are creating with our landscapes is equally as important as our language. It is language that connects the environmental conservation practices and traditional knowledge of our ancestors who have passed this knowledge down through the generations. However, all hope is not lost when it comes to language due to the present language revitalization programs that are taking place in our communities.

### **3.3 Future Research**

Future research would consider Indigenous ways of learning and teaching from a Kwakwaka'wakw perspective when considering school curriculum. *K'waxalikala* depicts our spiritual, emotional, mental and physical lifelong learning that is relational and sustainable. Our lifeline learning is situated within the learning rings of *K'waxalikala*. The knowledge we acquire comes from our sources and domains of knowledge situated within the root system of the tree of life. This knowledge is inclusive and cumulative over

time. The film's participants spoke about how important it is that our aboriginal models of learning and teaching be incorporated in school curriculum for our children to be successful in their learning needs. Programs and curriculum could include learning about traditional territories, their location, and how to access the resources within these sites. By grounding our curriculum in our Indigenous philosophies and knowledge, our children will be better prepared for their responsibilities in our community, and in their life-long learning. Leanne Simpson (2002) echoes our beliefs that it is critical to employ Indigenous ways of teaching and learning which is by being out on the land where our teachers, our Elders and nino'gad, are most comfortable.

This project has also generated an awareness of the need for deeper research in terms of sites that belong to the Kwagu'ł, but now lie outside colonial imposed boundaries of the Kwagu'ł. Companies considering investment in resource extraction within our traditional territories are mandated to consult with our Chief and Council. To ensure Chief and Council are fully informed about all Kwagu'ł territories, research has to go beyond current territorial boundaries to include all Kwagu'ł origin sites, and resource and use sites outside of the territorial boundaries the Federal Government has imposed on all First Nations.

Origin sites have also generated a conversation about accessing Kwagu'ł sites that lie within neighbouring First Nations territorial boundaries. These boundaries have been forced on First Nations groups by the Federal Government, thus the need for First Nations to develop a mechanism that addresses access to these important sites. Our ancestors did not have clearly drawn boundaries, and due to diffusion or amalgamation, many resource and ceremonial places were shared. For instance, the origin site,

Wak̓ānakw, is located on Gilford Island, which lies in Kwikwasut'inuxw territories. The Kwagu'ł must have access to this origin site, a process dependent upon open discussion between the First Nations governments.

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## Appendix A: Participant questions

### Pre-trip:

1. Can you please tell us tell me briefly about yourself and your family background?
2. Can you tell me why you wish to participate in this project?
3. Have you had experience with oral traditions within your family and can you tell me a bit about them?
4. Can you finish this statement? A sense of place to me is.....?
5. Can you share with me about what aboriginal identification means to you?
6. What are your understandings and experiences of landscapes and places of origin?
7. Do you have any questions for me, or have anything you would like to add?

We are at this site our ancestors called Wakānakw (this site may change) and I would like to ask some questions if I may? When I talk about landscape, I mean the physical land itself, as well as the spirituality and emotional connection to the land and its previous occupants. We know this location is recorded as an origin site for the Kwagu'ł and Kweeha.

1. As a First Nations community member, can you share with us how being on this landscape makes you feel, knowing it to be an origin site?
2. Can you tell me your thoughts and feelings about this experience of going to a particular site within Kwagu'ł territories, being on the land and talking about our ancestors' teachings?
3. Can you share your ideas on whether this might be a useful exercise in terms of getting to know our landscapes within our territories?
4. Can you tell me what the most important thing you have learned about yourself or your community during this outing?
5. Do you have any questions for me, or have anything you would like to add?

### Post-trip:

1. In your opinion, what do you think were the most important outcomes of the project? Can you tell me why?
2. Can you finish this statement? A sense of place to me is.....?
3. Can you tell me what you thought were the biggest challenges of the project?
4. What (dances, stories) moved you the most (were the most important)? Could you talk about your thinking?
5. Did this experience make any differences in your perception of your identity?
6. What happened (or what result, or who said what) that surprised you the most? Explain wa'xa (please).
7. If you have ideas about other trips, can you share your recommendations? How could we best improve our experiences?
8. Do you have any questions for me, or have anything you would like to add?

## Appendix B: Community Letter

November 19, 2012

Dear Kwagu'ł Community Members:

As many of you know, I have been working on my post-secondary education for the past few years. First I acquired my Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology, and now I am a graduate student working towards a master's degree in Visual Anthropology. Now it is time to carry out my research project!

My finished project will be a 25 minutes video that shows how we, as Kwagu'ł people, employ different ways of producing our identities. After I have completed this degree, a copy of this video will belong to the Kwagu'ł Band and will be a part of our resource library.

Specifically, this project will talk about origin sites. I would like to explore what we know about our origin sites in terms of ceremony, song, stories and family lineages etc. and I need your help.

If you have any kind of information that I could use, would you be willing to share with me?

Call me and we can talk about sharing your information.

Gilakas'la!  
Marie Hunt

## Appendix C: Definition of Terms

awakawis - a place to sit and talk

gukwdzi – ceremonial Bighouse

gwigwalayu - for all children – my reason for living

hase' – breath of our ancestors

Kwagu'ł – the people who are band members who live on and off the Fort Rupert reserve

mawil – dance screen

maya'xala – respect self, others and all things

maya'xala xa hesta'lis – respect for the universe

maya'xala xa wi'la – respect all things

nino'gad - knowledgeable ones

numaym – family units

origin site – first place of our ancestors

T'saxis – a village the Kwagu'ł occupy