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## Faye Halls: The story of the Baker family.

### Faye Halls, Vancouver Sun

Published: Monday, August 11, 2008

In the spring of 1950, I was born the fifth daughter of Simon and Emily Baker on the Capilano Indian Reserve. I was the eighth child in what would ultimately be a family of nine. I was raised in a big house on Marine Drive where the International Plaza and Staples now sit.

I was blessed to be brought up by a father who gave me strong cultural teachings (his native name Khot-La-Cha means "Kind Heart" in the Squamish language) and shared many stories of his years of growing up as a young native boy in North Vancouver in the early 1900s. He used to tell me about how there were no bridges, how the Capilano River froze every winter and how he used to canoe with his grandmother to Lumberman's Arch twice a week to sell berries, clams and cedar baskets. I feel blessed to have seen North Vancouver in its early days through his stories.

As a boy he had no choice but to attend an Indian residential school, coming home every summer to gather food and wood so his grandma could last through the winter. My father's difficult and traumatic experiences in residential school had a large impact on the way he raised his children. In an effort to protect us from what he had experienced, he did not speak to us in his traditional language. Sadly, this language was never passed on to me or my siblings.



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He also kept my two older sisters home until he negotiated with the North Vancouver public schools to allow native children to attend and not be forced to attend a residential school.

Even though he had negative experiences, he never shared them with us and always had a positive and humorous outlook on life. He taught me the importance of humility, respect, honour, honesty and always having a sense of humor. He felt it was important for all his children to get an education, while at the same time remembering our traditions, songs and ceremonies, remembering our roots.

After graduating from high school and immediately getting a job with the B.C. Telephone Co., I married my high school sweetheart, a non-native man. My father tried to talk me out of the marriage because I would be giving up my birthrights as a native Indian. I was young and in love and was willing to take the risk.

The impact hit me several years later when I realized I was not allowed to vote, live on reserve or take part in important meetings and ceremonies. I had three daughters who were denied native status because of the federal Indian Act. As a result, my family was raised off-reserve.

In 1986, my three daughters and I were granted native status as a result of Bill C-31. I remember that day very clearly because I read the letter to my girls and one of them looked at me and asked, "If they said we are native Indian now, what were we before?"

They were very confused because their grandpa had always shared his legends and songs and told them he was proud of them; in their hearts they will always be natives.

It took me many years to feel a part of the community again; it was difficult because some residents looked at me as an "apple" (red on the outside, but white inside). Hurt, I felt like an outsider for a long time.

Then in 1989 I was involved in a near fatal accident and was off work for three years from my job with the North Vancouver school district. When I felt able to return to work, there was an opening with the Squamish Band for a part-time student support worker. I was reluctant to apply because I was afraid I would not fit in. But I went and something wonderful happened: I worked with young adult students and I fell in love with the job. I was able to share my father's stories with them and show them that education could be fun. I truly felt this was the place I was meant to be.

I helped develop that small program into what is now the Eslha7an Learning Centre, a safe holistic learning environment for first nations youth from 16 years and up.

Three years ago, I built a home on the Capilano Reserve with my husband of 38 years across from my parents' home. I feel I have completed my circle.

The teachings and the praise I received from my late father helped me believe in myself so I could create this teaching environment. My father was an athlete on the North Shore Indians lacrosse team, a fisherman, an actor, a longshoreman, a politician, a husband, father and grandfather and, most of all, an ambassador for all native people. He could not have done all those things without the support of my wonderful mother, who was at home nurturing and giving us a loving environment to grow up in.

He achieved his best work after retirement, working endlessly to raise funds for such things as the First Nations House of Learning at the University of B.C. and the Vancouver Native Friendship Centre. He was honoured with doctorate degrees, the Order of B.C., the Order of Canada and many others. He loved these events and said he really appreciated the awards, but what was more important to him was that his legacy carry on.

In the last few months of his life, I asked my children to take turns going to the hospital to help feed him dinner. They loved their grandfather, but his fragile state frightened them and they were afraid to be alone with him. They reluctantly agreed and, after their first visit, they realized this was a rare opportunity to spend time alone with their grandpa. He told his favourite stories, shared his hopes and dreams for them, and reminded them that they would achieve success in life as long as they always remembered where they came from.

He told them, "Everybody makes mistakes, put it behind you and keep trying, never give up." My girls said that the time they spent with him was the greatest gift he could have given them.

As a father, mentor, teacher and coach, he gave me so much. In the late 1990s, I was taking a group of my Eslha7an students to Japan on a cultural tour to share our songs, traditions and dance. Dad was so proud that I was following in his footsteps; he too had travelled to many countries, always with his drum and talking stick in hand. Just before I left, he gave me his talking stick, saying he was getting tired and would not be travelling anymore. He said it would make him happy to know the talking stick was still doing its job of spreading our teachings. I cried because I knew it was not just a talking stick he was passing on to me, but the responsibility to carry on his hopes, dreams and his legacy. Those are big shoes to fill.

I love my career in employment and training because it gives me an opportunity to get young adults to believe in themselves. Every June when I see the smiles on the faces of the graduates and their families, I feel warm and fulfilled. My father was right: Always maintain your integrity, give more than you take, trust your instincts, never stop learning, be respectful, always remember your roots and you will achieve success.

In the last days of his 90 years, my father told me not to feel sad because he had completed the four seasons of his life and had no regrets. He lived a good life and was proud and happy knowing that we will carry on his songs, legends, history and that we know the footprint we come from.

I am currently on a break from my job for medical reasons. I will use this time to go back to nature, reread my Dad's autobiography, Khot-La-Cha, to give me strength and inspire me as I go through another season of my life. Daddy, as I fondly called him, always said when you feel lost or confused just pray to the Creator and he will give you

direction. So thank you, Khot-La-Cha, for all your love and teachings. I will pray to the Creator to give me 30 or 40 more years to help carry on his legacy and create my own for my children to pass on.

Yeltsilewet (Squamish First Nations name)

Faye Halls

North Vancouver

The book about Khot-la-cha's life journey is available by contacting Faye Halls at 604-989-5500 or e-mail faye-halls@shaw.ca. It costs \$23.

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