

This conversation was recorded in the recently constructed Healing Center at the Unist'ot'en Camp. Since 2009, the Unist'ot'en clan of the Wet'suwet'en Nation have been occupying their traditional territory and preventing government and industry from entering the land to build pipelines that would transport tar sands and fracked gas to the global market. The Unist'ot'en Camp has served as a site of inspiration where land defenders from disparate regions can meet, network, plan, learn from the Unist'ot'en strategy, seek wisdom, and heal.

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Designed in Occupied Duwamish Territory

Photography by Tamo Campos
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My Mind Below This Beautiful Country

*Tatsetān Brothers Share Their Stories
of Land Defense and Indigenizing*



confrontational.” In this whole thing, it wasn’t just the Tl’abānot’in people and the industry, Fortune Minerals. It wasn’t just the industry versus the Indians, the First Nations people. The cops were there, they set up an RCMP detachment. And when we took over those drills, the cops were the first ones to come. And they confronted us, they said, “This is bad, what you’re doing. We’re impartial, we’re here to keep the peace.” But they were just enforcing the colonial rules. They were enforcing these permits that were bought on our territory. Unceded, unsundered, Tl’abānot’in, Tałsetan territory. Some of the workers in that camp were Tahltans. It was really funny because one of them was worried that we were gonna hurt them or whatever. They were pretty much a sellout. The other Tahltans were cool, they were like “Whatever.” They left after that, but since then they never came back.

That point was big for us, because not only did we stand up for something, it gave us purpose to tell white people that came in and colonized our people, “No, you can’t do it.” It did something to us. It gave us a sense of purpose. And that was a final part of our indiginization, our decolonization, uncolonizing. That was the part that made us want to live for something, give us a purpose, give us something else. We knew what we wanted. We knew what we had to do, it felt right. It’s not going to school and making money off the system, and it’s not going to the bootlegger and drinking our life away, snorting our life away. It’s not that, it was something else. It’s climbing a mountain. It’s learning and understanding the language. Dissecting it, back and front, all around. It’s looking for an animal and knowing where it’s gonna go, and bringing that animal home and feeding your family. It’s a bigger thing. And from that moment, I, myself, have gained so much. I could do that, I could tell the colonizers “No, you’re not allowed on our territory.” I also quit all that drinking, and all that crazy lifestyle, the drugs that I was involved in. I quit that from that moment on, I’ve had a sober life since. And also, I did a lot of things from that moment because of the confidence that we built from that moment. And now our next adventure is to reclaim and occupy our territory. To move out there. All year, forever, ya know? Do something with it.

back to the camp and that drill was in no use, it was still in the ground.

I - We had a lot of the elders, and some of them came in and out to visit, some of them stayed there the whole time there. There was a core group of us that were there the whole time, and then some other people who would come stay for a few days, go back out, and come back again. Some of the people would come visit, but go back. I can't really say off the top of my head. We also had settler support, which was a huge thing for us.

I - And it was new.

I - We never had settler support.

I - The settler support was from afar previously, but we actually had settler support right at the frontline for the first time.

I - We had settler support previously, but it wasn't much, and they really couldn't do nothing because they came in with more of an environmental aspect of things, not so much an indigenous aspect of things. At the time, there was a separation between environmentalists and indigenous situations. This time was when things started to change, when environmentalists started to realize that they had to work together with indigenous to protect the environment. So this was new for us when we finally had settler support that had a huge role with the whole thing.

I - The settlers there, the non-indigenous folk, they were active bodies, but also they acted as media, so they helped us out in that way too. I mean it wasn't 100% that they were the reason why it happened, but a large amount of it was due to them. So we took over that drill, and we took over another drill, then later on Fortune Mineral still wouldn't leave after we took over two of their drills. There was no active drilling happening for a time, and then eventually we blockaded their camp, their headquarters. That eventually kicked them. The government called and said, "Get out, it's too

I - Then this company was doing some test drilling around the territory looking for coal. And we heard about it, and at this time we were still working our jobs, “saving the language.” We were being paid to revitalize the language, and it was cool at first, that we were getting paid, but our actions would pretty much eliminate our jobs from there because of “political unrest.” But we were still employed under that, which was important too. We were told about these things happening up in the Klappan, and they told us to show up. So we went up once, and it was just people camping out. What they were doing was just drumming their songs and singing. The elders, the Tl’abāne Keepers, went up to the company camp and said, “We’re giving you guys an eviction notice, you have 24 hours to leave.” Singing their songs, playing their games, but the companies did not leave. They kept on going. “Oh that was cute,” the companies thought. “No big deal, sure you want us to leave but we’re invested in this place.” They did that for about a month. And we just heard about it. Fortune Mineral was gonna utilize this road, but the Iskut Band maintained that road so they weren’t allowed to use it. So our Uncle John actually came in and stopped them, blockaded them. Everyone told us, “Go help the Uncle!” And he was already there, getting wood for fire. One of our elders told us, “Go!” And he gave us a ride to the blockade.

So we went, and by the time we got there, it was Uncle John and a few people there, and Uncle John already set Fortune Minerals out, sent them back. They had to fly their gear in. That was the catalyst for us. “Oh wow, we were a part of it while everything was happening.” The peak of it was our core people. The initial actions were ten years previous, everything was honky dory for the time being. A couple days later I heard something was going to happen, but that was it. So eventually we went up to the Spencer Flat, Tōkādi we called it, everyone else called it Sacred Head Waters. We went up there to the camp, and next thing you know we heard that there was a drill less than three kilometers from that camp. That really pissed everybody off, and that turned out to be, ‘We’re gonna occupy that drill, we’re gonna stop them from working.’ And we did. Tl’abāne Keepers went there and stopped the drill. So the workers got sent

My Mind Below this Beautiful Country

Tatsetān Brothers Share Their Stories of Land Defense and Indigenizing

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Days at camp are spent tending the infrastructure of the site, being with the river that has been protected as a result of the imagination and responsibilities assumed by the Unist’ot’en, conversing, cooking, and laughing. Nights are spent beneath the stars, huddled around a fire with fellow comrades, sharing stories, planning, and laughing. While I was at the camp this winter (early 2016) I met Ishkādi and Ło’oks, Tatsetān Brothers who are regular occupiers and visitors of Unist’ot’en, and whose territory is 4 hours drive north from there. They had stopped over at camp en route to their land. One night as some of us were drinking tea and eating snacks, they began to share stories about their home, their language, and their work defending their territories from industry. Several of us stayed up late into the night with the brothers, riveted by their stories and their particular cadence as a duo. What is printed below comes largely from what they shared that night. This conversation was made possible in part by the unique space created by the Unist’ot’en where indigenous and settler radicals can encounter each other and share their stories.

Ishkādi grew up colonized on Iskut Indian Reservation No. 6, in so-called Northwestern British Columbia, in Tahltan territory. He has been involved in direct action and blockades in defense of his people's territory for over 10 years. He is pursuing the reclamation of his indigenous identity.

Ło'oks was born in a hospital outside of Tahltan territory. He grew up pursuing guidance and wisdom from his elders, especially his grandma and grandpa. In his spare time he is crafting a diabolical scheme to dominate the world. He calls it "World Peace." Ishkādi and Ło'oks are brothers and they are the two youngest speakers of Tahltan in the world, of which there are currently less than 30 speakers.

unsurrendered. If we still live on a reservation and we don't flex that, that's not very strong until we get out there.

Ł - I liked our area the way it was. In 2003 rumors came around that more development was coming in, more mines, and then those rumors became reality. I was surprised that no one was resisting, that there was absolutely no resistance. It wasn't until a couple years later, around 2005, that more of this stuff started happening, then our people started blockading. I really enjoyed seeing that, I took part in it as much as I possibly could. I didn't want to see the land destroyed before I was able to go on it. And I didn't want to have areas on the land that I could not go to, and when it's already cleared out and I could go to it and it's not the same as it used to be. I liked the way it was, untouched and still able to roam around freely and not worry about any destruction happening to it. I liked our home the way it was already.

I - We were just kids, teenagers, when we took part in those actions. And we never really took major parts, we were pretty much just spectators, just showing our support. "Hey we're here!" It wasn't until a few years back, 2013, when our people were actually fed up, this one company in particular were gonna do some coal drilling in what they now call the Sacred Head Waters, and that's the headwaters of the Keen, Skeena and the Nas.

Ł - But it was more to us than just the headwaters. Most people see it as a headwaters, which was the headwaters of the great three rivers. But to us, we grew up going up there. Even when we were infants, when we were still sitting in child seats in our parents trucks, our parents would go for a ride and take us up there. It was part of us from our childhood and growing up. Back then, everyone in the community would go camping up there. Everyone. There was a time when you would drive up the abandoned road, and every couple kilometers there was someone's camp. And all the way up to the top at the very end, we had childhood memories up there. It was more than just sacred headwaters of major rivers, it was our home.

Indigenizing, Land Defense, and Decolonization



I - I think the last major part of our indigenizing was protecting the land. Prior to that we were still working, getting paid to “save our language.” Since our decolonization route, we’ve started to do all this work that wasn’t just separating from colonialism. We had to fill that hole, we had to fill that void with the ways that were taken from us. We had to pick up where we left off. We had to find out a different route, cause throughout our teenage years we wanted to be musicians, we wanted to make money with music and do our thing that way. But we never really had backing. It wasn’t until our whole years of trying to regain, reclaim our identity then that became something else. Now we’ve got a foundation. Our next adventure in decolonization, as they call it, is to reclaim our territories, to reoccupy our land. ‘Cause that has to be done. We’re on our territories, unceded and

“I Like Devil”

*Pop Culture, Punk, the Church, and
School on the Iskut Reservation*



Ło'oks - Ło'oks ushye. Tlabāne nasde. Tl'abānot'in sini ja'. My name is Ło'oks. I am from Tl'abane. And I am Tl'abanot'in.

Ishkādi - Ishkādi ushye. Ch'iyōne es-datsehi. Tl'abānot'in sini ja' Tatsetān sini ja'. My name is Ishkādi. I am Wolf Clan. I am Tl'abanot'in of Tatsetan people, what they call Tahltnan. We grew up in a reservation, ind res no. 6. The iskut first nations. We were contained there for most our lives. Pretty much what we know is res living. We grew up with our grandparents who didn't let us forget what we are. They always told us, "don't be white. Don't forget where you come from." Not necessarily saying we come from the res. They brought us out. They gave us tools to survive on the territory, living on the land, and they also taught us culture and language.

Ł - For me I had a good vocabulary growing up, but I never could find or understand 'colonization' as a concept growing up. Like I could see it, but I couldn't make it out. My whole vision as a young boy was to grow up back on the land and to not live in modern day life. Living out in the woods was exotic to me, it was something that we never did in those days. And it was something I wanted to pursue as I got older. And I looked up to my grandparents because they are the closest window I have for that path. They are the ones that helped me along with that path from the beginning.

I - Yeah, it all has to do with, it came in stages. As a youngster I had no clue about it. I never really sought out particularly decolonization, I never really quite understood anything. We grew up contained in a res, but we also had small increments of going out on the territory for days or weeks. Then we came back to the res. But I've always been looking for something, I always didn't like being around the same thing all over the place. I got bored easy. And we eventually developed a knack to do things differently. While our friends were still chillin' out listening to the same music that their parents and grandparents did, we were venturing off into something else. When I was a kid playing with my older brother and our cousin, my older brother would always chose to be the good guy, and Ło'oks was a sidekick, like he was a supporting character in our games, not a main

of animals would be there. Or if all of a sudden there were plants that were plentiful in one area, they knew, okay, this certain animal is gonna be here, this year or next year. So it was a guarantee that they were going to get something back by their relationship with the land.

Ł - We were doing more than just the language. We were going back to the land and doing everything our grandparents did before, which was going out on the land and being one with everything. Knowing everything about the land our grandparents walked on, and continuing with that.

Ł - When the early explorers and surveyors came into the territory and they brought in wall tents, they didn't use canvas, they made wall tents out of skin. They had moose-hide, like a wall tent made out of moose-hide. So they adopted to many new things, but skin was a huge thing. Without skin it's very hard for survival, it's very hard to do all the things without skin. So when they go out hunting, it's like when you say, "Ejidesāł", it's I'm going hunting. But it literally translates to 'I'm going for skin.' So going hunting, you're going for skin but there's also a bonus involved, you get food to feed your families.

I - Yeah, and hunting insinuates a hit or miss. When Westerners trophy hunt, they go out and if they don't get nothin', they come back and, "Ah, I got skunked this time." But our grandparents and our elders knew where the migration routes were, so when they went out and there were no animals there, they would say, "Okay, they're not here. We must go to this other place where they would be this time of year." So they would walk there. The longest our grandpa told me that they were out of food was two months, and that was two months of going to different routes until they finally got a piece of moose, I think it was a couple of moose. And when they say food they're just talking about big game, because for two months they had to be eating something. They were eating rabbits, squirrels, small animals that were around. That too is that whole relation with the land is with Ejidesāł, they did not just go out for hit or miss or trophy hunting, they went out for survival. So they knew everything about the land. Our grandpa, or our uncle, we could ask, "Where is a good place for moose this time of year?" And he would tell us, "Walk up this river or this creek, you go up this mountain, right there, you'll see 'em." And you could see how our ancestors knew more than just where the animals would be. They would walk in a huge, vast territory that's many, many square kilometers. It wasn't just a couple of hectares, they were walking miles and miles. And they would learn what animals eat what, what kind of plants they would eat, what kind of other animals they would eat. And they knew all of that by their relationship with the land. So if they looked around and could see what kind of plants were in an area, they knew what kind

character, and I was always the bad guy. So as early as that, I never went what was the so-called "good path."

Ł - Yeah, our older brother had access to a lot of music and we would listen to music he listened to. And one of the bands he liked was Guns N Roses and at that point we shifted from the good side to the bad side. (laughing...) We never really said like, "We are gonna be bad all the time", but it was something cool, like we can't be good all the time.

I - There was something attractive about that to us because we would always ask our friends, and we were just kids, and we would be like, "Do you like angel or devil?" They all said angel and me and my brother would be like, "No we like the devil!" (laughing...) That appealed to us. That kind of mentality was just in born.

Ł - I was in grade one I remember, I was six years old. And the reaction was crazy. Like a lot of the girls would be like, "Eeehhu" and we were like okay, that's pretty neat.

I - Like, "We're onto something." (laughing...)

Ł - And one time we had one of our buddies James to visit and we were playing our older brother's cassette tape of Guns N Roses and we were turning it up and while we were doing that we would ask him, "Do you like angel or do you like devil?" And he would say, "I like angel", and we would both say "I like devil", and then towards the end of the album he said, "I like devil!" (laughing...) And now we were all saying we like the devil.

I - Yeah, that was just some sort of in born thing that we've always had. Now, reflecting on it that was part of us transitioning into what they call 'decolonization.' And it all started with pop culture. We grew up with pop culture. Everything about us. Like we can recall movies and seedy movies we saw that challenged society. We listened to music that was abrasive and was good and a lot of people would say, "You can't dance to it" and we didn't care, it was something else.

Eventually, as we got older, in our age of self-assurance, we were still pretty colonized in a sense, meaning things were still Biblical. In my case I went completely against religion. That was the thing I went against, and everything about me was like, Fuck Jesus and Fuck the Bible, and everything, it was a different dichotomy, in a sense it was decolonization, but it wasn't targeted at anything, it was just basically aiming my target at Christian religion. Then I came up with so many different rationales, like they burnt so many witches in Europe, and killed so many people in all these places, but I had no clue what they had done to indigenous people. That's what I was missing. But I still looked for other things in Nihilism and Anarchism and Satanism, and all these different things that wasn't Christianity. But because we grew up with Christianity, I went against it within the rules.

Ł - My thing was trying not to do the same thing everyone else was doing. I've always wanted to do something different than everyone else. During school, colors of clothing was a big thing. Girls had their own thing that was colorful, and all the colors the guys had were black, or white if you were trying to be preppy. All the colors were really plain. The jeans, black jeans, black or blue jeans. All predictable. I settled on gray. That became something that fit me was gray. I've always preferred something in the middle of something. Everything was always medium. Like I would have medium shirts, medium pants, and gray always seemed to be a color to stick by because it's between everything. Instead of sticking to one side, I observed all sides. When I was young I would ask my parents, "Why do we have to go to school?" "So you can learn," they would say. "Why do we have to learn?" "To get a job." "Why do you need to get a job?" "For money." And I remember being a toddler asking my parents that and when I got older I would ask my teachers and guidance counselors that and the answer was always the same and that goes with everybody. It was all the same. And I didn't want my life to go in that direction. And by the time I get to the end of high school everyone was graduating-

in this day and age, industry or government, whatever it is, they come in, they do their work, and then they tell the Tahltan colonial council, "This is happening. Take this deal, otherwise the deal won't get any better." That's a far cry from 'we protect this with our blood,' that's a far cry.

Ł - Another example is 'Going for skin.' Like when we say 'I'm going,' you say Desāł, like 'I'm walking, going by walking.' And that's the only means of transportation, going about with your two legs. 'I'm going over there.' You can't really say that in Tahltan, well if you were you would just point, and mind you that the person knows where you're pointing, you could just say, "I'm going over there." You had to be specific about where you were going. If you're going a long distance and nobody knows where you're going, like if you're going to Houston, BC, you had to say Houston desāł, 'I'm going to Houston', but it's also like 'Houston-I'm-walking.' So coming and going has to do with walking, and there's different ways of using that word for walking, you say you're coming and going. So when you say, "Ejidesāł", ejide means 'skin.'

I - Like hide.

Ł - When our people were going hunting, they were providing food for their families, their communities and all that, but it's the skin that has a huge importance in providing us clothing and keeping us warm in certain temperatures and also protects us from a lot of things. Clothing in actuality is very important for our survival, and our people's everyday needs. From making clothes, backpacks to carry the food, moccasins. So skin was a huge thing that made the community function and do the things they could do for everyday life.

I - Skin was even used for our what they call 'huts,' we lived in huts traditionally, no houses. Skin was part of what we used for tarp, tarp-leen.

ago, it's all embedded in our language with this is *Es-dī yige kōnelīn*, it's expressing that you're happy. When you come back to your home that you grew up in, you feel happy like you're back at home. You feel happy in your mind because you remember the landscape. When you're walking the land, you create a cognitive landscape, a cognitive map of the area. And when you leave somewhere else, that part of the land stays with you in your mind. We would all say, "I remember this place," but it's a piece of landscape on this earth that's embedded in our mind that will never leave us.

I - The part that got us was *Es-dī*, 'my mind.' You picture the mind in western culture and psychology, they all have a different view of it, as something to dissect and everything. And this is the thing about English language, and the difference between English language and Tahltan language. English is a very separatist language, a double tongue language, and on the good side the English language could create things like poetry and really cool stuff that has double-meanings. And on the bad side, the darker side, the evil side, they come up with stuff in business, and law, and the courts, where the English language could say one thing but mean numerous other things. I like to call it, 'the double tongue language,' because of that. But with the Tahltan language, it's more of a connection, and more expressive. It's a language of feeling, connection, and the whole concept of it is *Es-dī yige kōnelīn*. Translates to 'My mind below this beautiful country.' It insinuates the cognitive landscape, the mind as part of the land. It's the beautiful territory, of the mind. The underneath, below it, it also insinuates that the sky is part of the mind. That connection is based in that one word, *Es-dī yige kōnelīn*, three words put together, one phrase. That is an example we use all the time of how Tahltan language connects us to the land. So to further that argument, if you mine the land, you are mining our minds. You're ripping out the mountain within our minds. This is another form of why we do what we do, why we take part in actions, why we defend our territory. Because we're not just defending it for the sake of defending it, there's a holistic reason, a more spiritual reason. Our ancestors defended our territory, and it says that in the 1910 Tahltan declaration, that we defended with our blood. And

I - And we were taken by that whole ethos, and it kind of started to change when we ventured off of everyone else's music. And we went into kind of a metal phase. This was long before the internet, this was underground stuff. Back at home, no one knew about black metal, death metal. This was strictly our thing because only we knew about it, no one else had that. And the thing that was cool about them and all these other metal rockers and punk rockers was that they had no jobs and they said Fuck the System Fuck Society and Fuck Jobs and we were really taken by that. And we were kids and we hated that stuff. We didn't want nothing to do with it. We hated school. That was another part of our decolonization, was getting away from school.

I - Yeah, when we were in high school, we struggled with marks to pass, eventually we both gave up-

I - Not quite giving up, we resisted-

I - We revolted. I don't want to write an essay on something I wasn't really interested in. If a teacher gave me something to do, I'm not going to be interested in it because a teacher is telling me what to do.

I - Exactly. And we hated when people told us what to do. That is one of the reasons why we hated the church and everything. Soon as we found a path, but we were still living within the system.

I - I remember our cousin who had a girlfriend and he was about to graduate, and he told us later on that his girlfriend said, "Just think after we graduate we'll just be workin' for the rest of our lives." And he told us that and we said, "Fuck..." like, that's a scary thought! (laughing...) That was like the worst thing to do! I didn't want that, but it was like, we all have to do it. And if you don't go down that road it's gonna be dark and sad, you gonna be an addict, you gonna have a bad life, you not gonna have good health, and you won't sustain yourself and you most likely will die of starvation or whatever.

I - We stayed true. We've had dreams of becoming something bigger, better, not being in the system. But eventually the system was all around us. Like we worked, that was the worst thing I did. That was the worst thing I did, I thought 'I look stupid.' I felt stupid. We spent the better part of our years getting paid pretty much, doing stuff in the system. Giving the government numbers for non-indigenous people. Every job I've had its always gone against my principles, every one of them. It's pretty much just grunt work, at the bottom, giving data, numbers or whatever, if it wasn't making white people rich, it was serving white people for their recreation times. It was always like that, the only way we could get money is that way. I used to be employed for the Tahltan Fisheries. When you think about the Tahltan Fisheries you think, 'The Tahltan manage their own fisheries', but in reality they're just employing Tahltan members in this field – and we were doing pretty high level stuff, and getting paid and all – collecting data like measurements, scales from fish, DNA samples, and you count them.

So all those numbers, they're not Tahltan numbers. You give them to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. That's Canadian, that's a Canadian Department. This is the reality that we all grew up with and I didn't like doing shit for the Canadian Government, and there are a lot of principles I broke just to get paid. It went from that work to hunting guide outfitters and these rich white people would come visit our territory and they pay the guide money and they take them out on a hunt to get trophies, the biggest bulls of whatever, the biggest males of whatever, and me and my brother would do the same thing and we would pretty much make fires to guide the tourists, and it was fine. It was outside, it was physical work, it did us better in the long run because at that time we were still getting paid by the man. That's what we hated. This system meant the man. And not just any man, it was like the white man, the patriarchal male.

Ł - It wasn't just the man. The image of the man was a white man who was above all.

Tałsetān/Tahltn

A Land Based Nomadic Language



Ł - Well what that means is Kōnelīn, means 'nice place.' You see a good landscape or a good lookout, a place that has a nice, natural scenery that you just like, you say Kōnelīn, it's a nice place. And Es-dī yige, is under, Dī is in mind. We can all understand memories, I can say I remember this place or land, but the thinking of our people long

us stuff, go hunting with us, go what we call 'hiking' which really is just walking. So we had that background. We never did it as much as our brothers, but we still had that background. And on top of that, our grandparents would teach us the language and tell us certain things about our culture, like whenever someone died our people would have that tradition, and our grandparents would explain to us why that would happen, and so many other things. Like, if someone from a Crow-Clan dies, you would cut your hair if you're a Crow. They would explain to us specifics like that. That really shaped how we live. Reincarnation was a big deal, we would always talk about reincarnation. This person would be reborn, this elder who had died a few years ago.

As soon as we hooked up with our buddy, Oscar, who was on his own decolonization route, then we started engaging in conversations about the language, 'cause he was learning from his dad, and we were learning from our grandpa and grandma. Our grandpa and his dad were hunting buddies, so they enjoyed the territory with each other. Me and my brother were learning Tahltan language together, Oscar was learning Tahltan by himself, and we hooked up, and the three of us started to discuss the language as a trio. Brother has been the one that learned it a lot earlier and a lot quicker, so he would be the one who would come to us, he already had the Tahltan mindset. And then Oscar would come in with his linguistic side, and I would come in with an anthropological, ethnographic vantage point, and we would decipher the language, the three of us. And what that did was help us to understand the way our ancestors think. Their worldview, everything they did, their whole language was land-based. There's a word that our grandpa told us that was a high Tahltan word, it's Es-dī yige kōnelīn.

I - It wasn't like a woman. A patriarchal woman is different than a patriarchal male. And at the same time we developed a critique of the macho man, and we know them as bros now. We were homophobic in our teenage years but we grew out of that in our later years.

Ł - We quickly grew out of that in our early teens, because of our exposure to television which gave us insight to what was happening in the world, like Women's Liberation, and the acceptance of homosexuality and all of those things, we had access. We understood what was going on the world. In the location where we lived, television was a big deal. Iskut had many channels while other towns hardly had much television. Because we had television with many channels we had access to learn what was going on outside our world.

I - So you add pop culture, and the fact that Ło'oks and I are two like-minded individuals, and another factor is our ability to think, and another factor is our ability to converse with each other. So we developed a sense of difference and we went against every homophobe out there, and we went against Christianity and religion, and we even went against capitalism through the jobs we did, every job we did was pretty much capitalism. Whenever the money came from a rich person on their vacation, it was never quite indigenous owned money, and if it was indigenous owned - they didn't own it. They were just underlings of another person that owned it. This was us in the system. We tried to make the system work in our favor and it never quite did because it was everywhere, so our path of decolonization was more internal from then on, like in our early 20's-

Ł - A big difference came in our mid teens, when we already grasped a sense of ourselves we knew who we were, we didn't need to know much more about who we are and how to conduct ourselves, we also developed an awareness about our surroundings, and the people we hung out with, we would stop hanging out with them because we already saw the path they were taking and we didn't want to take that path. And a lot of them took the path of finishing school.

I - We had two choices: we can finish school, go out, continue school, or get a job -

L - 'Do well!'

I - be a part of the system, or we can stay back, quit school, and just live the common res life, we can go look for bootleg 50 dollar bottles everyday, go look for some job destroying our territory, go do all the drugs we want, and that would be our life. And we didn't want to take any of those routes, those were just like dead end routes to us, so we decided to-

L - In our teens, we got out of high school and into home school, and for us it was like okay we can just do school anytime we feel like it, and we never really did it that much.

I - By this time we already had had enough of it.

L - But it separated us from all the other things we were tied to, once we had to go to school its kind of like you're tied to do work, and not doing what we want to do. And our friends kept going on doing their own thing, and within the community we stayed away from them. So we were isolated from our friends in our community because our interests were different. And some of them stayed, some moved elsewhere, and would come in and out.

I - Some of them are really active members of society.

really influential for spiritual purposes, social organizing, name giving and so many things that went along with that. Then when that happened, they took the Indians in the reservations, then they put a voting system in to elect a chief in council. The chief used to be appointed to that position through their merits, through their good will, of how well they treated people, how they did good for the whole nation, not just themselves. They've enacted a completely different kind of leader and put the word 'chief' on it, and that's the 'band chief,' 'band council.' And they just have jurisdiction on the reservation, it's pretty much all they have. So now we've got that form of colonizers. You can't really call them colonizers; they're just dealing with the colonial situation.

L - We never had our cultural teaching from our parents. I mean we had remnants of it, but never had a full grasp of it, so our grandparents were the ones that would teach us. And that's a huge generational gap, we're the grandchildren and we're learning from our grandparents. There was a gap in our traditions through our parents, we did learn from our grandparents but it was kind of hard because there was a generational gap. There were certain points that took a while to take in, certain teachings, certain questions we would ask our grandparents that would never come up because we were using our English, we would think it would help but it didn't. And our uncle who was living with our grandparents at the time, who spent most of his time with our grandparents, he's their son, and he would fill in those gaps, along with our aunts and sometimes our mother as well.

I - One thing that we're thankful for our parents is that during our teenage years they forced us to chill out with our grandparents, 'cause that helped us a lot. In our teenage years we were just kids who would want to hang out with our friends and stuff, but we were always told to visit our grandparents, and we did. But we were always actively listening to what they say, our cousins would be watching TV but my brother and I would be listening to what they had to say all the time. And on top of that, they taught us things about what we call 'camp life.' They took us out, our grandpa would take us out to show

into how they see the world. And it opened our eyes up, spiritually, emotionally, and everything like that. It really helped us heal, really heal, in a way that was far different than any seminar you could ever do. (laughing...)

L - Not only just learning the language, but our grandparents, just from their whole lives, what they grew up with, stayed with them their whole lives. And what they wanted to tell us or teach us, they would tell us very sternly. One time, a person had passed on, and we didn't know what to think about it, so we went to visit our grandparents.

Our grandpa asked us,
"You went to see the family?"

"Well, no..."

"Are you going to? Regardless of what a person has done in their life, no matter who it is, you respect them when they pass."

He told us to go over to the family. When we went there, everyone thanked us for coming. That was a great move, I thought that things were gonna be different but it wasn't. It showed high honor on us, of our presence being there, that changed my thinking of how our people thought as well. I always thought that everyone was against each other, but when we did that, it changed their thinking of us, and our thinking of them as well.

I - Our culture is deeply enriched with community support, it's all communal. Our people did everything with each other. Nowadays, it's different because of that colonial question, that hole, that dark cloud above us. Cause when they put us in reservations, when they took individual kids to residential schools, when they forced kids to go to day school, they were attacking those kids individually. But when they took individuals to the reservation, they colonized a whole community. The after affects of that are many different things. And on top of that, they slapped on a system that would suit the colonial interest. So instead of having our traditional governing structures, they abolished that. They made it illegal to do it that way. Suddenly the potlatch and the sundances were illegal to do, and those were

Teenagers hanging with their Grandparents

Reconnecting with Language and Life

L - And what we always ended up doing is just going to our grandparents. We would always pay visits to our grandparents all the time. Because that's the only thing to do. And not only the only thing to do but the only interesting thing to do. Because that's who we come from and we learned a lot from them. Growing up, we were around them, so they were people to hang around with and help and they taught us a lot of things. So going to our grandparents was a refuge from everyday life.

I - There was a point when Ło'oks started learning to speak the language and I started later, but it was really hard to get our grandparents to teach us at first because of the reservation mentality. The thing with the reservation is the colonizers separated people



from the land to keep them away from the land and they contained them in the res and used that system to keep them away from the resources that were on the land that they want to exploit, and they kept the Indians, us Indians, away from the settlers that came to occupy the territory and then on top of that they created laws that prohibited us from being Indian, with the Indian Act, and then they created Residential Schools, and they took kids away from the community into residential schools, and the reason the residential schools were created was to kill the Indian in the child. That was the plan from John A. McDonald, the guy on the Canadian 5 dollar bill, he developed a lot of these systems, he was a white supremacist and his whole model was to kill all the Indians, and he didn't like the Indians, so he used the Residential Schools to kill the Indian in the child, that was his 'final solution' per se. And then these kids went to the residential schools and they had to have their hair cut, and hair is a big deal to indigenous people, they had their hairs cut to suit the colonial mold. They gotta look presentable, be good Indians, and they told the kids they can't speak their language, and it's like a no good language, a primitive language, they instilled that it was bad to speak that language and on top of that they were prevented from singing their songs. Priests and teachers and the whole government really enforced this policy. Those kids grew up thinking it was bad to be Indian and then, if they were lucky, they would get to go back home, for the summer. Their home was on the reservation, and on top of that they had laws right up until the 1940's that said the Indians couldn't leave the reservation, they had a curfew. In their own home they were told that they were not to go out.

So the generational affect of Residential Schools and the Reservation System is traumatic nowadays because people think it's just only the Residential Schools and day schools and such. With day schools, our uncle would tell a story that Indian agents, priests, and RCMP officers came to our grandpa's house and said, "If you don't put those kids in school, we're gonna arrest you." Uncle John remembers all his siblings right there, and grandma was taking it in and she had to take her kids to school. This was from when our great grandfather was keeping our grandfather in the trap lines, away from the

trick Indians into thinking like that. This is what makes us different, we can rationalize that, to us that is not cool, it's not right, and this is what makes us want to be different. We've always had that sense of doing something else, not fitting in with the status quo of what we were supposed to be doing. When we learned our language, that was a huge thing. That opened up a lot of doors because we realized after speaking the language of our grandparents and our ancestors, we opened up a whole different doorway of lifestyle and way of living. It was a completely different thing because we grew up white, I'll say that all the time, "when I used to be white." Because that's what colonialism is, that's what the reservation is, what the education is, that was everything that we've been spoon-fed ever since we were kids. That's what that is, that's the affects of colonization. Then you've got two choices; go to school and become pretty much 'white.' When we were younger, our elders would say, "Oh that person turned white." Meaning that they're making money, they're rich, they're doing well in society, they're the ones we would refer to now as sellouts. They come back all pompous, they come back all arrogant. Oh look, they made it! That's the thing, they feed off of other people who look at them and say, "I'm proud of you, I look at you and you make me proud."

Other people, who have not done that, would look up to them as proud, hard-workers. Even people who would go to work in the mines, and when they buy a new truck for themselves, everyone looks to them as higher ranking in our reservation, a hard worker. So having a brand new truck means you're a hard worker. And that just shows how far, how deeply, the colonial situation is, how perfect that they made it. Now we don't need Indian agents to come into the reservation. Our own people can colonize ourselves too. As we grew up, hearing the same thing with our friends, "You look too Indian, you're acting too Indian." That was a common thing, as if we shouldn't have been Indian. So the biggest thing that we did was starting to learn our language, and our grandparents were really well versed in our language and the culture and everything. We were lucky to have them around 'cause they could explain specific words, specific concepts and everything. So we got a greater, in-depth look

I - And that's the traumatic effect the reservation system has done now. Now when we go out to our territory, we go camping, that's a different thing than living. Cause now we go camping for say, 2-3 days, then we have to go back to the reservation where we lived. That's the mental thing.

L - It's like a rubber band. You have the reservation and the rubber band nailed to it. Every time you leave, you always end up going back there. It's in our mind, 'Okay, I'm gonna go camping for a week.' You had to plan that week, free everything else up to plan for that week, for the family and the kids, but eventually you have to go back to the reserve cause you have a house there. There's security.

I - It's still that captive curfew mentality that our people go through. The colonizers put everything on that reservation, the funding, the unhealthy foods, all the water, whatever, it's all there, the housing, the medical, the education, all that, it's still that we need it. We need those jobs. The aid, social studies, science, English, math. We need to speak English, we need everything that the colonizers say, that's what the reservation represents.

L - It gave all of us the things we needed to live, like education, go to school and get a job to earn money. Everything is there, and we lost our knowledge of how to do all of that on our own land. We lost our medicines to heal us.

I - It wasn't lost, it was taken from us.

L - It was taken, and it hasn't been practiced, so instead of learning it ourselves we go to a clinic because it's convenient.

I - And it's free, that's the whole thing. That word is a big thing in this capitalist society. Now that Indians get 'free medical,' 'free education.' The Indians get 'tax-free' gasoline and tobacco. And everybody says, "Oh wow it's free!" ya know? Really, that's just a colonial tool to use to keep the Indians from being Indian. The colonizers have done their job really well, the system is perfect to

Residential Schools. And so they caught up with his kids, and they were mistreated in day school too. My dad and mom would tell us stories.

So you've got the education system there that would tell the Indians that they were bad, but the reservation system itself is just as bad. It's keeping Indians from our territory to the point that when we go camping, we called it 'camping.' Our grandparents never called it camping; it was going to Buckley Lake. It was going to, wherever. Like, certain spots of the territory. And in our language, we would never learn that, 'going camping.' The word for going camping could be loosely translated as, 'going to live there, going to lay down there, going to sleep there.' It's like I'm gonna live there, I'm gonna stay there.

L - There's a whole different concept of home, and living. Home is not just a house. In our language, [home] involves the whole territory, that's what keeps you living. The whole territory provides the food you eat, the water you need to drink, and if you don't take more than you need you could sustain yourself forever. Living is another thing. When you say 'I live over there' in English, you're pointing to a house where you go to sleep. But in our language, we say Nasdeh, which means 'I'm going to bed', or 'I stay here.' Because our people were nomadic, every night was a different place we stayed. They never stayed in one place year-round. Every night is a different country, throughout the whole territory. And so your nights are spread out through the whole territory. So if you go to say 'I live over there' it translates to 'I stay there' like 'I'm staying the night.' It's a nomadic language, from a nomadic lifestyle. If you come into a village, and you make a tent in one spot, and then everyone else has their tents in their spots, and you meet your friend and they say Da da nande, it means like 'Where you stay,' it means you're pointing at a tent, 'I stay over there, I live over there.' 'Cause it's only for a short time, then you're going to have to move on. You are constantly moving on; you never stay in one place.

