

# Ethnohistory Field School Report

## 2011

Grand Chief Clarence “Kat”

Pennier:

A Life in Leadership

Ben Clinton Baker

University of Victoria

The Ethnohistory Field School is a collaboration of the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, Stó:lō Nation & Stó:lō Tribal Council, and the History Departments of the University of Victoria and University of Saskatchewan.





## **Prologue**

When I first learned that I would be interviewing Stó:lō Elder and political leader Grand Chief Clarence “Kat” Pennier in order to interpret and write his life history, I was a little intimidated. As a non-Sto:lo Euro-Canadian from Victoria with no previous direct exposure to- and only a basic second hand understanding of- the rich and complicated culture and socio-political world of “the People of the River”, I knew that I was in for a challenge. I also recognized that for someone in my position such a project offered an incredible learning opportunity and it is the outcome of that experience which I now hope to be able to pass on, at least in part, to others.

In getting to know Kat over the relatively brief span of our research period I have tried to achieve a balance between investigations into both his personal and public lives. It is now clear to me that much more could be written in both directions. For what follows, however, I have attempted to employ some of the guiding principles of Oral Historian Alessandro Portelli who thus summarizes his own work:

*The task and theme of oral history...is to explore this distance and this bond, to search out the private, enclosed space of houses and kitchens and- without violating that space- to connect them with “history” and in turn to force history to listen to them.<sup>1</sup>*

I have also tried to observe Portelli’s helpful distinctions between “history telling” and “story telling”- similar in many ways to the Stó:lō categories of *sqwelqwel*<sup>2</sup> and *sxwoxwiyam*<sup>3</sup>, respectively- and have come to see the finished product as being almost entirely of the former. More than anything this is because of the information that Kat was

---

<sup>1</sup> Portelli, *Battle of Valle Giulia*, (viii)

<sup>2</sup> Stories of the recent past.

<sup>3</sup> Ancient stories relating how the world came to be.

willing to share with me but it is also partially a result of my own efforts to ground his narrative in the present while still recognizing the influences of the deep past. According to Portelli there are three main perspectives, or “modes”, of history telling: the Institutional, the Communal, and the Personal. As Kat constantly moved through and between all of these during our interviews, I have thought it best to let him speak for himself where possible while at the same time attempting to weave his words into “meaningful patterns”.<sup>4</sup>

Although I have focused my attention in this paper almost entirely upon my interviews and interactions with Kat himself, there have been a number of people whose comments, reflections and presences have guided me through the process of learning about Stó:lō culture from the “inside”. Of these Drs. Keith Carlson and John Lutz were my first and most important contacts. Without Dr. Carlson’s own close working relationship with Kat this project would likely not have occurred in the first place and so it is to him, in particular, that I am indebted for this rich and rewarding learning experience. To the Staff at the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre- Tia, Dave, Sonny, Ashley and others- I am also deeply thankful for their patience, knowledge and willingness to help. The Staff at the Coqualeetza Education Centre in Sardis were essential to my being able locate some of Kat’s past writings in the *Stó:lō Nation News* and elsewhere. To the people of Scowlitz- in particular Chiefs Andy Phillips and John Pennier- I would like to extend my thanks for welcoming us into their community and for sharing some of their stories and rich history. Chief Doug Kelly and the staff at the STC office were equally generous with their time. Lastly, I would also like to thank Nancy Pennier for welcoming us into her home on my first visit to Scowlitz and for fueling our initial conversation with her husband with an ample supply of delicious coffee and cupcakes. *Kw’as hoy.*

---

<sup>4</sup> Portelli, *Battle of Valle Giulia*, (pgs. 24-7)

## **Introduction**

As we pulled off of Highway 7 past an old, tired looking Church and into the tiny community of Chawathil, a few kilometers West of Hope, I had no idea that I was about to meet Kat for the first time. Myself and another student had been invited by Dianne Garner, our ‘host mother’ for our first week in Stó:lō Territory, to attend a potluck dinner and planning meeting for the upcoming Provincial Elder’s Gathering for which she was acting co-Chair.<sup>5</sup> Although we were more than an hour behind schedule the meeting had not yet begun as it’s location had been shifted, due to a power outage, to a facility at the larger community of Seabird Island ten kilometers downriver. The problem had been fixed, however, and a few cars and vans were now trickling back into Chawathil, including our own.

Inside the recently built Community Centre we made our way to a gymnasium where half a dozen circular tables were being set up with chairs, as well as a table for food and the requisite sound system to accommodate the modest gathering. People had come to hear about, discuss and promote the large event, set to take place in a couple of month’s time, but there was an atmosphere of informal familiarity in the gym. After filling our plates with homemade lasagna, bannock and Tim Horton’s doughnuts we sat down to hear an opening welcome song followed by reports and updates from various members of the Gathering’s organizing committee. When one of the first speakers mentioned that not only was Kat acting as Coordinator for the Gathering but that he was also present there in the gym, I was both surprised and excited.

---

<sup>5</sup>The 35<sup>th</sup> annual Elder’s Gathering took place in Abbotsford, BC, on July 12, 13 & 14, 2011.

After hearing the speakers I approached Kat at his table as he was getting up to leave. “So you’re the one eh?” he responded with a smile when I told him that I had been assigned to work with him putting down his life-history-so-far in writing. “Well, I don’t usually like talking about myself, but here’s my phone number” he said, jotting it down on a scrap of paper. “Call me Kat.”

### **Origins**

Clarence Martin Pennier was born in the Mission Hospital on the Second of October 1944, the fifth child of Mandy and Frank Pennier of Scowlitz. Although registered to that community at birth, Kat’s immediate family connections there were somewhat recent. Mandy, his mother, was born at Chelhalis whereas Frank came from Harrison Mills, just across the Harrison River near Old Scowlitz. It is through his father’s family that Kat inherits his mixed Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal ancestry and for this reason many of his family members have been classified as “non-Status” according to the assimilationist stipulations of the 1876 Indian Act, which disenfranchised Native women who married non-Aboriginal men. “They were non-Status Indians, the Penniers” Kat explains, “and lived up Harrison Mills there, off the reserve. But they did have Status spouses, the majority of them.”<sup>6</sup> One of his great-grandfathers on this side, George John Perrier, was a Hudson’s Bay Company employee from Quebec who retired to a farm on the Harrison River after an active career with the Colonial Government of British Columbia. It was there that he met and married Suzanne Chiltlat, Kat’s great-

---

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Kat Pennier, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2011

grandmother.<sup>7</sup> Although unclear about how his parents came to live at Scowlitz initially, Kat attributes the move to a family friend, Joe Hall. He “was the one that brought my father and Uncle Joe [Pennier] to be members of Scowlitz, and then they had us registered for Scowlitz after that”.<sup>8</sup>

In the busy and industrious post-War years, however, there was little opportunity for a young boy- especially an Aboriginal boy- to become attached and familiar with his home community. In 1950, at the age of 6, Kat was working at a hop yard near Sardis with his family when it was arranged that he would be taken to attend St. Mary’s Residential School in Mission. He recalls being loaded into the back of a “big cattle truck” and removed to his new home where he would remain for the majority of the next ten years of his life.

### **Residential School Years**

Kat’s residential school experience, as with many survivors of that system, was one of growth and learning as much as it was one of pain and loss. An especially difficult part, he recalls, was being so close to many of his siblings who also attended the school though unable to communicate with them<sup>9</sup>. It is this kind of removal and segregation that he feels to be at the root of much of the social dislocation faced by many Aboriginal people today.

---

<sup>7</sup> See Pennier, ‘*Call Me Hank*’, Appendix 1 (pgs.99-102) for an account of the life of George John Perrier.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Kat Pennier, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2011

<sup>9</sup> Kat has six living brothers and sisters: Gordie, Ralph, Evelyn, Wilfred, Marilyn and Arnold. One brother, Roger, passed away at birth. Most of them also attended St. Mary’s.

*That's part of the downfall of the residential school system is that it alienates us from our own family. Even today, you know, it's been difficult to really be a 'bonded family', so to speak... I know that from my own family and I know that from me.<sup>10</sup>*

While simultaneously facing these challenges and trying to remain focused on his education, Kat still found ways to move and grow beyond the rigid bounds of the institution. One of these was sport. Not only did he become a “decent soccer player” but he also found the game to be an effective means of social networking, “a way of getting to know more people, know more families”, including non-Aboriginals. During his Grade 12 year he played in Chilliwack and in doing so strengthened his connections in that area. Soccer has remained a life-long passion for Kat but, perhaps more importantly, he has also maintained many of these early connections. In a sense they have helped him overcome the more negative effects of his time at residential school. This, however, was a continual process and went far beyond a handshake on the pitch:

*Growing up like that, being not exposed to the larger extended family and not being exposed to people who spoke the language...we didn't have the real teachings of how it is we're supposed to be living and how it is we're supposed to look after the land and the resources. To me that came later in life.<sup>11</sup>*

Just two months into his time at St. Mary's, in November of 1951, Kat's family was struck by tragedy when his father was killed in a logging accident. Although he has no memory of attending the funeral, Kat recalls how difficult this made things for his mother. “Mother had the responsibility of all of us children”, he reflects, and, because St. Mary's ended at grade 10, it was she who made the decision to send him to Kamloops

---

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Kat Pennier, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2011

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Kat Pennier, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2011



Indian Residential School for his final two years. However, when he returned home for the summer after completing grade 11, she surprised him by suggesting that he finish his final year of school at Agassiz Senior Secondary, much closer to home.

Although Kat had stayed in contact with some of his family during the summer months of his years at residential school- time mostly spent at the “berry camps” around Sumas and Lyndon, Washington, and later as a chokerman in logging camps on Jervis Inlet and near Hope- it was around this time that he truly began to recognize the degree to which he had become alienated from his family and friends:

*My recollection of the first day getting on the school bus [to go to Agassiz]...I see a bunch of brown faces and didn't know a soul on the bus, and yet some of them were my cousins from Chehalis!*

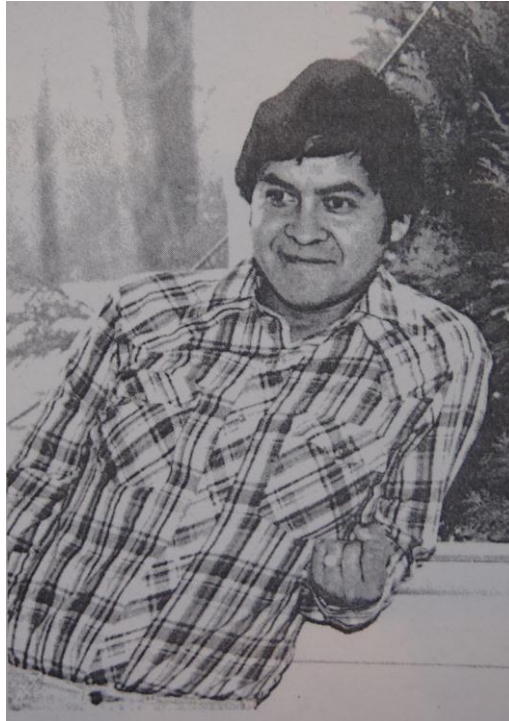
It was this increasing sense of unfamiliarity with his own family and culture that continued to nag Kat the most as he struggled to readjust in his post-residential school life.

### **Life Lessons In the Belly of the Beast**

Although Kat had tried his hand at logging- “the only game in town, so to speak”- he soon realized that it wasn't the job for him and, upon graduation, he made the decision to move to the City and continue his education:

*After I finished school I moved to Vancouver, because that's where the educational institutions were. I attended Vancouver Vocational Institute trying to be a book-keeper and after I finished that program I got a summer job working for the Federal Gov't (Supply and Services Department) and stayed there for a couple of years...After I left the Civil Service (in 1967) I went back to Vancouver City College, going into the accounting*

*program. I thought I better do something other than try to work for the Federal Government. I used to sit there and listen to people, 'I got 5 more years to retire... I got 10 more years to retire...' I couldn't see myself saying that because I just started!*<sup>12</sup>



Kat in the late 1970s during his time with the Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre.<sup>13</sup>

Kat remained busy with this program for the next two years but once again the longest lasting benefits of his attendance there had less to do with the formal training he received than it did from the networking he was able to do amongst his classmates. As it turned out one of his fellow students was Don Moses, from the Lower Nicola Indian Band of the Nlaka'pamux Nation, who had been spending his summers working at the main office of the recently formed Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) in Vancouver. After getting to know each other Moses suggested that Kat apply for a job

---

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Kat Pennier, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2011

<sup>13</sup> *Sto:lo Nation News* (January, 1980) p. 4

with the Union as accountant, which he did. He was employed there in 1970 and remained for two years while continuing with night classes at UBC in order to become a Certified General Accountant.

According to their website, the UBCIC was founded shortly before Kat's joining in November, 1969, "partly in response to the federal government's 1969 *White Paper*, which was a blueprint for assimilating Canada's First Peoples, and partly as an inevitable outcome of a growing conviction of many of our people that our survival in the face of such policies depended upon our ability to work together."<sup>14</sup> Their mandate- "to work towards the implementation, exercise and recognition of our inherent Title, Rights and Treaty Rights and to protect our Lands and Waters, through the exercise, and implementation of our own laws and jurisdiction"<sup>15</sup> - had a strong and lasting influence on Kat who remembers this period as one of the major turning points in his life:

*I got to travel throughout the Province to different consultation meetings that they held with various Nations. Since I [looked] after the money I used to be able to pay them their honoraria for attending the meetings and that became part of my learning process as far as Aboriginal Title and Rights... That was [my] first involvement politically, listening to those Chiefs talk about the Land Question. I'd never really paid attention to it before cause it wasn't something that we learned in school.<sup>16</sup>*

Kat's direct involvement with the UBCIC continued well into the 1980s, when he served two terms as Vice President with the organization, but there was another important connection that he made during these early years which would prove to be of equal if not greater significance. It was there in 1971 that he met Nancy Mitchell, who was also an

---

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/about/history.htm>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/about/mandate.html>

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Kat Pennier, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2011

employee, and they were married the following year. Together they made the decision to return to Scowlitz.

### **Stó:lō Ascendant**

When Kat and Nancy moved home in 1972 it was at the opening years of a broad movement of cultural and political reorganization for First Nations of the Fraser Valley. The leaders of the UBCIC had asserted a strong and unified voice in opposition to the assimilationist policies of the Provincial and Federal Governments and their clear message regarding Aboriginal Title was inspiring communities throughout the Lower Mainland and the Province. Though the complicated history of this movement is too extensive to elaborate upon in any detail here, it is no exaggeration to say that the functioning and coordination of its various expressions soon became the primary focus and occupation of Kat's life.

While taking up a short-term position as an Accounting Clerk with the District of Mission, Kat became increasingly involved with the founding of a new organization- the Coqualeetza Cultural Education Training Centre (CCETC). Established at the site of the old Methodist residential school and hospital at Sardis, near Chilliwack, their goal was to foster and promote the revitalization of Stó:lō language, tradition and culture.<sup>17</sup> Serving there as book-keeper, Board member and, in 1976, as the first Upper Stó:lō Manager and Executive Director, it was also during these years that Kat became associated with the Fraser East District Council (FEDC). This group was the modern embodiment of the Department of Indian Affairs Indian Agency for the region and it was made up of twenty four Stó:lō Bands located between Fort Langley and Yale to which it was intended to

---

<sup>17</sup> Martin Hoffman interview with Kat Pennier, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

“facilitate the administration of DIA benefits and services”.<sup>18</sup> In 1976 Kat became a member of the Advisory Committee for the Council where he acted as a liaison between the Government and participating Sto:lo communities. His involvement with these founding organizations continued into the early 1980s, but as their mandates and memberships fluctuated, and as other grass-roots organizations continued to spring up, the challenges associated with the coordination of their efforts also grew.

A major advancement in these early years of modern Stó:lō governance was the articulation and affirmation by members of the CCETC, the FEDC, and eventually the UBCIC, of the manifesto known as the Stó:lō Declaration. This document re-asserted Stó:lō ownership over their lands, waters and resources while also emphasizing the absence of inter-Government treaties in the majority of the Province of British Columbia.<sup>19</sup> Kat remembers this as a busy and energetic period as he continued to expand his associations and understandings:

*In the later 70s we were with the Fraser East District Council and we had all these different Constitutional meetings, and I became the representative to attend all these meetings. We'd have meetings in Vancouver but then we had meetings throughout the Country, so I'd be attending on behalf of Stó:lō. And again, that was a good learning process, listening to leaders from throughout the Country<sup>20</sup> ... See, our whole idea was trying to get the governments to recognize our Title and Rights and we finally achieved that in 1982 with the Section 35.1 of the Constitution.<sup>21</sup>*

---

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.stolonation.bc.ca/about-us/our-history.htm>

<sup>19</sup> Martin Hoffman interview with Kat Pennier, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Kat remembers Wsanec elder Chief Tom Sampson (“still a good friend of mine”) and the late Squamish Chief Joe Mathias (“knowledgeable and articulate”) as leaders of particular influence during these and later times.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Kat Pennier, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2011

Other initiatives at this time saw the employment of direct action as an effective means of demonstrating rights and gaining the attention of the government and public at large. One such incident in which Kat was involved occurred in early May, 1976, when members and associates of the Coqualeetza Centre, including Chiefs and Elders, occupied the old Nurses Residence building on the Coqualeetza grounds as an assertion of the Aboriginal ownership of that property. Twenty five people were eventually forcibly removed from the building at gun point with many of them, including Kat, receiving fines for trespassing.<sup>22</sup> Kat continues to see such measures as useful and important but has found the coordination of broad participation to be a challenge:

*That's one of the things we'd talk about...on the Provincial level, you know, we'd talk about all these kinds of direct action activities and at the Provincial level people [said] 'Yeah, yeah, let's do it' but when 1990<sup>23</sup> came not too many of us went out and did it.*

*That's why I say colonization is still alive and well- people are afraid to do things because it means, 'Gee, we might get charged', 'Gee, we might have to get a record' or something, you know...<sup>24</sup>*



Kat being interviewed by a television news station while conducting an information roadblock in his home community of Scowlitz in support of the Mohawk of Oka and Kahnawake.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.coqualeetza.com/>

<sup>23</sup> The armed standoff at Oka, Quebec, during the late summer of 1990.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Kat Pennier, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2011

<sup>25</sup> *Sto:lo Nation News* 15/148 (September 1990) p.3

Another responsibility that was increasingly drawing Kat onto the streets of his community at this time was his participation in band governance at Scowlitz. First serving as Councilor in 1973, soon after returning home from Vancouver, in January of 1979 he was elected Chief. Remaining in this position for the next fourteen years, Kat remembers this work as a central learning experience that allowed him to meet many other community leaders while also doing what he could to strengthen his band's administration at home. In a 1982 Stó:lō Nation News article about Scowlitz, for example, it is reported that "when Kat became Chief of Scowlitz Band, his first job was to get the Squawkwum Park on the reserve back under the control of the Band. It took about a year, and Kat was able to get this control for the Band from American Campgrounds Incorporated."<sup>26</sup> In order to commit himself more completely to such work, Kat resigned from his duties as manager at Coqualeetza in 1979.

In the opening years of the 1980s Kat was poised on the frontlines of Stó:lō politics and governance on the Band, District/Tribal, and Provincial levels. Thus, when Prime Minister Trudeau's Liberal government in Ottawa announced a resolution to patriate the Canadian Constitution, he, like many Aboriginal leaders across the Country, was cautiously optimistic.

### **The Constitutional Era**

The Federal Government's initial draft of the Constitution Act (1982) was seen by many First Nations in Canada as little more than the latest attempt to impose old assimilationist policies that would effectively end the need for the recognition of

---

<sup>26</sup> *Sto:lo Nation News* (May/June 1983) p.11

Aboriginal Rights and Title. It soon became apparent, however, that the only way by which an Aboriginal voice was going to be included in a new Canadian Constitution was through mobilization and direct action. This realization resulted in what became known as the “Constitution Express” which the website for the UBCIC, who were central to the effort, explains as follows:

*The Constitution Express was a grass roots Aboriginal political movement led by George Manuel, then President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. This peaceful protest resulted in an Ottawa-bound cross-country train journey of Aboriginal activist, community members, and others, that gathered over 1000 people nationwide along the way. Over 100 people from the movement continued to Europe in 1981 to build pressure and support for the Aboriginal cause. As a result of this and other actions, Section 35, recognizing Aboriginal title and rights, was included in the constitution.<sup>27</sup>*

Kat participated extensively in this movement and remembers it as both a productive and frustrating experience:

*Most of it was with our own people, in this Country, all the different Nations, different Provincial Federations, you know...trying to figure out how we're going to get the governments to recognize what it is **we** mean, you know, we use the terms “Aboriginal Title”. We use the term “Aboriginal Rights”, but those are, that terminology arises from court cases, and it has different meanings to the Governments and different meanings to us. You know, when you look at an Aboriginal Right to fish, to the Governments it's mainly trying to control us in terms of what it is we can harvest, that's all they want to do. But to us the Right to fish is the Right to harvest, the Right to protect, the Right to conserve, the Right to make sure it's there for future, you know, and the teachings that go along with doing all the different harvesting and looking after the land, those are all things that are integral to fishing, as an example, you know... It's hard for the governments to look at things in that light, so, you know, it was trying to figure how to get the governments to recognize things, and, even up to today they can't do that because*

---

<sup>27</sup> <http://constitution.ubcic.bc.ca/node/13>



*we're dealing with a system that's alien to us and they're trying to deal with a system that's alien to them... You know, when you look at today, where we've come from and where we started, we've come a fair distance in educating the courts, in educating the politicians, but nothing's changed. It doesn't matter what's in the Constitution, it doesn't matter what the S.C.C.<sup>28</sup> has said, no policies, no legislation has changed to reflect that.<sup>29</sup>*

Despite these challenges Kat sees the outcome of the negotiations for the amendment of the Constitution as a notable, if incomplete, benchmark in the struggle for the entrenchment of Aboriginal Rights and Title in Canada:

*The only thing they did wrong was they put the word '**existing** Aboriginal Title and Rights and Treaty Rights are hereby recognized and affirmed', you know. They put that **existing** in there, but, to us it all exists. But to the Courts it's a different matter.*

In 1983 Kat wrote an article for Stó:lō Nation News titled "Report on the Constitution Issue" in which he summarized the negotiations and their immediate and potential outcomes in the International, National, Provincial, District and Band arenas.<sup>30</sup> His comments aptly summarize his feelings at that time:

*As Aboriginal people we all believe that we have something to fight for and protect... One of the things that disturbs me is the impact that will hit our people if we cannot fight our common enemy together.<sup>31</sup>*

At the end of the article he lists a number of "major thrusts" to be pursued in the coming years including a "Massive Education campaign", an "Independent Commission of Scholars and leaders" and the formation of an "All Chief's Conference/General

---

<sup>28</sup> The Supreme Court of Canada

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Kat Pennier, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2011

<sup>30</sup> *Sto:lo Nation News* (May/June 1983) pgs. 22-4

<sup>31</sup> *Sto:lo Nation News* (May/June 1983) p. 23-4

Assembly”.<sup>32</sup> These goals were partially reached with the emergence of two further Sto:lo organizations during these tumultuous years: Stó:lō Nation Canada (SNC) and the Stó:lō Tribal Council (STC). Whereas Kat saw a pressing need for a strong and unified front, however, the multiple voices and interests represented by these and other bodies made any true progress in that direction both slow and difficult:

*We ended up having some difficulties amongst our chiefs, you know, there was a new regime coming in to, coming to Chieftainships. Younger people were emerging as Chiefs, and, that led to an annual general meeting. I guess that would have been about 1984, 1985. And, there was an executive in place, six person executive in place at the time... so we were going through elections for that, those executive members and it ended up that there was a couple of different factions within the Sto:lo, so the executive was replaced by a different group. So after that, there was a couple of meetings just to talk about, uh, sorta debriefing sessions on what happened: Are we in fact willing to continue to work together with everybody or are we going to try to work on our own? So, that's what happened in the end, was that there was a number of bands that decided to pull away from the Fraser East District Council, and form the Sto:lo Tribal Council. And, the other faction now became the Sto:lo Nation Society.<sup>33</sup>*

With all of these different happenings Kat was finding it increasingly difficult to maintain a balance between his personal and political lives at this time:

*It ended in 1986, my travels, even though some of the meetings were still continuing. That's when my daughter<sup>34</sup> was born, 1986. I told the Chiefs that that was it for me for traveling anymore because I missed 8 years of my son's<sup>35</sup> life, traveling. So they accepted that and so I became more of a stay-at-home body, in terms of politics...*

---

<sup>32</sup> *Sto:lo Nation News* (May/June 1983) p. 24

<sup>33</sup> Martin Hoffman interview with Kat Pennier, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Katina Pennier

<sup>35</sup> Colin Pennier

Of course, a “stay-at-home body” in Kat’s sense of the term does not mean that he became less involved in broader Stó:lō politics but rather that he chose to continue to do so in a manner that would allow him to prioritize his responsibilities to both his family and his community at Scowlitz. In fact that same year, 1986, saw Kat’s appointment as Chairman of the Stó:lō Tribal Council while also serving for what would amount to three terms on the BC Indian Housing Council. Although it was never easy for him to juggle these and various other positions and responsibilities, he emphasizes that “it was always with the idea that I knew which role I played or, you know, which meeting I was at, so I made sure that there was no conflicts of interest.”<sup>36</sup> In fact, a long-time friend and colleague who has worked with Kat for most of thirty years, Chief Doug Kelly, mentions this ability as one of the outstanding qualities of his character. According to Kelly, Kat “never used one role to gain advantage in the other roles” that he has held and, partially for this reason, he considers Kat to be “the most ethical and principled man” that he knows.<sup>37</sup>

It is clear that by this stage other Stó:lō leaders had similar views regarding Kat and his abilities as a leader. The most recent divisions and uncertainties within the governing organizations had resulted in a re-structuring of their fundamental frameworks and by 1988, largely under the influence of Chief Sam Douglas of Cheam, the single Manager of the Tribal Council was replaced with a Management team. Kat was asked to direct the Aboriginal Rights and Title Department in the Spring of 1988, a role which he accepted and remained in for well over a decade.

---

<sup>36</sup> Martin Hoffman interview with Kat Pennier, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Doug Kelly, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

## **Who Is Clarence Pennier?**

The splintering and diversification of the Stó:lō governing structures which characterized the late 1980s and early 1990s raised many questions for the leadership about whether or not there was another more effective means of presenting a united front in the face of ongoing negotiations with the Provincial and Federal Governments regarding Aboriginal Rights and Title. To this end the two primary organizations- Stó:lō Nation Canada and the Stó:lō Tribal Council- agreed to form a single organization under the leadership of Chief Steven Point of Skowkale in 1994. According to the Stó:lō Nation website, “Twenty one bands joined the Stó:lō Nation Society with Chiefs Charles Douglas, Michelle Douglas, Marilyn Gabriel, Ken Malloway, Lester Ned, Steven Point and Bruce Sam forming the first Board of Directors, known as the Special Chiefs Council.”<sup>38</sup> Kat remembers the build up to this amalgamation as being largely motivated by a general desire to engage the BC treaty process with a single Stó:lō voice:

*One of the things that happened before then was, in '92, what was called the First Nations Congress worked with British Columbia and Canada and set up the BC Claims Task Force and they came out with a report, talked about setting up a treaty process, so that was brought into force in '92. And that was one of the, I guess, a precursor to Steven trying to get everyone together to see if we could work together then we would join the BC treaty process as the Stó:lō instead of going together as different tribal councils, independent bands, that sort of thing. So, like I said, it took a few meetings and then we agreed that we would form Stó:lō Nation once again. It went through the process of disbanding the two different tribal councils and forming Stó:lō Nation.*

---

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.stolonation.bc.ca/about-us/our-history.htm>

With unification Kat had once again to readjust his various responsibilities at the same time that he was being bestowed with new honours:

*At the time I was still chief of Scowlitz, and Director for Title and Rights with the Tribal Council, but when we joined together as Stó:lo Nation then I had to make a choice: Did I want to be a Director of Aboriginal Title and Rights or did I want to be Chief of Scowlitz? So I made the choice that I'd [continue as] the Executive Director for Title and Rights because it paid my bills. And, it was just, probably about a year after that Steven had arranged a ceremony and they [the Stó:lō Chiefs] made me Grand Chief, so that's how I became Grand Chief of Stó:lō Territory, for all my years of service for the Stó:lō and for the Scowlitz Band. "*<sup>39</sup>

If Kat's first years of working with the UBCIC in Vancouver were an important transition time in his life, the mid-1990s was another such period. According to Chief Doug Kelly, his installation as Grand Chief in 1995 made him the first and only representative from Stó:lō Nation to hold that highly respected title.<sup>40</sup> Around this time he was also bestowed with the first of his Aboriginal, or *Xwelmexw*, names. The honour and privilege that come with such a gift cannot be overstated but it is also important to note that, even in the midst of these recognitions, there were dissenting voices who saw the associated ceremonies as opportunities to vent their frustrations, both personal and political, towards Kat and those with whom he worked. The significance of these events is best described in Kat's own words:

*It took me a long time to figure out who I am and, when I talk about finding out who I am it's my family, my extended family... We go by English names- my name is Clarence Pennier- but, who is that really, you know? In terms of my history I have to have a Xwelmexw name. My family bestowed a name on me...and, so you're a somebody when*

---

<sup>39</sup> Martin Hoffman interview with Kat Pennier, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Doug Kelly, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

*you have a name because that plants you within that family, the extended family. They know who you are, where you come from, and you're supposed to be able to use your name in a good way otherwise they can take it away from you if they think you're not doing the right thing. And that's what happened to me. My other family thought I was not doing a good job of looking after the name so they took it away. They did it in a longhouse and they invited people and that's the way it should be. The name was bestowed in a longhouse and taken away in a longhouse. But then I was... another part of my family put another name on me, shared with one of my cousins [Xa:yslemtel (1997)]. Then another cousin put another name on me [Hi'yolemte (1998)] so I carry two names now, because that's the way it works: families feel that you deserve to be recognized as somebody so they give you a name. It's an ancestral name that comes from generations back, you know, those are the things that we look at.<sup>41</sup>*

According to Kelly, the ceremony installing Kat as Grand Chief was interrupted in a similar way when “people who ought to have known better” used the occasion to voice their opposition to recent political transactions, particularly Kelly’s decision to fire somebody. On this occasion again, however, the result, though initially discouraging to many of those involved, was an ultimate strengthening of bonds of friendship and allegiance. Kelly explains it as follows:

*I built my house in 1993 and I asked Stan Greene to carve me a housepost. So it was a six foot welcoming figure and... I didn't know it then, but it wasn't meant to be mine. So, when Kat's big day was essentially spoiled by this foolish protest about a decision I made to dismiss someone, I set the table and invited all the Chiefs and all the people that were there [at the original honouring ceremony], all of the witnesses, and I took that housepost which I meant for the front of my house and I gave it to Kat. And it's now in the front of [his] house...So that was in part because of Kat's integrity. It was my expression of love*

---

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Kat Pennier, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2011

*and appreciation for the kind of man that he has been, the kind of leader that he has been, the kind of mentor that he has been for me.*<sup>42</sup>



A close up of the welcome figure, originally carved by Stan Greene for Doug Kelly, which now stands in front of Kat's house in Scowlitz. On the chest is the Stó:lō Tribal Council logo.

As with any political organization these challenges and setbacks constitute an integral part of “the game” of community governance where opposing parties and factions always exist. For Kelly, a central goal of this process is the creation of a forum for the expression and, hopefully, reconciliation of such differences and in this way he sees protest actions as confirmations of the roles and responsibilities of the leadership. For Kat, the honours that he received in the mid-1990s served as vital affirmations of his own employment commitments as well as of his general sense of self. When he received his third name- *Hi'yolemtel*- in 1998, for example, he was tied to the sacred *sxwo:yxwey* society and dance ceremony which serves primarily as a vital “cleansing instrument” at important community events such as namings, weddings and funerals.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Doug Kelly, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>43</sup> For a fuller description of the *sxwo:yxwey* and its associated meanings see Carlson et al. *Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, pgs, 10-11 (Pl.3).

*So that's basically when I **actually** started changing my way of life and way of looking at things a lot more clearly in terms of who I am, and what I am, and why I am. The purpose was there.*<sup>44</sup>

### **'A Progression of Learning'**

In early 2003 Grand Chief Clarence Pennier was elected to the highest office in the unified Stó:lō Nation government structure. As President, or *Yewal Siya:m*, he has continued to assert- both in and out of treaty negotiations- the Aboriginal Rights and Title which he sees as being central to the Stó:lō quest for effective self-governance. To this day, however, Kat has yet to hear a fair and just Government position from the opposite side of the negotiating table that will allow his people to move ahead in a unified manner:

*My whole idea was, you know, they're saying 'the existing Aboriginal Title, Aboriginal Rights and Treaty Rights are hereby affirmed...recognized and affirmed'. So my point is, it's all it says. What does it mean to us? We can put words to our Title and our Rights, but we can't get there. We keep getting interrupted, and we got interrupted again by this treaty process. Because the treaty process **doesn't** recognize Title, **doesn't** recognize Rights. This is only political negotiations. We're not interested in what the Courts say. This is voluntary if you're coming into this process. Let's negotiate. They come in with fixed mandates. So, that's why we're not in it. That's why our people said, 'until the Governments change their mandates, don't go in'.*<sup>45</sup>

In 2004 a second major split within Stó:lō Nation resulted in the resurrection of the Stó:lō Tribal Council. Kat decided to stay on with that organization as President, as it has been there that he feels the most connected, but his various activities and involvements have continued to influence and be influenced by people and organizations

---

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Kat Pennier, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Kat Pennier, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2011.



throughout the Stó:lō world and beyond. For Kat a central challenge in moving towards a lasting reconciliation with settler society is the difficulty in establishing relationships while simultaneously defining and observing boundaries:

*People say ‘we should be the same’, but we’re not. The White race isn’t the same. You all come from different countries. The Black people are [all] black but they come from different countries, they have different tribes and everything, they fight each other too, you know. And, with Canada being very multi-cultural it makes that much more difficult because people bring their own way of life from their own home countries and don’t really want to gain a better understanding of the people who were here first. So, I mean we’re trying to do some of the things like that in curriculum in schools. Probably works to some extent but, you know, it’s gotta be continuous from grade 1 to grade 12 to university: a progression of learning. It’s not just one class or one year of classes where you say ‘oh ok I know a lot about those people now’.*

To this end Kat himself has been directly involved with various educational outreach initiatives in the Mennonite, Sikh and broader Canadian communities of the Fraser Valley. He is under no illusions, however, regarding the short-term benefits of such work and recognizes, perhaps better than most, that true reconciliation is a long-term process.

### **Postscript**

Today Kat, though officially retired, remains busy in his STC office at Seabird Island where he “keeps tabs” on such current goings-on as the pending and controversial Yale First Nation Treaty and the Government inquiry into the decline of the Fraser River sockeye salmon stocks known as the Cohen Commission. But it is at Community events like the one at which we had initially met that he seems to be in his element.

Very recently I had the good fortune to be able to attend the 35<sup>th</sup> Elder's Gathering in Abbotsford as a volunteer. The environment of the massive complex in which the event was occurring- an airplane hangar adjacent to the Abbotsford airport and surrounded by seemingly endless farmland- could not be further from that of the tiny meeting that we had attended at Chawathil more than 2 months previous. We arrived around lunch time and, after signing in and collecting our volunteer badges, were assigned to assist with the distribution of meals to the thousands of Elders and their families and friends who were moving in and out of one large wing of the complex that had been arranged as a dining hall. As I made my way down the middle of this area on my way to the kitchen I spotted Kat who was also moving amongst the tables. "Just making sure that there is enough food to go around", he replied when I inquired as to how things were going. "Have you managed to have lunch yourself yet?" I asked, suspecting an answer to the question. "No," he replied, "not yet. Maybe I should do that too."



Kat and the author at the 35<sup>th</sup> Elder's Gathering. Abbotsford, July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

## **Bibliography**

### **Books**

Carlson, Keith T, ed. *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001.

Cruikshank, Julie. *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

Pennier, Henry. *'Call Me Hank': A Sto:lo Man's Reflections on Logging, Living and Growing Old*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

Portelli, Alessandro. *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997.

### **Articles**

*Stó:lō Nation News: Rebirth of a Nation*

Issue 13 (September 1976), pgs. 1-2.

Issue 24 (September 1977), pgs. 1-2.

Issue 25 (October 1977), p.1.

Issue 31 (April 1978), p.14.

Issue unknown (January 1980), p.4.

Issue 73 (July 1982), pgs. 12-15.

Issue 80 (February 1983), p.1.

Issue 81 (March 1983), p.1.

Issue 83 (May/June 1983), p.1-2.

Issue 85 (August 1983), pgs. 1-2.

Issue 88 (November/December 1983), pgs. 3-4.

Issue 91 (June 1984), p.2.