

NICOLA I. CAMPBELL

Spíłəxm

A Weaving of Recovery,
Resilience, and Resurgence





Spílóxm

A Weaving of Recovery,
Resilience, and Resurgence



NICOLA I. CAMPBELL


HIGHWATER
PRESS

© 2021 Nicola I. Campbell

Excerpts from this publication may be reproduced under licence from Access Copyright, or with the express written permission of HighWater Press, or as permitted by law.

All rights are otherwise reserved, and no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, scanning, recording or otherwise—except as specifically authorized.



Conseil des arts
du Canada Canada Council
for the Arts

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.
Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien.

HighWater Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Province of Manitoba through the Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage and the Manitoba Book Publishing Tax Credit, and the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund (CBF), for our publishing activities.

HighWater Press is an imprint of Portage & Main Press.
Printed and bound in Canada by Friesens
Design by Jennifer Lum
Cover and interior art by Carrielynn Victor

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Spíłaxm : a weaving of recovery, resilience, and resurgence / Nicola I. Campbell.

Names: Campbell, Nicola I., author. Description: Includes index.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20200399535 | Canadiana (ebook) 20200399748 | ISBN 9781553799351 (softcover) | ISBN 9781553799702 (EPUB) | ISBN 9781553799719 (PDF)

Subjects: LCSH: Campbell, Nicola I. | LCSH: Indigenous women—British Columbia—Biography. |

LCSH: Indigenous authors—British Columbia—Biography. | LCGFT: Autobiographies.

Classification: LCC PS8605.A5475 Z46 2021 | DDC C818/.603—dc23

24 23 22 21 I 2 3 4 5



www.highwaterpress.com

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Treaty 1 Territory and homeland of the Métis Nation

For my cæceꝛ, Steffanie Michel.



Table of Contents

Prairie Letters

February 4, 1973	3
April 5, 1973	4
July 1, 1973	5
July 26, 1973	7

Her Blood Is From Sptétk^w

sptétk ^w	11
fried bologna and rice	12
yellow house	14
Speed Sew	15
hamburger stew	19
lullabies	21
buckle-up shoes	23
Little People	24
çàlcàle	33
alpine mountains	36
frog whisperers	37
cousin cluster	38

Métis

Saskatchewan	43
La Ronge	44
Mooshoom	45
Back to Batoche, 1985	47

Nleʔkepmxcín Lullaby

skíxzeʔ transforms	51
Cəceʔ and Sínciʔ	53
Rockstar Hair	58
ǵéceʔ Tea	62
University of British Columbia	70
Blackout	71
for the party	73
Tmíxʷ—This Land	75
Grandpa's Corrals	80
Learning to Heal	88
i am sorry	98
it is okay.	101
the same as trees	103

Land Teachings

Métis	111
Beginnings	112
Prayer Warriors	114
gathering	116
gathering songs	117
sn'ix'wam	119

Coming to My Senses

The land, we are woven together like strands of light	123
tmíxʷ. temexw. temxulaxʷ.	131
Porcupine Song	135
snow on the mountains	154
Salish Dancer	155

The Kingfisher's Dance	158
race day	161
quw'utsun	165



SORROW

September 16, 1998, 10:15 PM	169
deer stew	171
i dreamt of you last night	176
tracks	178
little brown	180
September 24, 1998	181
October 1, 1999, 10:15 PM	184
With Each Stroke of My Paddle	187



yémit and merímstn

Teapot Hill	199
this trail	206
unceded	207
Huckleberries Are My Weakness	208
medicine song	213
pressure canner rhythms	215
sx ^w úsm	216
Spring Chicken	220
going home	231
come inside	233
wildflowers	235
nkéx ^w	236
tmíx ^w	238
A Gathering of Stones	241
the riverbed is home	251

 this body is a mountain, this body is the land	
as sisters	255
Scwéxmx	257
May 20, 2000	259
Adanac Trail	261

 Resurgence	
The Trail	275
Stories Are Alive	277
Why Am I Writing This?	280
Run	283
I Believe in the Power of Prayer	286
We Are Their Prayers Come to Life	290
Reweave the Universe	300
Offering	308
Acknowledgements	313
Glossary	314
Index	321

Porcupine Song

Witnessing the Stó:lō chiefs' meetings and learning about the Treaty process and the research undertaken by the Aboriginal Rights and Title Department gave me a lot of appreciation for the magnitude of work necessary to transform our communities and our Nations across British Columbia and Canada. Healing and transformation needs to occur from within ourselves, within our families, and within our communities. At the meetings, chiefs and hereditary leadership, young and old, male and female, sit together; each takes their turn listening and speaking. The meeting rooms are always full to capacity even when the room is half empty. If I had 3D glasses that detected ancestor spirits, I am certain I would see the ancestors of these leaders standing among them.

Our Elders, matriarchs, and visionaries gave everything they had, strategizing to create positive change all across Canada and British Columbia, regardless of laws preventing organized gatherings. In Stó:lō territory, the people stood together against the government and reclaimed Coqualeetza. I'm not saying they didn't have negative internal dynamics; just like every other community, they did; however, they persevered with tremendous love in their hearts for the land and the people. They set goals. They developed working groups and worked from the ground up. They struggled but they found ways to continue moving forward. Community wellness and self-determination, governance of health, wellness, land and water stewardship, economic development ventures, and child and family services are just a few areas in which Indigenous leaders and communities are systematically and tenaciously making

progress. They do so while preserving a deep reverence for their children, Elders, families, culture, spirituality, and traditional governance practices. The structure and organization of how they do business in accordance with Stó:lō protocol makes the work they do even more beautiful. It is reciprocal and interconnected, and everything is intrinsically embedded with cultural and spiritual values and practices. It keeps the work focused on love for their future generations, family, community, and traditional territory. Stó:lō protocol: the calling of witnesses, the blanketed orator, the hundreds of hand drums on the floor; this process is unlike anything that I've ever witnessed in my home territory.

It is a strange feeling to realize how vastly different yet similar each of our Nations is in British Columbia. There are almost forty Indigenous languages spoken in British Columbia and many of those languages have significant dialectal variations depending on the region and village. In elementary and high school, I didn't learn about Interior Salish or Coast Salish people, our languages, or all of the Indigenous Nations of British Columbia. We learned minimal details about the people from Haida Gwaii and Eastern Canada. For example, how "Canada" was supposedly adapted from the Iroquois word, *kanata*.

Pit house people. River people. Longhouse people. Ocean people. Big house people. Our ancestors designed, built, and lived in traditional homes while providing for their families and communities. Carriers of sacred ancestral knowledge, carriers of cultural and spiritual practices. Powerful, beautiful songs, images, and artistic designs. Thousands of villages. Generations of people: communities, families, children. Indigenous DNA as ancient as the soil we walk upon is embedded within every corner of this tmíxw now called British Columbia.

Salish, Interior Salish, and Coast Salish are colonial terms used to refer to the Indigenous people that reside in what is now known as the Southern Interior and West Coast British Columbia all the way down into Washington State. Sometimes subtle, most often dynamic, linguistic variations differentiate one group from the next. Languages, communities, cultures, and spiritual practices are not a reflection of pop culture and what is currently “cool”; they reflect the landscape and waterscape, and they are directly linked to the spirits that exist within each of our traditional territories.

As the people of the Nicola Valley, we are considered to be Interior Salish, of the Nt̓eʔkepmx linguistic group, which includes the Southern Interior Plateau Region and Northern Cascades. The people of the Nicola Valley are often referred to as Scwéxmx, “People of the Creeks.” My Elders have jokingly stated that we are referred to as “People of the Creeks” because our Nicola and Coldwater rivers are so much smaller than the Thompson and Fraser rivers that unite in Lytton, BC. There are stories of an Athapaskan people who came to the Nicola Valley and resided among the Nt̓eʔkepmx and Syíl̓x people of this valley. But not much is known about them and why they came or how long they stayed. It has been said many times by our Elders that those who didn’t die during the epidemics were absorbed into our community.

According to the Indian Act, there are five “Indian Bands” in the Nicola Valley, and each of these Indian Bands is made up of many Indian Reserves, which are numbered (e.g., “1R #”). Four of the Indian Bands are Nt̓eʔkepmx. The Coldwater Indian Band has their main reserve below the Coquihalla Highway. It is cooler in the mountains than the valley bottom. The Coldwater River, č̓əletk̓u, flows through the Coquihalla Mountains from the west into the town of Merritt and joins the Nicola River; together they

travel to the Thompson River. By the Mamette Lake turnoff, just north of the town of Merritt, is Sptétxw, or Springs Reserve. This is where my great-grandparents, grandpa, and numerous grand-aunts and grand-uncles worked the land and built their homes with their families. My grandpa also owned land on Joeyaska Reserve. The Coquihalla Highway travels through my grandfather's land. Ownership of this land was passed to Grandpa's descendants when he passed away. Joeyaska, Springs, and Shulus are part of the Lower Nicola Indian Band. Further downriver is Nwéyc, which is the traditional place name for the "Nooaitch" Indian Reserve and the Nooaitch Indian Band. Sxéxénix, a place name meaning "little rocks falling," is the traditional name for the Shackan Indian Band. The place where the Nicola River joins the much larger Thompson River is Cook's Ferry Indian Band.

Quilchena and Spaxomin, or also known as the Upper Nicola Indian Band, is made up of Syílx people. It starts along the eastern shores of the Nicola Lake and goes up to Douglas Lake, through to what is referred to as Fish Lake or Salmon Lake. The weather is usually colder up Spaxomin because it is at a higher elevation. My maternal grandmother and maternal great-grandparents are Syílx from up Spaxomin. Our Syílx family extends all the way through Armstrong, BC to the Head of the Lake and Vernon, BC.

The majority of the Nicola Valley is inhabited by speakers of Nłeʔkepmxcín and then Nsyílxcn. At one time it was common to have orators who spoke five or more languages. Some of these included Nłeʔkepmxcín, Nsyílxcn, Secwepemcetsín, Státimcets, and other Salish languages as well as English. As our Elders who are fluent speakers leave us, there are fewer and fewer people who speak even one Indigenous language. Many families are interconnected

through marriage. For instance, within my families' ancestral lineage, one of our great-great-grandfathers was Chief Nk'wala. He had five wives. Each of those wives had many children and those families and descendants are extensive. Another example would be my great-grandparents who together had twelve children. My grandpa was the father of nine children and his siblings each had as many as fifteen children. Our blood lineage has direct linkages to many of the Nłeʔkepmx and Syílx families in the Nicola Valley, the Fraser Canyon through the Similkameen, the Okanagan Valley, and beyond.

From what I understand, my family name, Shuter, was adapted from the Nłeʔkepmx name Séwtaʔ, which is pronounced like "Shuta." Many of our traditional names were lost through Indian Residential Schools and their name registries. Many Indigenous names are gone forever due to generations of files that were lost or destroyed by Indian Agents, Indian Residential School staff, and by fires. Names that connected us to our ancestors were changed to names from the bible and even the names of employers. The very first great-grandfather to receive an english name, such as Joseph, well that first name became the last name of all his descendants. Loss of names, loss of language, stolen identities; how can we ever know who we truly are if we do not know the true names of our ancestors? Many of our Elders say that our true state is the state of the spirit and that during ceremony and prayer, the Creator answers to our ancestral names. If our ancestral names are wiped away or forgotten, how will our ancestors recognize us once we cross over to the spirit world? How can I recognize myself?

Almost twenty years ago now, the Douglas Lake Cattle Company stopped allowing members of the Spaxomin community, or

“Upper Nicola Indian Band,” to access sections of the ranch where, since the Douglas Lake Cattle Company came into existence, access had always been given. In response, the Upper Nicola Band held a huge roadblock, denying the Douglas Lake Cattle Company vehicles access to travel on the main road that passed through Upper Nicola Reserve land. In order to travel into the town of Merritt, or access any major highway, travel through the reserve is required. The only other option is a dirt road that leads to Armstrong, located between Kamloops and Vernon, BC. This route, depending upon destination, can add as much as four to five hours of travel time.

This event occurred in response to the actions of the Douglas Lake Cattle Company when they tried to deny the inherent rights of the original inhabitants. These actions are not just about the annual harvest of food sources; they are about the sacred responsibility to nurture, monitor, protect, honour, have ceremonies, and respect our Indigenous food sources, so that the land remains healthy for future generations. Indigenous rights to traditional resources such as fish, wildlife, and plants for food and medicine are non-negotiable, regardless of non-Indigenous ideologies on rights and access. Eventually, through respectful negotiation, consultation, and a court order, the Douglas Lake Cattle Company recognized and chose to honour the inherent rights of the Spaxomin people.

People don't say a lot about it, but the rivers and creeks downstream from the Douglas Lake Ranch have become stinky, brown, and polluted as a result of cattle runoff. This has affected the spawning grounds of the kokanee (a landlocked species of sockeye salmon), the rainbow trout, and the ling cod (also called burbot). Our ancestors nurtured and protected the land and waterways and

then harvested strategically to allow for continual abundance, generation after generation. Fish, such as the kokanee, remain a main source of sustenance and continue to be harvested and preserved every year. However, like other species of fish, particularly the sockeye, the returning numbers of the kokanee fish have decreased to almost nothing.

Government decisions to ransack, plunder, and pollute the land and water through mining, clear-cut logging, and other industries including sewage waste disposal destroy entire ecosystems. Despite the government and industry push for Indigenous people to rely on grocery stores and an economy-driven food industry, Indigenous communities continue to rely primarily on traditional food sources. Our primary grocery store remains the land and waterways: seasonal rounds of hunting, fishing, harvest of roots, plants, berries, and natural medicines. Denying Indigenous people the right to access and govern our traditional harvesting, hunting, and fishing grounds places Indigenous people in a state of continued poverty and starvation. It denies Indigenous families and children the right to nutritional health and well-being. Furthermore, it denies Indigenous people the right to successful participation in a contemporary economic world. The more things I learn about Canada and its lack of integrity in relationships with Indigenous people, the more frustrated I feel. There are so many multidimensional issues that continue to affect every element of our existence. Prior to leaving my community, I didn't understand the full spectrum of the impact industry and government had on our traditional food sources. I didn't understand the genocidal history of government policy with its discriminatory, colonial laws and all the multi-faceted ways they impacted our communities.

Post-secondary and my time living with and working for the Stó:lō have awakened me in ways that I am still learning to understand.

Prior to the draining of Sumas Lake and the redirection of all waterways within what is now Sardis, Chilliwack, and Abbotsford, the Stó:lō people could literally fish in their own backyard. They weren't starving. They weren't in poverty. They weren't fighting diseases; they were tremendously healthy and wealthy in ways relevant to sustaining vibrant Indigenous children and livelihoods. They lived in prosperity and their very life source was in copious abundance. The draining of Sumas Lake signified an epic and catastrophic change for the Stó:lō. Every spring, Sumas Lake grew to cover 44,000 acres with the spring freshet, extending from Chilliwack and Yarrow to Abbotsford and across the Sumas border into what is now referred to as the United States. Imagine all the species of fish, including all species of salmon and sturgeon, returning to find their home gone. Why were we never taught about the draining of the Sumas Lake in the public school system? How did the draining of Sumas Lake impact all those Elders and their descendants? The people went from being healthy and prosperous with an abundance of fish to being malnourished, poverty stricken, and devastated.

In the Halq'emeylem language, the word *tomieqw* translates as "great-great-great-great grandparents and great-great-great-great grandchildren." The translation of this word had me pondering many things, including the deeper dynamic translation that would not just be understood, but embodied, if spoken between fluent speakers of the original language. I can't count the times I have heard my Elders share the importance of abiding by these teachings of the past and future generations. People of the north, south,

east, and west all abide by these. If we, as Indigenous people, had international laws, this would certainly be one. To honour ancestral Grandmothers and sacred Grandfathers of the past but also the livelihood of future generations yet unborn. To be cognizant and humbly aware of the resilience, courage, and strength of our ancestors in every aspect of daily life. To honour, monitor, and protect our traditional practices, languages, teachings, and territories, the waterways and all living things including the plants, for future generations. All to sustain an environment where future generations can thrive. This reflects the teachings of my Elders in the Nicola Valley as well as Indigenous teachings I've heard across tmíxʷ.

When the Elders came to visit at my godparents' house, the coffee pot and tea kettle would always be on. They would scoop a spoon of sugar into their cups of Red Rose tea or coffee, then stir. "Ting ting ting," their cups sang late into the night as they listened to one another and wove stories in Nsyílxcn, Nl̓eʔkepmxcín, and english. Spíləxm are the day-to-day stories, the remembered stories of things that were witnessed and events that took place. Men's hunting and fishing stories, women's stories and memories of living and working the land, cowboy stories, and stories of spiritual practices. These were happily told with pride. In my childhood, I had never heard anyone share sptékʷl̓ in the traditional way, at bedtime. A book titled *Our Tellings* explained that these were the stories of a time when animal beings spoke and walked the land with humans. What I learned was that the sptékʷl̓ say that the animal beings were the ones that taught human beings the laws of conduct, respect for all living things, and how to care for the land.

From *Our Tellings*, I learned that when my Elders were children, "stories, told repeatedly, taught them about nature, respect, morality,

and proper behavior; they also served as a form of entertainment.” These stories were orated at “gatherings, funerals, potlatches, hunting and fishing camps, root- and berry-gathering camps, and so on.” Stories, mainly *sptékʷl*, were almost forgotten because for many years they weren’t shared in the evenings, with the children, the way they once were. As a result, like myself, did not have the opportunity to learn them. What hurt the most was reading the words spoken by an Elder, “Ask by the graveyard, for when the elders die, they take with them an encyclopedia of knowledge.”¹

With the Elders, life stories and memories are deeply intertwined with the land. Many stories are of travelling great distances from the Nicola Valley, throughout British Columbia, and down into the United States, following the harvest of roots, food, medicinal plants, and berries. One of my favourite *spíləxm* is about my pregnant grand-auntie, when her baby came into the world after significant travel by horseback to the berry-picking grounds in our highest alpine mountains. Our people travelled through the Coquihalla Mountains, Boston Bar, Fraser Canyon, and the Nicola Valley, to the Okanagan Valley, to traditional berry-picking grounds, salmon-fishing sites, and village sites. Sometimes they shared stories of interactions with animals and spiritual experiences. Sometimes they shared stories about the Fraser River Gold Rush or the highway and railway construction through the Fraser Canyon and all the Chinese labourers that were brought to work in the Canyon. So many people died building the railway. Many

1 Darwin Hannah and Mamie Henry, eds., *Our Tellings: Interior Salish Stories of the Nlha7kápmx People* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996), 11.

of those deaths occurred for no other reason than those people, Indigenous and Chinese, were considered disposable.

Sometimes they reminisced about childhood memories of Indian Residential School and learning about agriculture and farming. Some days, they reminisced about bootlegging. As agriculture and fruit harvest became normalized, the people became fruit pickers. Indigenous fruit pickers often travelled for work throughout the Okanagan in order to harvest from fruit-bearing trees. Other times, Grandpa, his friends, and others reminisced about great big gatherings at the hop yards.

“What’s hops, Grandpa?”

“A plant,” he responded. This was followed by a long pause and then someone added, “Beer is made from hops.”

“Beer is made from a plant? That’s weird!” That was followed by the chuckle of Elders and further explanation.

“Every summer, people travelled from all over to harvest hops in the Fraser Valley. Same as when we all travelled to pick fruit in the Okanagan.”

“I remember going to the Okanagan with my godparents when I was small. They would park in the shade of the cherry trees and let me sleep in the car while they picked.” There was a moment of silent reflection throughout the room. I remember the front dash of the old truck and the windows left open when I woke on the seat of the truck. I would cry around, calling for my godmommy until I saw her legs descending a wooden ladder at a nearby fruit tree. The orchards were lined with tall grass and row upon row of trees, loaded with fruit. Through the years, we often travelled to the Okanagan for rodeos. On those trips, my goddaddy and godbrother would load the horses in the horse trailer. When we went for the

fruit harvest, we didn't bring the horses. "At nighttime, I remember we slept in a little cabin. I'm guessing those were for the pickers." The Elders nodded in agreement.

"Yes, everyone travelled to pick fruit, at least until the Mexican folks started doing the harvest. After that, there wasn't any work left for us." I imagined a time when my Elders were children. Because of the anti-potlatch laws Native people weren't allowed to gather in large groups for any kind of event or cultural ceremony. Nor were they allowed to have organized meetings, yet one place they were allowed to gather in large groups was for the annual harvest of hops.

Queen Victoria's birthday on May 24th, 1865 marked the beginning of an annual day of waterfront celebrations at Victoria's harbour front. During the time when laws still prohibited Indigenous groups from gathering in large numbers, coastal Indigenous Nations began an annual tradition of travelling from as far north as Haida Gwaii, and south of the "us Border" for cedar dugout war canoe races. By 1867 the "May Day" birthday celebrations and canoe races were also being celebrated in New Westminster, BC. Stó:lō, Coast Salish, and West Coast ocean travel canoes began to change into the streamlined, extremely lightweight, and fast-turning, cedar race canoes. Through this process, cedar canoeing transformed from the daily uses of fishing and travel into a highly skilled and culturally disciplined Coast Salish traditional sport. Canoe racing is a sport that many Nations remain passionate about, right to this very day. The Syílx have many stories of travelling the interconnecting lakes throughout Syílx territory in cottonwood dugout canoes; however, I don't know these stories.

The first time I read my auntie Maria's book, *Halfbreed*, I was a kid. It woke up my mind, and gave me the understanding and

courage to recognize the things in my life that weren't right, such as alcoholism and the violence perpetrated against women that I witnessed and experienced as a child. Later, in my teens and twenties, I began to put the pieces of the puzzle together. I gained a deeper understanding of the "why" of things. Why the Canadian government created Indian Residential Schools. Why our Elders were afraid to speak their language. Why for many years, our Elders didn't teach our parents and us younger generations our languages. Why my auntie would cover her mouth when she spoke our language. Why most of my family lived on reserves yet my mom and I weren't allowed to live on reserve. What it meant to be enfranchised, disenfranchised, non-status, status, or Métis.

My dad's family in Saskatchewan didn't live on reserve. I imagine Métis people as descending from wildflowers, wild strawberries, rolling prairies, jack pine forests abundant with wolves, deer, and waterfowl; woven with stories of traplines, fiddles, alcoholism, frustration, and the Red River Jig. Blood lineage, traced to the generations before contact, intertwined across tmíx", Scotland, France. If there is such a thing as an original "Canadian" it is not the oppressive and racist european colonizers and settlers who set out to destroy everything about the original inhabitants of this land; it is the descendants of Indigenous women and the early fur traders or Hudson's Bay Factors. Métis people are not a random mixture of blood lineage that includes Indigenous and white european. The Métis are a very specific and distinct group of people in Canada who can trace their lineage to the intermarriages between Indigenous women and the original fur traders at the time of contact. Métis—vibrant with culture, fluid in their knowledge of the land—were denied the right to peacefully raise their children and

harvest on the lands of their Grandmothers. Resulting in their road allowance homesteads. Small amounts of grasslands between the road and Crown land. Why? They were not Indian, nor were they white, so the Métis were not considered a people.

What does it mean to have multiple generations of children taken away for part or all of their childhoods, to Indian Residential School or into the foster care system? “Imagine a community without children.” Imagine an entire country where every single Indigenous baby and child is taken away from their family. Imagine a country where every single child is raised in an environment where love, patience, compassion, and affection do not exist. Imagine a country where every single school has a graveyard and not a playground. In Canada, the theft of Indigenous children into foster care and mass “child apprehension” has resulted in generations of children lost and stolen from almost every single family in our entire community within the Nicola Valley. Generations of children stolen from every single Indigenous family across Canada.

The silence after the children were stolen must have thundered through our valley and all across what is now Canada. The silence must have haunted our Elders day and night. How could they sleep? How could they carry on? How did they survive such utter heartbreak and devastation, without the singing voices of their babies and children? Not knowing if their children were alive or dead. Did they have food? Who held them when they cried? Who could possibly comfort their broken hearts and childhood injuries? How many generations of our grandmothers and grandfathers feared for the safety and well-being of their stolen children?

I understood now, why so many Loved Ones remain heartbroken and angry. I understood why so many Loved Ones live in

despair and struggle with addictions. When they stole all the babies and rounded up all the children, when they forced Indigenous people off their lands and onto reserves and road allowances, when they denied access to traditional fishing and hunting grounds—they shattered the hearts and spirits of our people.

The Elders have said that before european contact, the lights from everybody's fires lit the Fraser Canyon like northern lights across the sky. Hundreds of thousands of Indigenous people lived along the Fraser River right from the ocean entrance at what is now Musqueam, through the Lower Mainland, Fraser Valley, Fraser Canyon, and all the way up to the northern reaches of the Fraser River. The Fraser River and other major rivers traditionally did not just function as a river; they were major highways that provided our primary food source of all species of wild salmon for Indigenous people throughout British Columbia.

Stó:lō orator and historian, Naxaxalhts'i explains that the smallpox epidemic arrived in British Columbia and Western North America, long before european colonizers physically arrived here. George Vancouver arrived in the Pacific Northwest in 1792 and at that time, found villages that were completely decimated. We have heard many stories about the trade blankets, contaminated with highly infectious european diseases, that were "gifted" to Indigenous people in eastern North America by early traders in the 1700s. The Indigenous trade economy is vast, and as a result, the smallpox epidemic and then influenza travelled quickly. Oral traditions speak of smallpox travelling like a wave, hitting village after village along the Fraser River, all the way into Northern British Columbia, resulting in the tremendous death of Loved Ones. Our ancestors had never before experienced such complete devastation. Our

Elders tell us stories of entire families placed inside pit houses before the smoke hole and exits were sealed.

The constant sorrow that our people face within today's generation began during those epidemics, the dying years. When we were at our weakest, colonizing governments executed destructive policies, and Indian Residential Schools, with graveyards and not playgrounds, were developed for the purpose of solving "the Indian problem." Every single child was stolen from every single Indigenous community across Canada.

Anishinaabe oral traditions speak of North America as "Turtle Island." Despair fell upon Indigenous people all across Turtle Island like a great blanket covering the Turtle's back, woven of the same despair that devastated generations of our ancestors. And now the tattered remains of those blankets of sorrow need to be lifted and put away. As each generation courageously relearns cultural and spiritual practices and responsibilities, new blankets made of love, joy, healing, and perseverance need to be woven.

When I was a little girl, I used to hide under my godmom's kitchen table and listen to the Elders. I remember asking what this meant and what that meant. I was told by my godmother, "No more questions, Babygirl. Don't interrupt when your Elders are talking. When it is time, you will understand." The pieces are coming together now. Is this what "coming to my senses" means? I'm finally waking up. I'm awake to who I am, now. And finally, I understand what has occurred in our world as Indigenous people across Turtle Island. At the same time that I feel powerless, I also feel rage. I feel uncertainty. I am aware of the work we need to do in order to transform the despair. I want to help; I want to fix things and contribute to bringing joy back to the hearts of our people.

After work, I have nothing to do, nowhere to go, no one to hang out with. The road to Cultus Lake is foggy and mysterious. I imagine the ancient beings that once walked this land. Woven with the stories and songs of ancestral spirits. Stó:lō temexw is ancient like my home, ancient like Syíl̓x temxulaxʷ, like Sk̓w̓xwú7mesh temíxw. Ancient like Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, or the traditional territories of the Tsilhqot'in, the Wit'suwit'en, and Nisga'a; the Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuxalkmc, and Haíłzaqv. Ancient like Athapaskan and Dene ancestors who travelled all across the Turtle's back, from north to south to east to west. This place with its dark grey sky and endless rain is so close on the map, yet it is worlds apart from Scwéxmxuym̓xʷ.

During the summer, the temperature in Scwéxmxuym̓xʷ is so hot you can fry an egg on the sidewalk. Dust devils, sagebrush, and tumbleweeds trundle through town with the many gusts of wind. Yellow grass-covered hills gradually roll into pine- and juniper-covered mountains. Willows and cottonwood trees mark the waterways. Tmíxʷ is parched and covered by a spongy blanket of crispy, dry pine needles. Back home a tinder landscape is commonplace.

Fog and low clouds rest like a great blanket of mist around the hemlock and cedar trees across Stó:lō temexw, blurring the mountains. If not for the rain, Cultus Lake would be glass. I park and walk across the grass. It is a shade of green that doesn't happen in our semi-arid landscape back home. In the short walk from car to beach, I am drenched yet exhilarated by the sound of pouring rain drumming across the lake. This is not a landscape; this is a waterscape. Never in my life have I experienced such a continuous downpour that obscured absolutely everything. The lake monsters that our Elders talked about back home would love this kind of monsoon. I wait for a loon to sing but nothing comes.

Nicola Lake is at least twice the size of Cultus. The Elders say there's an underground river that joins the Okanagan Lake to Nicola Lake. The Ogopogo would travel back and forth between the two lakes. They said it often rested beneath the cliffs on either side of Nicola Lake before continuing through the channel beneath the mountains as it travelled to the Okanagan. I've heard our Elders say that many of the lakes throughout the Nicola Valley and Southern Interior are connected by the footprints of giants. However, I can't tell these stories because I do not carry this knowledge.

My godmom told me that every animal has songs—loons, grizzly bears, and porcupines are just a few. Some of their songs are medicine songs; some are calling songs. They all have a purpose but rarely does any person hear them sing. She shared stories about being a girl and travelling everywhere on horseback. One time, she had a nap under a tree up the hills by Fish Lake. When she woke up, a porcupine was in the tree above her. "Porcupines are really timid and shy," she said. "They are not fierce at all." When she woke, that porcupine was singing in the tree above her. I often wonder, when the wind blows hard across Nicola Lake, is that the Ogopogo singing? I often wonder about the Ogopogo, the *cuwenéytmx*, the little people, the cedar people. The mystical creatures and beings of our lands, where have they gone? All their secret sacred places are gone now. There has been so much development. The encroachment by people is overwhelming, and all the secret sacred places are besieged by the noise and destruction of people.

From the front steps of the concession, I watch as the coach from the canoe club arrives on the beach wearing a rain jacket and a wide-brimmed hat. He stands at the water's edge, looking out

over the water. When he turns he squints at me in the Native way, as though trying to recognize me. I imagine his thoughts: Whose daughter is that one? Is she a niece? Is she a relative? I know he is looking, not at me but at the bones shaping my face. The mist rising off the water lingers in the air around him and rain pours off the brim of his hat. He turns away when he realizes—I am a stranger—then walks up the beach and out of sight.

I sit in the rain, listen as voices multiply and echo across the water. I told my friend that I would be here. I didn't say that I would walk over to their camp, intrude. Instead I listen to the music of their presence and watch as they carry their canoes to the water, then stand knee deep, unaffected by the April chill. Finally, one by one, eleven men get into one canoe, and then ten women with a skipper climb into another. That is when the canoes come alive. They follow one another, paddles simultaneously reaching, digging, until their canoes disappear into the mist and rain. They leave only their wake and their voices calling switches. I feel as though I have witnessed the ancients at the water's edge, but for them it is an ordinary day.

Huckleberries Are My Weakness

I am an urban hunter-gatherer and I am shopping at Capers, an organic grocery store in Vancouver's West End. I step silently from ceramic tile to ceramic tile looking for the organic muesli with the most dried berries. I settle for blueberry-almond. From the cereal aisle I venture onward, searching for fresh, new greens. In a moment of contemplation, I remember one of the most important teachings I ever received from my Elders, that of balancing the traditional Indigenous lifestyle in which I was raised with the convenient lifestyle of the dominant society.

I grew up in a small town in the Southern Interior of British Columbia. I am proud to say that on my maternal side, I am of Nłeʔkepmx and Syílx ancestry. During the winter, I went to a public elementary school, unlike my mother's and grandparent's generations who attended Indian Residential School. During the summer months, my entire family would pack up tents and coolers, and travel great distances to gather traditional food. In the spring, we gathered wild celery, wild rhubarb, wild potatoes, bitterroot, and tree sap. When the wild rose bushes bloomed, we knew the sockeye would soon be filling the rivers, and my family would travel to the Fraser River to fish with traditional dip nets. Later in the summer, we gathered saskatoon berries, chokecherries, soap berries, then travelled to the highest mountains to gather black huckleberries. My cousins and I would pile blankets into the box of the truck and lie there for the duration of the trip, telling stories and giggling until we fell asleep.

Amidst trees, bushes, and grasses that grew higher than our heads, my cousins and I would gather wildflowers, Indian paintbrush, glowing bright red and orange; unsuccessfully we would tug on tall, brilliantly pink fireweed. Then, crawling through the grass, we would wonder and fantasize about the fairies that wore the lady slippers.

Surrounded by loud infectious laughter and the gentle rhythm of the language spoken by my Elders, I sat near my mother with a pail tied around my waist and gathered handfuls of shiny, black huckleberries. “Ting, ting, ting,” they fell into my bucket, rolling around, taunting me with their sweetness. But my ever-watchful mother would say, “Don’t eat the berries that are filling your bucket!” Tart, tangy, and sweet, the berries were irresistible, so I would stuff handful after handful into my mouth every time her back was turned. Afterwards, I would have the telltale signs: purple lips, purple tongue, purple cheeks, fingers, and palms.

During the winter months, the hunter-gatherer became the midnight-freezer-raider. Slowly, bag by bag, my mother’s precious winter preserves of huckleberries would diminish, savoured by my thievish mouth. Her voice hollering, “Nicola, where are my huckleberries?” echoes through my mind as clearly as it echoed through the house the day she discovered her precious pancake rations were gone. Today, that phrase reverberates back to me with a dozen different meanings. Where have my huckleberries gone? Or better yet, what have they become?

I am standing by the purple grapes in the Capers produce section. I bite into a grape and sweet juices flood my senses. I hate buying bland grapes; they have to be sweet and tasty before they receive

any appreciation. My friend professed to me her great love for frozen grapes. Her senses have not been intoxicated by the overwhelming melody of flavour found in ice cold, sweet and tangy black huckleberries; not the red huckleberries that so many West Coasters are fond of, black huckleberries. That's when I know: I am not only a hunter and gatherer of food, I am a hunter and gatherer of life experiences.

My first love was raised like me. The two of us would spend endless days in the mountains, driving or hiking. At home we would have the senseless arguments that young people have, and, in the mountains, we resolved them. In the spring, we gathered fresh, new greens. In the summer, we helped his mother and aunties preserve sockeye salmon and berries. In the fall, we went hunting for deer and moose. In the winter, we went ice fishing. But of course, things change. We moved to the city for his education. When all the jars of salmon were gone and there were no more huckleberries to be found, I realized that I needed to allow myself to grow and to dream. I began my journey of hunting and gathering alone.

In cedar dugout canoes, with wind, rain, and hail blowing in my face, I hoped to gather the strength and discipline of my ancestors. My Elders said balance is necessary to survive.

Standing on the beach in the pouring rain, I taught my canoe sisters the “looking-for-a-good-man dance.” Laughing, we envisioned situations where we could practise our hunting, catch-and-release strategies. But Indigenous men are hunter-gatherers as well. Late one night I realized this when one sang Indian love songs to me from out on the street. My theory was affirmed again when I discovered I was one of many—like berries in a bucket—girlfriends of my new love. While listening to the radio, my newest flame said

he thought notching his guitar to mark his passionate endeavours was wrong: His guitar was far too precious. Then he professed my perfection, his insignificance, and said the timing was off and went east in pursuit of his goals. He was a hunter-gatherer too.

I came to the conclusion that it was time to pursue my gathering elsewhere: gathering life and work experiences, gathering dreams and goals. Now I am doing things that I never would have experienced had I stayed at home in the Nicola Valley. At university, I further my education. On the water, I participate in traditional cedar canoe racing—a Coast Salish traditional sport that is not practised in my home territory. I work out at the gym becoming physically fit; becoming aware of my health and nutrition. I have my own home, which is my safe place. My car transports me anywhere from the northern tip of Vancouver Island, to the University of British Columbia, to my home in Chilliwack, to my home in the Nicola Valley, and to my auntie's home in Batoche, Saskatchewan. I have accumulated memories of love, loss, and grief; clothing that never seems to stay in style; a stereo; and of course, music. Someone somewhere said those things are important. At university, I gather knowledge: $a + b = c$. I never made it through math, but I learned the gift of the spoken and written word, and of course, academic discourse.

Where is the balance between academic education and traditional education? Where is the balance between the city filled with pavement, tall buildings, and smog and the mountains, filled with the sweet, enveloping scent of pine, fir boughs, and Labrador tea? In a place where my existence is as clear as the intricate patterns on the sidewalk beneath my feet, it would be so easy to become confused about my identity. The city becomes more real than the

community where I grew up. And the valley of my childhood remains more real than this city filled with cement, buildings, and millions of people.

Back at Capers, I remember the shock of an early morning bath in ice-cold mountain water while refilling my recyclable water bottle. With sudden overwhelming clarity, I realize that real balance between traditional and contemporary, bad and good, new and old, exists nowhere else but inside.

Acknowledgements



My heartfelt gratitude to:

My entire family, my Elders, and my Loved Ones.

K^wu^wscémx^w and special acknowledgements to Sharon and David Antoine, Marty Aspinall, Deanna Francis, Xiquelum Gene Harry, Scotty and Carol Holmes, Mandy Jimmie, Helen and Herb Joe, Siyámíya Diana Kay, Mary and Ed Louie, Naxaxalhts'i Dr. Sonny McHalsie, Brian and Kowaintco Michel, Garry Thomas Morse, Alayna Munce, Isaac Murdoch, Ray Natraoro, uncle and Grand Chief Kat and Nancy Pennier, Chief Mark Point, The Honourable Dr. Steven and Dr. Gwen Point, Gail Point, Thet-simiya Wendy Ritchie, Sk^wóz Delia Shuter, Nelson Stewart Jr., and Saylesh Wesley, as well as HighWater Press.

MFA Graduate Supervisor, Keith Maillard and PhD Supervisory Committee: Dr. Jeannette Armstrong, Dr. Bill Cohen, Dr. Allison Hargreaves, and the late Dr. Greg Younging.

K^wuk^wscémx^w for the courage, Auntie Maria Campbell.

Glossary

Indigenous Peoples and Languages

The Nations, peoples, and languages in this glossary are only those mentioned in this book. There are many, many others, both in British Columbia and across what is now Canada.

Anishinaabe	people who speak Anishinaabemowin; traditional homelands include and radiate out from the Great Lakes region
Athapaskan	people also known as Athabaskan or Dene; traditional homelands in the northern regions of BC and Canada
Dakelh	the People Who Travel Upon Water; also known as Nak'azdli or Carrier
Danezāgé'	Kaska or Kaska Dene
Dene-Zaa	Peace River region of BC
Diiʔdiitidq	Ditidaht
Éy7á7juuthem	Comox
Gitxsanimx	language spoken by the Gitxsan
Haíʔzaqv	Heilsuk
Halq'eméylem	language spoken in the Fraser Valley spoken by the People of the River
Hənq'əmínəm'	spoken on the coastal mainland closer to the mouth of the Fraser River and by the X'məθk'əy'əm
Hul'q'umi'num	language spoken by Coast Salish people on Vancouver Island
Ktunaxa	Kutenai
Kwakwaka'wakw	the people who speak Kwak'wala

Index

- Adanac Trail, 261, 269–70
addiction, 131, 149, 244, 263, 276, 287. *See also* alcohol
alcohol, 15, 28–29, 71–72, 73, 76–77, 79, 106; and alcoholism, 87, 147, 263; production of, 87; and sobriety, 88, 89, 93, 263, 277
Amy, 127
Anishinaabe, 150, 314
Armstrong, British Columbia, 138, 140
Armstrong, Jeannette, “Constructing Indigeneity,” 301–2
arnica, 117
arrowleaf, 117
Athapaskan, 78, 137, 151, 314
bakwam (the original people, Kwakwaka language), 287, 320

balsamroot, 117
Baskin-Robbins, employment at, 69
Batoche, Saskatchewan, 7, 47, 211, 251
bears. *See* sax^wsux^w; spēzec
beavers, 200
bereavement. *See* sorrow
berry-picking, 33–35, 37, 38, 62, 65, 131, 144, 238
Big River, Saskatchewan, 3
bluebirds, 19, 119
bog laurel (swamp laurel), 64
Boston Bar, 28, 144
Brown, Michael, 28–32, 55, 62, 63, 71, 72, 94, 172, 173, 281

Campbell, Colin, 112
Campbell, Johnny, 4, 24, 45, 86, 112, 147, 171; drowning death of, 7–8, 47, 90, 129–30, 244
Campbell, Maria, 112–13; *Halfbreed*, 146–47

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 24, 220
canoes, 154, 155–67; cedar, 146, 156, 158, 161, 165, 191, 210, 211, 291, 293, 295; cottonwood, 146
canoe racing, 128–29, 146, 155–67, 187, 195–96, 211, 281, 293–96
Carrot River, 6
cedar. *See* k^wättp
čewéte? (wild celery), 117, 208, 317
cæce? (younger sister), 53–57, 59, 172, 317
čólčále (black huckleberries), 33–35, 36, 94, 208, 209, 210, 218, 317
čøletk^wu (Coldwater River), 137–38, 317
ceremony, 97, 102, 107, 118, 120, 139, 146, 250, 281, 282, 287–89, 293, 302–3. *See also* prayer; sweatlodges
Chief Joe Mathias Centre, 259
Chief Mistawasis, 112
Chief Nk^wala, 28, 139
Chilliwack, British Columbia, 124, 142, 169, 211, 295
Chinese labourers, 144–45
Chiyom (Mount Cheam, Halq'eméylem), 316
chocolate lilies, 62–63
church, 97, 106, 126, 285, 288, 289
Coldwater, British Columbia. *See* čøletk^wu
Coldwater River, 137–38, 257
colombine, 62
Cook's Ferry Indian Band, 138
Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre, 125
Coqualeetza Indian Hospital, 124–25

Coqualeetza Indian Residential School, Sardis, British Columbia, 124, 125
Coqualeetza Industrial Institute. *See* Coqualeetza Indian Residential School
Coquihalla Highway, 62, 65
Coquihalla Mountains, 62, 65, 137–38, 144, 214, 275
cottonwood, 51, 70, 103, 116, 151, 214; dugout canoes, 146
COVID-19 pandemic, cultural existence going online during, 283, 298
Coyote. *See* synkýép
cradleboards, 55
Cree, 7, 111, 112, 288
crochet, 17
Cultus Lake, British Columbia, 151–52, 159, 192, 200
čuwenéytmx (sasquatch), 152, 317
cycling as healing, 66, 100, 200, 261–62, 267–70

Dakelh, 133, 314
Danezāgé', 133, 314
Danny, 15–16
death camas, 64
deer, 25–26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 119, 147, 200, 210, 261, 308; stew, 118, 171–75
Dene ancestors, 151
Dene-Zaa, 133, 314
depression, 89–92, 129, 262, 265–66, 269, 280
diabetes, 82–83, 84, 87
Diane, 93, 96, 97
Dii?diitidq, 133, 314
disease, 86, 104, 142, 246, 264; influenza, 131, 149; smallpox, 131, 149–50; tuberculosis, 124–25, 131
disenfranchisement, 85–86, 147

If the hurt and grief we carry is a woven blanket, it is time to weave ourselves anew.

In this exceptional memoir, bestselling author Nicola I. Campbell deftly weaves together rich poetry and vivid prose to illustrate what it means to be an intergenerational Survivor of Indian Residential Schools.

In the Nl̓eʔkepmx language, *sp̓l̓əxm* are remembered stories, often shared over tea in the quiet hours between Elders. Rooted within the British Columbia landscape, and with an almost tactile representation of being on the land and water, *Sp̓l̓əxm* explores resilience, reconnection, and narrative memory through stories.

Captivating and deeply moving, this story basket of memories tells one Indigenous woman's journey of overcoming adversity and colonial trauma to find strength through creative works and traditional perspectives of healing, transformation, and resurgence.

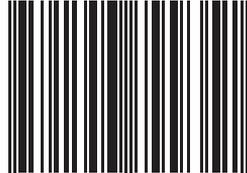
This is a terrific tale...loaded with history, rich in story, and lovely in its poetics.—SI'YAM, LEE MARACLE, author

NICOLA I. CAMPBELL is the author of numerous books for children, including *Stand Like a Cedar* and *Shin-chi's Canoe*, winner of the TD Canadian Children's Literature Award and the Governor General's Award. Nl̓eʔkepmx, Sy̓l̓x, and Métis, from British Columbia, her stories weave cultural and land-based teachings that focus on respect, endurance, healing, and reciprocity.

\$32.00


HIGHWATER
PRESS

ISBN 978-1-55379-935-1



9 781553 799351