

Reviving Secwepemc Child Welfare Jurisdiction

by

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I was Chief at the time of the Gustafsen Lake blockade which generated a lot of public controversy, and more importantly for the villages affected, much internal dissension. General band meetings and treaty meetings were forcefully disrupted by several young men with the loudest voices and ability to intimidate. At the time it seemed these young men opposed everything that did not coincide with their opinion. Some of their points were valid; however, many were not. Their desire was for the Council and the people to hear and act only on their opinion. Of course, this was unacceptable to the majority since their opinions mattered as well. This did not accord with our way of practicing law.

The general band meetings were held in the gymnasium. The tables were set in a big circle with Council members sitting together. People from family groups would also sit together. A chairperson kept order in the meetings and recognized each of the speakers in turn. On occasions where there was a contentious issue each person was called upon to provide their point of view. This structure did not work when the loudest voices were intent on disrupting the meeting. Their intimidating behaviour caused bigger fights with those at the meeting who were strong enough to oppose their views; however, it silenced those who were afraid of conflict and confrontation. It came to the point where people did not want to attend general band meetings, staff did not want to participate, and Council members dreaded having to be accountable in such an atmosphere.

These young men did not seem to care that their intimidating tactics were disrespectful to the Elders, to the guests in the meeting, to the people in general. Their actions demonstrated the disrespect they had for themselves. When it became clear that the people were being re-traumatized by the behaviour, especially the Elders, we knew it was time to set some new rules in place that could carry authority. We thus used our own laws to regulate behaviour in the community and resolve these disputes. We sought to reinforce our laws by also applying the laws of the state. We focused on a few of the young men had participated in taking over the band office and ransacking it during their occupation. The Council at the time obtained a court order to remove the young men. Still they continued with their intimidating behaviour, and engendered a dislike for their tactics and disrespectful behaviour towards them by other band members. Band



COORDINATED WLIB CnC / RCMP  
SMEAR CAMPAIGN

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#### INTERVIEWS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

Interview of Elder #1, July 14, 2009

Interview of Elder #3, August 6, 2009

Interview of Elder #4, March 10, 2009

Interview of Elder #5, July 14, 2009

Interview of Elder #11, July 20, 2009

Interview of Junior Elder #1, July 11, 2009



Interview of Junior Elder #2, July 15, 2009

Interview of Junior Elder #3, May 27, 2009

Interview of Junior Elder #4, July 11, 2009

Interview of Junior Elder #5, July 3, 2009

Interview of Junior Elder #6, September 27, 2009

Interview of Junior Elder #7, July 18, 2009

### **COMMISSION TRANSCRIPTS**

Indian Claims Commission, Transcripts of Williams Lake Elders Interviews conducted by Jean William, 1972-1974, 1978 and 1994-1995, Exhibit 12d, namely: Transcript of Clothilde Thomas, Exhibit 12d; and Transcript of Lily Alphonse., Exhibit 12d.

Indian Claims Commission, Transcript of Proceedings, June 18, 2003; Charlie Gilbert, Witness for the Williams Lake Indian Band, Exhibit 5a.