

Val Wilson

A New *Heritage*

The working title of this issue was *First Nations II*, intended as a follow-up to our “Focus on First Nations” issue of March 2001 (Vol. 10, No. 1).

When I learned “First Nations” is most correctly used to describe Aboriginal persons with a land base (most often reserve land), I sought clarification from Heather Raven, herself an Aboriginal person and Chair of The Law Foundation of BC. (See her Profile in the next issue.) She says,

Many terms are used these days to identify Indigenous peoples. The terms tend to be fairly fluid, depending on the context and who is doing the defining. It is essential to note that Indigenous people define themselves in their own languages using terms that don't readily translate into English. What follows is my understanding of the most-used generic English-language terms.

- Indigenous is the most inclusive term and includes Inuit, Aboriginal, and Métis persons.
- Aboriginal is used to describe persons formerly described as “Indians” and Métis persons.
- Inuit persons have told me that many Inuit do not consider themselves to be Aboriginal.

That information considered, our theme title became “First Peoples.”

This issue has inspired a new outlook within me regarding First Peoples. Margaret Teneese (who helped with the Ktunaxa Nation article) suggested “including that comment would add volumes to your article. This is precisely the type of awareness we are trying to achieve.”

My level of awareness has definitely risen. In addition to my heritage from the British Isles, I realize I am heir to another culture—that of our First Peoples.

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In talking to many First Peoples over the past weeks, I have been impressed by their warmth, sincerity, and spirit of cooperation. Their holistic view of life sees “working together in harmony” as the best way to achieve goals.

That's a winning attitude, any way you look at it. According to BC Attorney General Geoff Plant (*Vancouver Sun*, Sept. 28, 2004), “Treaties will create a platform of certainty, but the real work will be done by people in communities helping each other to build a stronger province.”

Society Secretary/Executive Director Wayne Braid says, “No matter where you travel in this great province, there is contact with a native group who are and need to be an important part of BC, who contribute a great deal to our cultural makeup and who



have provided us with a history and will continue to do so.”

I was moved by my recent visit to the Tsleil-Waututh Community in North Vancouver and by the opportunity to share the excitement of families settling into their new homes—strongly built and beautifully finished by First Nations craftspeople.

Gracious, bright, and educated, Leah Wilson-George and Justin George are among the new leaders. How did the innovative On-Reserve Housing Program get started? “The First Nation and the Royal Bank sat down at the table to discuss an action taken by the Bank,” offered Leah, Director of Treaty, Lands, and Resources of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation and its former Chief. “From that meeting, a relationship began and the On-Reserve Housing Program was conceived.”

As our First Peoples work to improve the lifestyles of their communities, they are respectful of the teachings of their elders and they hold a positive vision for the future.

To know each other better and feel the sense of harmony that will enrich our lives and our communities, we still have much to learn. A giant step forward is understanding that we are all part of the big British Columbia family of the 21st century.

Gilakasla!* ▲

*“*Ha-lak-keya-sla*” means *hello or goodbye in the language of the Laich-Kwil-Tach Nation.* (Thanks: Shirley Johnson, *Hamatla Treaty Society*)