

D A N C E S *with*
DEPENDENCY

OUT OF POVERTY *through* SELF-RELIANCE



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CALVIN HELIN

edited by CANDIS MCLEAN, MA

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10 09 08 07 06 FIRST EDITION 1 2 3 4 5

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ORCA SPIRIT PUBLISHING & COMMUNICATIONS, INC

6520 Salish Drive Vancouver BC V6N 2C7

ISBN 0-9782107-0-0

COVER ARTWORK: Bronze mask by Bill Helin

EDITOR: Candis McLean, MA

JACKET, INTERIOR DESIGN, AND LAYOUT: Rosanna Hanser

ABOUT THE COVER: *Four Clans Bright Spirit Sun Mask*, artist Bill Helin

The sun radiates life-giving light, and nourishes the world with its warmth and energy. The sun mask was chosen for the cover of this book because the sun not only gives life to all, but hope—hope for peace, happiness, and a better life tomorrow. The mask crest characters are sculpted into the rays extending from the sun face. Raven (on top as always), Eagle, Orca and Wolf represent the four crests of the Tsimshian. Originally carved out of Red Cedar and cast in bronze. The sculpture measures 32" high by 32" wide by 8" deep.

Printed and bound in Canada by Friesens

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PREFACE

One who knows the enemy and knows himself will not be endangered in a hundred engagements. One who does not know the enemy but knows himself will sometimes meet with defeat. One who knows neither the enemy nor himself will invariably be defeated in every engagement.

SUN-TZU, *The Art of War*

This revised edition of Dances with Dependency universalizes the message inherent in the original edition, which focused more exclusively on Canada's indigenous people. While caution must be exercised in making comparisons, the situation involving Canada's indigenous people can, in countless ways, serve as a model for any impoverished population experiencing enforced dependency. As such, it can inform policymakers and others around the world who are seeking ways to sustain national prosperity levels while ensuring improvement in the lives of the underprivileged by setting an attainable course away from crippling dependency and towards the dignity that comes with self-reliance.

In particular, this edition of Dances with Dependency draws a parallel between the demographic tsunami created by the Aboriginal population in Canada and dilemmas now faced in the United States, where a massive tidal wave is poised to swamp national finances. At a time when America's greying baby boomers are relying increasingly on expensive social programs such as health care for prolonged periods and a growing wave of ethnic minorities threatens to deluge welfare coffers on an epidemic scale, viable turnaround solutions are needed. This scenario is further exacerbated by massive annual national debt, huge long-term budget shortfalls, an enormous burden of personal debt, and a pension system in crisis.

In looking at solutions for reversing the descent of indigenous populations into the chaos of poverty, it is hoped that the discussion in this book will provide fodder for debate on tackling the much larger questions of social welfare policy, reform of government entitlement programs, and the looming financial crisis facing America.

The purpose of this book is to look at practical ways to move indigenous populations forward. Money has been liberally thrown at Indian problems with nominal impact. Neither mainstream nor indigenous politics has had lasting widespread impact on improving the lives of ordinary indigenous folk, no matter how many hyped political announcements and other solutions have been touted. It is time to look at the problems and issues at the broadest level in order to seek general solutions that might be tailored to the different circumstances of Tribes now.

This book will look at two areas critical to the long-term self-reliance of Aboriginal people: the views and attitudes of Aboriginal people themselves, and the question of effective economic integration. The indigenous populations appear to be at one of the most critical junctures in their modern evolution. The rapidly-growing populations and burgeoning wealth creation potential are set against a backdrop of archaic and largely unsuitable governance structures, a dependency mindset that has been entrenched by government policy, and a host of formidable social pathologies.

This book will examine how the respective demographic trends occurring in the mainstream and Aboriginal populations have direct and enormous fiscal implications to the fundamental health and future prosperity of Canada. Surely self-interest on both sides dictates a better understanding of the Aboriginal population and why constructive change is vital. It is also important to recognize that for the first time a “perfect storm” of circumstances is coming together to provide the opportunity to move Aboriginal people up the social and economic ladder in a manner that preserves the dignity of all concerned and benefits the entire nation.

While some folks have been successful at putting together pieces of the puzzle, the entire picture has not been painted in any meaningful way. The issue to date has confounded solution. In fact, it reminds many of Winston Churchill’s description of Russia: “...a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma...” Although I am not very artistic, in writing this book I felt like an artist painting a picture, placing all the pieces of the puzzle in their proper place. I have endeavored to articulate honestly the indigenous condition as a starting point from which to move purposely forward. In doing so, I sincerely hope I have, in turn, provided some small honor to the many wolves, ravens and killer whales who have protected me and provided valuable life-long guidance.

In the most primal sense, an oath given to my father was an essential catalyst in my deciding to write this book. My father’s English name is Barry Helin.



SM'OOYGIT NEES NUUGAN NOOS, Barry Helin, former Chief of the Gitlan Tribe of the Tsimshian Nation and father of author (taken in 1992). Bordered by his Wolf Crest, Chief Helin is the middle son of Tsimshian Chieftans, Maude and Henry Helin. Part of the legacy of Maude and Henry (grandparents to the author) was to encourage their children and grandchildren to work towards bettering the plight of indigenous people.

His Aboriginal name, as Chief of the Gitlan Tribe of the Tsimshian Nation, is Sm'ooygit Nees Nuugan Noos. His Tribe's primary crest or protector totem is the wolf (*Laxgibuu* in our language). In 1998 when he was dying, in the final stage of his gruesome stomach cancer he was taken by medivac air ambulance from our small village to the hospital in nearby Prince Rupert. In the village, people are accustomed to hearing the howl of wolves in the late evening or early morning, but never during the day. As the medical personnel were taking my father to the awaiting air ambulance helicopter (just past noon), a chorus of howling wolves erupted behind my father's house—as if to provide a final lament to honor the ancient connection between the Gitlan and the *Laxgibuu*, and to say goodbye to their Chief.

As the illness exacted its horrific toll, my father called my brothers and me to his bedside. He asked us to put our hands on the bed in which he lay and make a solemn pledge. In his heart of hearts, his dying wish was simply that, in whatever circumstances our family found itself after his death, we “stick together and always support each other.” At the time, being consumed with the gloomy prospect of my Dad's impending demise, I did not have much opportunity to contemplate the deeper meaning of giving my word of honor in this way.

Upon later reflection, however, I thought about this oath and how it was the theme central to my father's existence. Sounds so simple—“sticking

together,” and sometimes can be so difficult, but in the end, is unquestionably of great value. I began to think how this principle, invoking self-reliance, loyalty and mutual support, was really the most crucial underlying element of tribal survival, and how utterly ruinous had been the government support that took its place. If you were to reformulate my father’s wish in biblical language it might be: “What tribal bonds therefore Nature hath joined together, let no man put asunder.” Yet when one looks at the unrelenting misery, pain, and massive confusion that is consuming indigenous people and developing populations around the globe, it is clear that colonial man has pulled apart these most precious bonds with wholly predictable results.

Extending my father’s idea, I believe that there must be a return to the simple tribal and human values that spawned the complex and beautiful indigenous cultures in the first place—in effect, a contemporary reclamation of the lost tribal values and social DNA. Although it certainly might be helpful if more remnants of indigenous cultures were still in existence, we do not have to turn back the clock in order to find the still-pristine emotional legacy of our ancestors, stressing the importance of social interconnections and the necessary interdependence of families, Tribes, or Nations. Or to recognize the value of self-reliance, high moral conduct, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and leadership. This renewal must be done in a modern context in constructive partnership with the larger society.

This book divides the history of North America’s indigenous population into four distinct waves of development. At the micro-level, there are relevant differences in the particular patterns of development of Aboriginal people in Canada and Native Americans in the U.S.. At the broadest level, however, such impacts arguably follow a sufficiently parallel track to make useful comparisons. Though this book focuses on the particulars of Canada, the same general analysis and suggested solutions, at least at the broadest level, may also be applied to Native Americans in the United States.

The first wave of development is by far the longest, involving the migration to, and occupation of, various parts of North America by indigenous groups. Some scholars contend this occurred no earlier than 10,000 BC. Others argue that particular physical evidence could push that date back as far as 400,000 years ago. More modest proposals suggest the actual date is 20,000 to 70,000 BC (with many agreeing that there was human occupation by at least 20,000 BC).¹ One writer has suggested that, if modern North American indigenous peoples can claim direct descent from the early people of 15,000 to 20,000 years ago, as some undoubtedly can, then the indigenous populations are by

far the oldest known race on the earth.² Throughout this long period, indigenous societies flourished, developing intricate and sophisticated languages and cultures. The period of the first wave will be examined to determine how and what particular attributes contributed to the self-reliance and survival of indigenous people for millennia prior to contact with Europeans.

The second wave involved the supposed “discovery” of North America, and the subsequent colonisation of the North American indigenous populations by European imperial powers. This period precipitated the massive decline of the indigenous population due to disease introduced by Europeans to which there was no natural immunity. This second wave lasted until about 100 years ago.

The third wave, a period from about a century ago to the present, initially involved colonizing powers adopting specific strategies to assimilate indigenous populations. The third wave will be examined for how it developed the “welfare trap.” It is this era that has resulted in destructive social and political pathologies that have created massive dysfunction and social chaos. The third wave has led to enormous dependency which has impacted not only social and economic conditions, but has created a dependency mindset and unrealistic expectations. These attitudes are neither sustainable nor do they hold any future answers to regaining the self-reliance that was once crucial to the indigenous world view from antiquity onward.

In recent times, indigenous people have become endangered and defeated in most engagements because, to paraphrase Sun-tzu, they no longer know themselves or their enemies. By comparing the strategies of the past (that ensured long-term survival) with the problems and internalized dependency conditions of the present, we should begin to relearn who we are and what our true historical legacy is—to start to “know ourselves” again in a collective sense. Certainly, our real legacy involves more than indigenous peoples being puppets controlled by strings of welfare and transfer payments on the stage of the federal government. To “know our enemy,” there are the usual suspects of government, bureaucracy, and the “Indian Industry,” but we also must acknowledge how the dependency mindset has been socialized internally into generations of the indigenous psyche. And how it is creating self-erected barriers to moving forward. In some respects, these destructive attitudes have resulted in indigenous people becoming their own worst enemies—defeating ourselves with our own caustic and pessimistic attitudes before we even engage the enemy.

The fourth wave, in Canada at least, coincides with the title of Part I of this book, “The Demographic Tsunami.” The huge “greying” mainstream baby boom population (representing one-third of the population of Canada)

may be combining with the rapidly-growing indigenous population in an immense demographic tsunami capable of swamping the finances of the country if corrective measures are not taken immediately. It is hardly an exaggeration to state that, in a fundamental manner, the very prosperity and competitiveness of the country is at stake. The fourth wave explores solutions that may instead turn this impending crisis into a colossal opportunity. In the United States, although Native Americans form a comparatively smaller percentage of the population than Aboriginals in Canada, the circumstances requiring innovative solutions are equally dire. Massive welfare dependency does not, and cannot work for any population.

Whether the fourth wave is a crisis or opportunity depends on the views we adopt and the action we take now. If we are prudent and thoughtful enough to adopt the right strategies now, indigenous people may not be, in Sun-tzu's words, "endangered in a hundred [future] engagements."

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

There are many terms used to describe the first peoples that occupied North America prior to contact with Europeans. The term in common usage in Canada is "Aboriginals." The terms used in the United States are "Native Americans" or "Indians." In Canada, the term "Indians" is only used for those persons defined in specific legislation (i.e., the Indian Act) as Indians. The word is not in popular usage in Canada because it is the expression that Europeans erroneously applied to the first peoples of North America as the result of Columbus' first voyage. Columbus believed that he circumnavigated the globe by going west and had landed in the East Indies. It turned out he actually landed in what is now called the West Indies in present day Puerto Rico. The name he mistakenly gave to the indigenous populations he met was "Indians." This later became the default term for how Europeans identified North American indigenous people. (The running joke is that we should be thankful he wasn't looking for Turkey.) In reference to the first peoples that occupied North America, I will simply use the word "indigenous" people. If I am speaking specifically about the populations in Canada, I will use the term "Aboriginal," and for the indigenous population in the United States I will use the term "Native Americans."

In the same vein, there are many terms used for the communities of indigenous peoples. In Canada the terms "Band" and "First Nation" are often used. In the United States the term "Tribe" is often used. I will adopt the usage of the term "Tribe" here to mean indigenous community or communities unless I am referring specifically to "Bands" or "First Nations" in Canada.

I also refer to current geo-political names rather than repeatedly stating, for example, "what is now called British Columbia."



NORTHERN MIRAGE

Wolves are referred to as *gyibaaw* in the Tsimshian language, Sm'algyax. The *gyibaaw* are singing their haunting songs near the village of Lax Kw'alaams (or Port Simpson) in northern BC. They are lounging beneath three totems. One of the totems is called "Mirage" and tells a story about three great chiefs with mystical powers. In the night sky the Creator is painting the celestial heavens with his supernatural paint brush representing the Northern Lights or *Aurora Borealis*. A limited edition of giclee method prints was made.

INTRODUCTION



I

I HAD A DREAM...

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
“Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door—
Only this and nothing more.”

EDGAR ALLAN POE, excerpted from *The Raven*

BACKGROUND

I was brought up in a small coastal Indian village of Lax Kw’alaams on the northwest coast of British Columbia. My community was part of the Tsimshian Nation, a group known for its highly complex culture that developed in the mists of the mystical coastal temperate rain forest. For the last two centuries the rich culture, spirituality, and highly-evolved artistic traditions of the Tsimshian and other Northwest Coast Indian groups have captured the imagination of scholars. One eminent anthropologist has pointed out that, even though the coastal peoples were genetically and linguistically similar to the other tribes found across North America, in some ways they were different from all others.³ These cultures have a pronounced oriental or Asiatic tinge which is thought to be evidence of a basic kinship, and long-continued contact, with the peoples around the north Pacific Rim.⁴ Most of all, the cultures were distinguished by a local richness and originality, thought to be the product of vigorous and inventive people in a rich environment.⁵

When Captain Cook (in 1778) and other European explorers and fur traders first visited the coast, they encountered one of the highest densities of First Nations settlements found anywhere on the North American continent. Due to the bounty of a lush environment, fully one-third of the Aboriginal population in Canada lived in British Columbia. Between the Kodiak Archipelago

of Alaska and San Francisco Bay, several hundred thousand people lived, speaking more than sixty distinct languages—a linguistic diversity far greater than that of the continental interior—attributed to the ecological complexity of the sustaining coastal lands and waters.⁶ In only a few other places in the world did comparably-advanced societies arise on a foundation of natural abundance, rather than one of farming or herding.⁷

Although their patterns of land ownership and utilization did not accord with European legal notions, the coastal peoples were nonetheless quite sophisticated in this regard and had clearly-defined concepts, which were mutually-respected. For example, natural boundaries such as rivers and the ocean defined specific geographical areas where a tribe was recognized to have exclusive use and control of the natural resources contained within the boundaries of that area. If another group wanted to use those resources or conduct trade within that area they had to receive permission from the tribe and often had to pay what amounted to a tax for those privileges. They also proved to be shrewd business people who, the early fur traders soon learned, were formidable commercial competitors. Originally, tribal leaders of the coastal people exploited trade to develop their cultures further along their own distinctive lines. Had it not been for the ravages of several decades of introduced disease, alcohol and gunpowder, they would have been a greater force when settlers began to arrive.⁸

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Tsimshian were significantly involved in industrial production, manufacturing, mercantile enterprises, and wage labor.⁹ The Tsimshian Chiefs were quick to expand their existing tribal trading privileges and monopolies to include the new European markets. “Through such [trading] monopolies, they could control a large amount of the trade, especially that of the land-based Hudson’s Bay Company [the American and Russian fur traders, on the other hand, came in ships by sea], and to some degree could regulate the price of the furs (Fisher 1977: 30).”¹⁰ The Tsimshian trade competitively expanded into the interior of British Columbia. By the time the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) arrived from the east in 1826, the Tsimshians were already trading to the inland tribes European goods received from American traders on the coast. Upon their arrival, the Hudson’s Bay Company traders were greatly surprised that they could not afford to match the prices for furs offered by the aggressive Tsimshians who already dominated those markets.¹¹ When diseases such as smallpox began to decimate the Aboriginal population, HBC traders had access to inoculations, but sometimes distributed these strategically to only

those Tsimshians who were non-trade competitors.¹² Despite their purported “Christian” values, such decisions were tantamount to a death sentence for the most capable Tsimshian entrepreneurs of the time.

In 1834, the Hudson’s Bay Company established its trading fort at what is now the site of the community of Lax Kw’alaams (“Island of Roses”). Nine tribes of the Tsimshian moved to Lax Kw’alaams soon after the establishment of the fort. The community is also known as Port Simpson, named after Amelius Simpson¹³, superintendent of the marine department of the Hudson’s Bay Company of the time. Lax Kw’alaams was soon to become headquarters of the fur trade on the Canadian side of the north coast.¹⁴ One of the largest towns on the BC Coast at the time subsequently grew up around the fort at Lax Kw’alaams. In 1891, the first major hospital on the north coast was founded there by an Act of the provincial legislature.¹⁵

A FRONT ROW SEAT

Sadly, when I was a lad, the Tsimshian were but a pale shadow of their vigorous ancestors who prosecuted trade and commerce so enthusiastically throughout the Victorian era. Growing up on an Indian reserve, I witnessed first-hand the complex web of social and political pathologies resulting from a nouveau culture based on welfare dependency and government transfer payments. My father was a commercial fisherman and a fine one. Though he had made a good life for our family, I was well aware that life in an Aboriginal Indian reserve had a very sinister side to it. Such a bad environment has persisted so long in most Aboriginal communities that many Aboriginal people have, over generations, been socialized into thinking that this widespread dysfunction is normal. Imagine a situation where tragically high youth suicide rates, gross unemployment figures, frequent banana republic-style corruption, and persistent abuse—both substance and physical—prevail, and you might begin to understand what life is like on many Aboriginal reserves.¹⁶

My grandmother, Maude Helin, was Chieftain of one of the largest of the nine tribes in our community. In the Tsimshian system it was not uncommon for women to be in high positions of power such as the role of Chieftain. Her Chief’s name was Sigidm hana’a Nt’sit’hotk (“Grandmother of the tribe”). Unlike the English system of assigning names, the Tsimshian system provided an example of a social structure built on the two themes of kinship and rank (which were much more important than to Europeans).¹⁷ English people receive only one name, which usually reveals the sex of the individual and the

father's line, while titles and honorifics can indicate marital status, educational attainment, occupation, or rank. Conversely, Aboriginals on the northern coast took a series of names of higher and higher rank as they aged. Such names usually revealed to the other members of the tribe the person's sex, age-group, lineage, rank, and sometimes role (such as successor Chief).¹⁸ My Grandmother's Chief's name had been passed on from hereditary Chief to hereditary Chief in her tribe for thousands of years. Though it brought her great status, it also imposed many obligations that involved duties, responsibilities, and originally prescribed considerable formality and a code of conduct.

RESPONDING TO A CHALLENGE

Kites rise highest against the wind... not with it.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

In Tsimshian society, my grandmother was an aristocrat from the royal house of Gitchiis. No matter how blue her blood, however, she would have to endure first-hand the many humiliations of the legacy of colonial policy and law which ensured that Aboriginal people of her generation were treated like second-class citizens. Throughout most of her life, she could not vote in federal or provincial elections. Indians –along with Chinese and some other minorities—were forced to sit in separate areas from whites in movie theatres, could not go into bars, and were effectively barred from becoming doctors or lawyers. In many ways, her generation was subjected to grotesque racial indignities similar to those endured by African-Americans in the deep South, or South African Blacks under the apartheid regime.

Add to this a system where land and resources and the means to a livelihood were simply removed, and where Aboriginal culture and language were effectively outlawed. What was instituted to replace self-sufficient Aboriginal societies was an incompetent and patronizing bureaucracy whose prescription amounted to a heavy dose of welfare. In light of these circumstances, you might begin to understand what piqued my grandmother, raising her ire and indignation.

Along with my grandfather, Henry Helin¹⁹, my grandmother worked tirelessly to improve the lot of Aboriginal people. Together they were instrumental in founding the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia, the organization that for almost 75 years has represented Aboriginal workers and fisherman in



GRAMPA AND GRANNY HELIN

Portrait of Henry and Maude Helin in traditional regalia. Tsimshian chieftains of two of the nine tribes of Lax Kw'alaams. Henry Helin's Chief's title was Sm'ooogit Nees Nuugan Noos and his tribe was the Gitlan. Maude Helin's Chief's name was Sigyidm hana'a Nt'sit'hotk which meant "Grandmother of the tribe." She was Chieftain of the Gitchiis tribe. Both were lifelong activists advocating for constructive action to make the lives of ordinary indigenous people better.

the fishing industry. Every chance she got, she would urge me to “Get an education and become a lawyer and fight for the rights of Indians.”

In seeking to obtain an education, I was greatly handicapped by circumstances. As a child, I was stuck in an atrociously-run federal Indian Day School with very low academic standards and exceedingly low expectations from the federally-appointed administration. Since my family at the time were “non-status Indians” and quite poor, there was no money to obtain a better education elsewhere. I am indebted to the generosity and good graces of my grade 8 teacher, Greg Millbank and his family (particularly his father and mother, Bob and Betty Millbank), for providing an opportunity for me to attend school in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. After finishing high school, I went into the fishing business where, thanks to 24 percent interest rates in the early 1980s, I earned my first PhD in business by going spectacularly broke. Failing miserably in the family business forced me to get around to earning a law degree.

Twenty years later, much observation and reflection has led me to conclusions I could never have imagined. I have learned that the Aboriginal population and its issues are not simply questions to be pondered at the leisure of do-gooders and altruistic liberals. I also realized the mainstream Canadian population has a very poor understanding as to why such a question is absolutely critical to the future well-being and vigorous development of Canada as a nation.

A contemporary translation of the question with which my grandmother challenged my generation is: “What can be done to make the lives of ordinary indigenous people better?” Sounds like a simple enough question, doesn’t it? Nevertheless, after a century of high falutin’ talk between the federal government and Indian politicians, ordinary Aboriginal folk are left to wonder: “What is the practical legacy?” Are Aboriginal people any further ahead? The truth is that for the vast amount of resources expended, most statistics indicate that the social and economic dividend has been nominal.

The crux of the problem is that parties have largely assumed that the whole solution to sorting out Aboriginal woes can be provided for, or solved by, the federal government. There is no question that its policies and programs are important. However, a search for a real solution must begin outside the current dependency mindset.

My grandmother’s question has been pondered for the past 200 years, and most solutions proposed have had little effect. Government has put forward “solutions” that frequently have exacerbated already bad situations. Though the system was created through no fault of their own, a host of past Indian

chiefs have made an industry of pointing fingers and assigning blame. Expensive Royal Commissions have come and gone with supposed answers. In the meantime, the stark reality of grassroots Aboriginal people in Canada has changed very little. Aboriginal children and youth see no hope at the end of the tunnel of despair and poverty. As shocking statistics reflect, Aboriginal youth continue to commit suicide and abuse substances at truly horrifying rates. Grassroots community members continue to be victims of an *Indian Act* system in which they are individually and personally disempowered and largely politically neutered. At the same time, Aboriginal folks have passed muster on the federal government-supported reserve system by voting with their feet. Today, approximately 50 percent of Aboriginal people in Canada live outside of reserve communities, primarily in urban areas where there are, quite simply, better employment, educational and economic opportunities, and higher incomes.²⁰

The fact of the matter is that neither Aboriginal people nor the Canadian public can afford another lost generation of youth. The staggering human and economic costs are simply too great, particularly when the opportunity to take a giant leap forward is at hand.

The good news is that Aboriginals are likely in the best position ever to integrate economically with the mainstream, to partner with industry, and create wealth and opportunities for all. With reserve lands and only a handful of modern treaties concluded, Aboriginal people currently own, lock-stock-and-barrel, over 600,000 square kilometres of land—an area over eight times the size of Ireland, over twice the size of either New Zealand or England, and larger by a substantial margin than either France, Germany or Spain. And there are still many, many more settlements to come. Some estimates suggest Aboriginal people will eventually own or control one-third of the entire Canadian land mass—an area equivalent to a third of the total land area of Europe! Current settlements have resulted in approximately \$2.5 billion to \$5 billion in cash payments. Some estimate that there may be between \$10 billion and \$20 billion paid in future settlements.

With growing resource development in their traditional territories as the result of huge, unremitting commodities-demand in the world markets, and legal decisions requiring genuine consultation, Aboriginal Canadians for the first time have real leverage over a substantial area of the Canadian economy. This results in an unprecedented opportunity to forge a new era of self-reliance. There is real hope and a practical solution—albeit one that may not be popular with those parties benefiting under the current chaos, and whose interests are entrenched in maintaining the status quo.



I
Author's Grandpa
(Henry) and
Granny (Maude)
Helin, both
Tsimshian chieftains
of the Gitlan and
Gitchiis tribes,
respectively

2

Totem pole raising
in front of Chief
Henry Helin's Lax
Kw'alaams residence.

Purpose was to
commemorate his
chief's position as
*Sm'ooygit Nees
Nuugan Noos* of the
Gitlan Tribe (which
name and title was
passed down to his
son Barry Helin on
his death)





3 Author's Grannies, Georgina Scott, *Sa'gyep* "Seal coming out of the water" and Maude Helin, *Sigyidm hana'a Nt'sit'hotk* "Grandmother of the tribe"



4 Author's Mother and Father, Verna Helin (*Sigyidm hana'a Su Dalx*) and Barry Helin (*Sm'ooygit Nees Nuugan Noos*)



5 Helin Family Siblings
Bottom Row: Cindy (*sister*), Elaine (*sister*), Verna (*mother*), Crystal (*sister*), Barry (*father*).
Top Row: John (*brother*), Pat (*brother*), and Calvin



6 Author's Family: daughters Denise & Georgina, wife Vernita, Calvin and son Lewis



7 Uncle Lawrence Helin, *Sm'ooygit Nees Nuugan Natt* (inherited position of Chief of the Gitchiis Tribe from mother, Maude). In traditional regalia with copper shield or *hyetsk* — symbol of great tribal wealth



8 Uncle Arthur Helin, *Sm'ooygit Hyemass*. Chief's name held by great warriors of legend. A gifted athlete and basketball star, Art was recipient of the prestigious Tom Longboat Award



9 Chief Barry Helin, *Sm'ooygit Nees Nuugan Noos* in traditional blanket



10 Author's wife, Vernita Helin



11 Author's grandson, Lucius



I2 Author with Cree elder Billy Joe Takaro.



I3 + I4 Greg and Fong Millbank. Greg helped author out of small village to greater educational opportunities by welcoming him into his home. Long-time friend and mentor of author.



I6 With Maori elder, Pihopa Kingi, in New Zealand, for the millennium celebration.

I7 Receiving Canada's "Top 40 Under 40" with friend Dave Tuccaro (first two Aboriginals in Canada to receive this award).

I5 Calvin, John, and Pat Helin with John & Pat's father-in-law, the venerable Chief Harold Dudoward (Sm'ooygit Sax sa'axt) of the Gitwilgyots Tribe. The photo was taken in Las Vegas marking the first reunion in sixty years with Chief Dudoward's sister. Upon his passing, Chief Dudoward was honored by having his name "buried with him." While it had been passed on for thousands of years, the name can never again be used by another Chief of that tribe.



I8 Photo of Bill Helin, internationally renowned artist whose works grace the pages of this publication (also cousin to author and son of Arthur Helin), makes presentation to Maori leader, Te Taru White, at NITA Resource Expo 2004 Gala Dinner in Vancouver.



I9 Sensei Toshiaki Nomada (4th degree black belt) and author (3rd degree black belt) pose in front of barn where their *dojo* (martial art practice gym) is located. Photo was taken for the *Province* newspaper in July of 2006.



THE RAVEN AND THE FIRST MEN

Bill Reid's famous cedar carving at UBC's Museum of Anthropology. Carved out of a giant block of laminated yellow cedar, this sculpture depicts the Raven coaxing the first men out of a giant clam shell he found on the beach.

THE RAVEN'S CALL

It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

My own thinking about this question has been shaped by a number of influences. Such influences are partially summarized by a recent experience.

One night I had a tremendously powerful and frightening dream. I do not dream often (at least that I can remember), and this dream was so vivid that I awoke in a cold sweat. I dreamt that I was in a room in a building that was a cross between a traditional Tsimshian longhouse and a traditional house of a Chinese nobleman—a house built around a courtyard. I do not know how those two structures could be reconciled, but in the surrealistic nature of dreams, that is just the way it was. I was standing at the head of a room, talking to a group of anonymous people in a manner which was both condescending and arrogant (although I am not sure what I was talking about).

As I was talking, a gigantic raven flew into the house and landed at the end of the room. The raven was enormous. After I awoke, I realized it had been similar in size to the raven on the massive yellow cedar clamshell carving of the famous Haida artist, Bill Reid, located at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology. In my dream, however, this was not a stylized figure of Northwest coast art, but a *real* raven and a big one, with a wingspan of 15 feet. It flew right past my face. I could hear the distinctive and graceful swishing sound of its wings—swish, swish—a sound familiar to anyone who has heard the elegant rustle of a raven on the wing.

The giant raven landed at the end of the room. It said nothing but fixed upon me a serious and displeased gaze. The look that flashed from its eyes was: "You had better behave yourself! The way in which you are talking to those people shows terrible manners. You know better!" Whatever the message really was, the raven's presence scared the hell out of me and I woke up. I couldn't get to sleep again. I have tried to make sense of why I was given such a powerful dream. I got to thinking that the only ravens I knew really well that might be in the dream/spirit world are my Grandmother and her son, my Uncle Art, a sub-chief in her tribe²¹. The raven is the primary crest and guardian spirit of the Gitsiis Tribe to whom my Granny and uncle belonged. Was this dream a message from them?

After much contemplation, I have interpreted the dream in this way. My grandmother wanted me to dedicate my efforts to seeking genuine solutions,

to being a soldier in the effort to provide that glimmer of hope to lost Aboriginal generations. At one point, I got sidetracked by the glitz of the business world and started chasing money solely for its own sake. For reasons which I did not understand at the time, everything that I undertook seemed to run into problems. My belief is that my grandmother visited me in the dream to tell me that I had lost my way. I had lost my *raison d'être*—a purpose important not only to my Grandmother, but to my own well-being.

I also believe there was a moral message in the nocturnal visit from the raven. In seeking answers to my grandmother's question regarding how to improve the lot of Aboriginal people, it is of utmost importance to be principled and humble. A friend told me that Cree people begin all prayers with the invocation that I have translated as: "Thank you Creator for giving me, such a pitiful little creature, another day and much to be thankful for." Repeating this is intended to acknowledge the miniscule role played by individuals in the greater cosmic order and to show thankfulness and respect to Nature for what we have been given. It is important to keep this in mind in our search to find the target—solutions to Aboriginal problems. Perhaps the raven's message is that, in order to find the target, our arrow must be straight, our aim true, and our vision unclouded by arrogance, self-interest or fear.

COURAGE TO FACE THE UNPLEASANT

You must speak straight so that your words may go as sunlight to our hearts.
COCHISE, Apache Leader (1815 – 1874)²²

Finally, if lasting solutions are to be found, the *real* Aboriginal social and political problems must be discussed openly and frankly. Aboriginal people need to declare an Aboriginal "glasnost" similar to that in the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev. The removal of government censorship allowed the problems of the Soviet Union to be discussed and addressed in an environment of openness. Aboriginal citizens must also squarely face the Industry of Non-Aboriginal Hucksters, and "consultants", and those Aboriginal politicians who are openly profiting from this sea of despair and poverty. In spite of what they say, this "Indian Industry" has no real interest in changing a system from which they are profiting. Without such resolve it will be difficult, if not impossible, to deal with the myriad of problems that must be tackled.

If manners and common civilities stand in the way of finding solutions, then these must be set aside. It is also time to put questions of self-interest and



GAAX FLIES

The Raven (*Gaax*) was the first symbol and crest of the Northwest Coastal peoples. As the Creator's assistant, he created all things that exist, with mysterious trickery. This mystical bird is a symbol of prestige—a cultural hero.

political correctness aside while real solutions are explored in the name of a higher purpose. The tears and broken hearts of thousands of mothers and grandmothers should be enough to convince anyone that we must take action *now*. How long are we prepared to leave the plight of Aboriginal children and youth in the unkind hands of the welfare trap? How many more families need to fall as casualties of a fatal “welfare syndrome”—one that is literally stealing the lives and hopes of our future generations? We must shake off the apathy of an all too comfortable “cloak of welfare” and act to fix the problems now.

A solution to the problems plaguing Aboriginal people in Canada will ultimately take a more workable policy framework, and likely several generations of reform. In the meantime, there are effective economic and business resolutions that, if pursued, can have a huge impact right now. To exploit these opportunities will require a fundamental change in the dependency mindset of Aboriginal people. For lasting solutions, decisions have to come from Aboriginal people themselves. Aboriginals have to consciously choose a more beneficial path than the dependency course they are currently on—and have the conviction to live with the consequences.

Aboriginal citizens must take ownership of these problems and assert control over their own destinies. We must look immediately to opportunities to generate our own sources of wealth and employment that could lead to the Holy Grail of rediscovered independence and self-reliance. It is time to re-take control of our lives from government departments, bureaucrats, and the Indian Industry. To do this, we must create our own wealth, develop a focussed strategy to educate youth, and control our own purse strings. Reasserting control with a strategic plan for moving forward should ultimately lead to more basic personal happiness. The object is to ensure that larger numbers of Aboriginal people are leading enriched, rewarding lives. Wealth (or money), although needed to provide opportunities, in itself is not the goal, but only a means to this greater end. Successfully implemented, this process in turn should pay huge economic and social dividends for Canada as a country.

A UNIVERSAL MESSAGE OF SELF-RELIANCE

The inevitable consequence of poverty is dependence.

SAMUEL JOHNSON

The situation involving Canada’s indigenous people can be seen as a microcosm representing any population going through a condition of enforced

dependency. It seems government-sponsored welfare dependency results in astonishingly similar behavior and attitudes regardless of a population's ethnicity. Indeed, throughout the world, societies with long-ingrained entitlement cultures are questioning the wisdom of having created attitudes of expectation.

While welfare payments provide valuable assistance to many individuals in short-term need, the long-term question is: *How can we liberate from poverty a population that has been socialized into a dependency mindset over a long period of time?* Africans, for example, are beginning to openly question the distorting impact of aid, which is a form of welfare, on their long-term well-being. In a recent online posting titled "Africans to Bono: 'For God's sake please stop!'" author Jennifer Brea points out the crippling dependency and corruption created by aid given with the best of intentions.²³ She alludes to the growing chorus of African voices asserting, "We can continue the endless cycle of need and dependency, or you can create jobs, develop indigenous capacity, and build a sustainable future."²⁴ Such aid further crowds out local entrepreneurship, makes governments lazy, and deprives countries of the incentive to build effective institutions. She notes: "Public revenue derived from taxes makes governments directly responsible to their citizens. Free money builds white elephants and bloated bureaucracies, it being far easier to create new government jobs than implement policies to fight unemployment, especially when someone else is footing the bill."²⁵ She concludes, "If we really want to help, why not ask Africans, not their governments, how they perceive the challenges before them, the dreams they have for the future, and the resources they think they need to realize them?"²⁶

Germans, as well, are intimately acquainted with the ways in which dependency, enforced through government policy, can quickly manifest in a formerly self-reliant population. The subsequent cost of unification and the deeply-ingrained attitudes regarding dependency of their East German counterparts ultimately came as an enormous shock to West Germans. The terms *Wessi* ("westerner") and *Ossi* ("easterner") came to imply their different approaches to the world. *Wessi* refers to a competitive and aggressive nature, the product of what former East Germans call the West's "elbow society." *Ossi* refers to passivity, indolence, and dependence—in effect, the West German view of the East Germans as products of communism.²⁷

Similar observations regarding long-term dependency fostered by social welfare systems are being made around the world. Certainly, the creation of long-term welfare dependency in any former colonial population or developing country needs to be reexamined in light of the massive harm caused.