

Calvin Helin a Motivated Visionary on a Clear Path

Story and Photos
by José Bonhomme

Calvin Helin has a keen sparkle in his eye. The native of a small fishing village, Lax Kw'alaams (Port Simpson) on the north-west coast of British Columbia, is of Tsimshian ancestry. He appeared for two enlightening presentations in Dawson City on Sept. 23 and 24, to share important facts to the young and not so young.

One presentation geared to high-school students took place at R. Service School on the 23rd, and on the next night, a community dinner was held with a multi-media summary of the main concepts presented in his book: "Dances with Dependency: Out of Poverty through Self-Reliance".

The audience on the Wednesday evening public event at the Tr'ondek Hwech'in Community Hall numbered over 150 people of all ages and walks of life. As Helin continued with his logic, based in demographics and stalwart hope, one could have heard a pin drop.

The lawyer, entrepreneur and kinesiologist, with a black belt in karaté, is the incarnation of stoic pride, armed with an alert mind capable of grasping links

between statistics, science and the future, always with a deep respect for tradition and history. His grandmother, a chieftain of the Gitcheiis tribe, urged him to become a lawyer "and fight for the rights of Indians".

An important value for Calvin Helin is an oath he made to his father Barry before his death, along with his brothers: "in whatever circumstances our family found itself after his death, that we 'stick together and always support each other.'"

Reflecting on this promise, Helin writes, "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."

He continues, "...we do not have to turn back the clock 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



Calvin Helin, Author, Speaker, Lawyer, Kinesiologist, Entrepreneur and (young) Grandfather.

the larger society."

He likens the aboriginal experience in Canada to that of a long canoe trip, spanning 10,000 years, with the most recent effects of colonization taking place in the last 400 years. He uses metaphors to illustrate the waves of changes sweeping through his people and their diverse and rich cultures.

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He compares the current and imminent demographic shifts to a tidal wave, as much a result of baby boom economics and of aboriginal population growth with a much younger median age.

Through his use of demographics (statistical study of populations), he points to trends with imminent consequences, which need to be addressed honestly and swiftly. He heralds education as an important tool to achieve self-reliance and success for both individuals and their larger communities.

To illustrate this point, he uses the successful example of educational adaptations and progress at the East Vancouver's Grandview/?Uuquinak'uuh Elementary school. They reached out, improved disadvantaged children's marks from 1.6 to 7 out of 10, by using high academic expectations and literacy through phonics, despite a 68% English as a

second language population, and a special needs group of 35%.

He then describes success stories of aboriginal enterprise, such as the Maori in New Zealand, Alaska Native Corporations, the Mississippi Choctaws, Northeastern Alberta Aboriginal Business Association, Membertou First Nation, the Osoyoos Indian Band and alliances such as ATCO-Akita Drilling Ltd.

Helin writes of the specialized reality of urban Native residents, and again looks at options to deal with this problem. He emphasizes the need for connectedness and support for those away from their rural home communities, preparation for urban living, and how the transition to the new life can be made more productive.

He urges an awareness of the welfare trap, and the impact of "shaman economics" (the effects of the welfare trap), the general structural defects by which tribes have been economically isolated and force fed welfare and shows how this has economically isolated communities and created the complete reliance on transfer payments and welfare. He talks about accountability, honesty and the economy in straight-shooter language, straight from the heart.

"One solution," he concludes, "is for people of all ethnicities to start thinking less about our differences and more about the fabric that binds us together as a human species."

"...Another solution is for government and private sector decision-makers to realize that while there is a role for welfare among individuals truly in need, we must also be mindful of québécois singer Félix Leclerc's caution that 'the best way to kill a man is to pay him for doing nothing.'

"Society gains immeasurably from investing in the self-reliance of its poorest folk, for this is the way of sustainability. The alternative - continuing to invest in the administration of poverty that benefits only a few, while perpetuating the never-ending cycle of debilitating dependency - has already been revealed as economically untenable.

Lifting the yoke of dependency allows the poorest children, mothers, grand-

mothers, and men down on their luck to wake up in the morning and feel good about themselves, hopeful about their future.

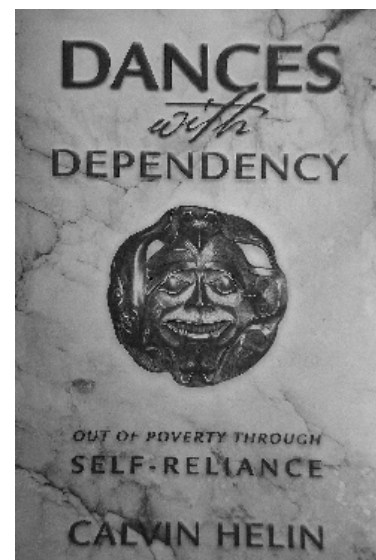
Such an outcome would exemplify the founding principle of America, which was, according to former president Woodrow Wilson, to realize a vision of liberty among all people. Wai Wah. (just do it).

The well researched, referenced and indexed book has 300 pages full of quotes, facts and examples to support Helin's hopeful view of the future. But his warnings are also well backed with numbers that don't lie.

The book is illustrated throughout by the author's brother, Bill Helin, a well-known Tsimshian artist. The colourful plates add to the awe and spirit with which this humble author was entrusted, always protected and guided by his wolves, ravens and killer whales, hereditary crests he is allowed to wear. As he spoke, Calvin Helin, dressed in his traditional robe adorned with his family's crests, intricately patterned, with overhead slides and an artistic touch, gave all in attendance lots to think about.

Helin is currently working on soon to be published books on related topics, with one supporting a humorous approach, as "indigenous culture teaches children always to be prepared for a laugh, especially when they are the butt of a joke. Even at such times happiness prevails, because laughter sustains emotional health."

To Calvin Helin for including Dawson City on his hectic world itinerary: Toyaxsut'nuun (thank you in Tsimshian). *Dances with Dependency* is published by Ravencrest Publishing, Woodland Hills, CA and retails for \$34.95 CAD.



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