

MONDAY JULY 15/85

Interview with Vi Smith

WHERE WERE YOU BORN?

I was born right here in Hazelton

SO YOU'VE BEEN LIVING HERE ALL YOUR LIFE?

All my life except for three years when I went to school.
Residential School.

WHAT WAS YOUR MAIDEN NAME?

Clifford.

WHAT WERE YOUR PARENTS NAME?

Charles and Mabel Clifford.

IS CHARLIE CLIFFORD YOUR BROTHER?

Yeah, Irene Patsy is my sister.

THEY'RE ALL BORN HERE?

Oh, yes they're all born here

DO YOU HAVE ANY SONS OR DAUGHTERS?

Yes, Six sons and three daughters.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF?

I have good thoughts about myself I'm glad I am me. I wouldn't be anybody else. I wouldn't change places with anybody. I'm happy with myself. I feel I'm very well adjusted adult. But that doesn't mean to say that I never had problems. So I had problems but I was able to deal with them because of the way I feel about myself. I can look at myself honestly and I know my weaknesses and my strengths. I try to develop my strengths and that's what see me through, and when problems arise I can deal with them with out going off the deep end.

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP FROM CHILD TO TEENAGER?

I guess the one important thing I remember most was when I was small child was the way I related to my parents. Right from the beginning they made me feel that I was a very special person.

They gave me a lot of love and a lot of support. I think that

was an important thing in my life. If I had been uncared for as a child I don't know if I'd have the strength that I have today. Because of their.. of letting me know that I was special that gave me the strength I have today. I learnt a lot from my parents I didn't always appreciate it at the time but now that they are gone and I'm an adult I really appreciate what they did for me and the lessons they tried to teach me.

HOW DID YOU MEET SCOTTY?

Just through social events in Hazelton. I went to school to the little school down by the river we call it the Anglican Hall now. That's where I went to school. It was a church that established the school they carried all the expenses and then when the government saw that it was needy and working they decided to support it. I went there to grade four and then I went away to residential school down in Sardis, B.C. Sardis is a couple miles from Chilliwack. I went there because my parents wanted me to have a better education than the big school was hearing it was very... the teachers weren't what you call qualified teachers now, but I guess they were o.k. for the day. They were usually the Anglican Priests. They did it out of love for the native people needed an education to adapt to this changing world. That's why they started the school and the government supported it helped it financially. But the minister wasn't paid as a teacher. He had his staple as a priest. And for years we thought that was only after the second world war that the government really took over and supplied qualified teachers and so because my parents realized I had to live and survive in a changing world that was rapidly changing. They sent me away to a United Church school a boarding school that was supported by the United Church. I came back here and took my grade eight there was no Grade eight at that little church school. It went only as far as this school. Dad had to go to apply to the school board to get permission for me to go to school its not like now. The Indian and white children were separate. We had our own school and to go there. My dad had to go to the school board to get permission, he didn't have any problem because they were all men he knew. Like Allen Benson, Bill Sargent, Mr. Sargent Sr. They were all the school board and other people he knew that he'd grown to be friends with in his eye. So I didn't have any problems getting into the school. I took my high school here.

HERE IN HAZELTON?

Yes, It was an old building that burnt down. That was right across from where that Tribal Council building is now. Where that little house is, Ward Marshall's house. That's where the high school was, I went there, and there might have been a dozen. Half of them were coming from New Town, and those students walked down. There was no bus and in the winter time they walked down in the deep snow before the roads could be plowed.

WERE THERE ANY PROBLEMS OF BEING LATE?

Well they were given an excuse for that if it was snowing and you know if the roads were snowed in, it took time for them to get here plus there were excused for that. I did my high school there, and that's how I met Scotty. I was just through social events that I was able to mix. I was probably one of the few to mix with both cultures. I got to know them through high school, and my father had white friends. Also we lived next door, right down here rather than up on the hill. I lived over in that house where Charlie lives now. That was where our house was. The neighbors that rented the house that was here were white people, and the Sargent's were right next door, so I was able to adjust respondedly alot quicker than alot of my native children because of the environment. Then I went away to school, and it was predominantly run by white people. We only spoke English there, because that's the way we learned, but I didn't forget the language. I mean I can't put the blame, I can't cop out and use it as an excuse and blame the schools for forgetting my language. I don't have that excuse.

I came home every summer. I can remember coming home on the train. Charlie and I, we were trying to remember the Indian words because there was just English spoken there. Although there were Nishga people there, and I could hear them talk among themselves in their own language. There were children there of all different nationalities, like, you know, different Indian nationalities. What you call Indian now. Native people, they all had their own language. They used them, they weren't supposed to you know. In the classroom they weren't allowed to use it, but just talking among themselves the usually did. I used to listen to the Nishga's, you know. I could understand that and so maybe through them I was able to keep my language. Because we spoke it at home, I had no problem with the language at all, and neither did Charlie.

CHARLIE WENT WITH YOU DOWN TO SCHOOL?

Charlie? Oh yeah, he went, a couple of years after I did. We had a cousin that attended that school, so it was hardly recommended, but people that dad talked to, and that's why they chose that school. They could've sent me to another school. There was a school in Alert Bay that I could've gone to which was run by the Anglican Church, and there was another one in Litton which was run by the Anglican Church, but dad and mom selected the one run by the United Church because it was highly recommended. My dad also had a niece there who was a senior and felt comfortable that she was there to sort of see that everything was alright with me because I was only ten years old.

DO YOU REMEMBER HER NAME?

Hattie Ferguson, she was Hattie Morrison. She's from here, she's dead now. She's Hattie Ferguson, but she became quite well known in working with native organizations down in Vancouver. She was in Vancouver when she died only two or three years ago, but she used to come up here periodically. She understood the Indian culture. I'm not too sure whether she understood the language. I don't think she used the language, because her parents separated when she was very small and she went away with her dad and they lived down in the States, so she was away from the language. But she knew the

culture. She studied it thoroughly. She wanted to know who she was, where she came from. For that reason, when she became an adult she studied the Gitksan language (culture) so she knew it thoroughly. She knew who she was, she knew what her Indian name was, what her crest was, what clan she came from, you know, she knew all that. She knew the legends and stories because she made it a point to find out, cause she was away from it and she wanted to know. She was a very interesting lady. I worked domestic work after I didn't graduate when my older sister died. She died when Thelma Blackwater was born. She was my niece. Somebody had to look after the baby so my mother took the baby, and in the course of time, my mom got sick. I think I had about three months to go to grad 12 when my sister died and we ended up with the baby. I stayed home to help mom look after the baby because my mom was sick.

THAT WAS THELMA?

Yes, Thelma Blackwater. She had two other kids, she was married to Dick (Richard) Lattie and she had Kenny and Dickie. He (Dick) kept them and we took the baby. We raised her so she's more like a sister to me than a niece. So that was why I didn't graduate, I suppose. I probably used it as an excuse to quit school. Theas DIA didn't pay for students to go away at the time. When I went away it was just my parents. They always sent us because they wanted us to have a good education than I was getting at day school. But the Indian Agent did come and say if you do well in school, and you want to go back the second year, we'll help you with your expenses and you can go away and train as a teacher and come back and teach your own people. That's probably what had turned me off. I probably would have made that choice on my own, but I didn't want them telling me what to do. I didn't want to be bound with this promise. If they had said yes we'd go away and help you with this expense, I don't know if I would have, but I did go away, I probably would have come back and talked, you see because they put that thing on saying come back and teach here. I normally bound by it. I was a very rebellious young person. I rebelled things I felt weren't in my own, even though I didn't realize it, I was rebelling at them telling me what to do. I'm making a stipulation, but I came back here and teach, I didn't want to be bound by that. In the end that's what I probably would have done anyway. That's the reason I didn't take them up on their offer. They weren't paying for students going away at the time, and they weren't going to pay for all mine, they were going to help, probably a pretty little sum. I remember when the elders were really quite old and my Grandmother was one of them. Their monthly help to the native people was four dollars a month.

WAS THAT VERY GOOD?

It was. It wasn't in money, it was little things like tea, and coffee and cocoa, and things like that. I can remember my Grandmother didn't even know what cocoa was. I remember she boiled it on the stove. They were giving her food she wasn't even familiar with. She was familiar with tea because that's what they had. You know they gave her

her cocoa and she didn't know what it was for so she boiled it on the stove, I remember we laughed and we went to say "Granny, what do you have on the stove?"

She said "Well that Indian Agent peoples said they gave me this tin of cocoa, they never told me how to cook it. I remember we showed her how to do it. "Oh," she said, "Oh, that's so simple" and she tasted it and we put canned milk in it for her. She was just trying to drink it without the canned milk. So this is some of the stupid things that the DIA did, eh, just giving these things without thinking of showing them how to use those. It was foreign to her, she didn't know what it was at the time.

It was through social events when I got to meet him (Scotty), I knew him for a long time. I knew him for 5 years before I married him. I just got to know him, it wasn't anything I rushed into, and he certainly wasn't my first boyfriend. I got married when I was ready, when I was good and ready to get married. It wasn't anything I rushed into.

DID SCOTTY PLAY BASEBALL?

Oh yes, he did. He played with Neil and Bill Sargent. I guess those are the only two that are still here.

YOU WERE ON THE HAZELTON HOME TEAM? DID YOU ENJOY PLAYING?

Oh yes, in fact I was very instrumentally in setting up softball for the women here.

Well for a lot of a better name we called it the hometeam. I guess when we'd invite people to play we were the hometeam, the name kind of stuck, so then they had another team later on 'cause there was only the ladies who wanted to play who only picked so many on one team. They called it the maple leafs. We used to play against them.

WHEN YOU GUYS TRAVELLED AROUND, YOU USED WARD MARSHALL'S TRUCK?

Hmmh, yeah, we used Ward's truck, and there weren't that many vehicles around at the time. Most of the time Scotty was the driver at the time. He would take both the men and the women's team and that's how we travelled around.

I remember one year in Moricetown we camped right at John Brown's creek. The both teams, you know, because it was a 2 day event, and we were going to participate both days and it was a long way at the time. The roads weren't paved, so we just camped and took tents and our parents came with us, I remember my parents came. Just all the families came and we used to have fun because even if it was a day trip everybody would take lunch, whole families went. they didn't go in the truck, but they had other vehicles. And they would take picnic lunches with them. It was just a fun day for everybody.

SO YOU KNEW SCOTTY LONGER THEN ?

Oh yes, a long time before I got serious about him, for one thing intermarriage, you know between the different cultures, was really not acceptable. What people didn't like, and our people certainly didn't like it. And again mother was very much against it, so you know

we just went at it slowly and we finally decided that it was something we could cope with. I had to think about the result of the children, what might come out of that. What they might go through, 'cause I went through discrimination but it didn't bother me that much. I didn't let it interfere with my life, you know I feel that if they descriminated against me that was their problem, it wasn't mine. There fore it's for them to solve I didn't worry about it.

DID YOU STILL HAVE YOU STATUS?

Oh yes, until I got married.

YOU CAN STILL GET IT BACK.

Oh yes, I can still get it back, without any problem providing the band excepts me. But I don't think that at this stage in my life I don't think that's what I want. I worked hard for everything I got and I'm satisfied in what I got. I f I was a younger person I might have made maybe a better education for my children, that was the only thing I probably missed out on, that my children didn't get the education cause there just wasn't the money. You know that would help. But at this stage, no.

WHAT KIND OF JOBS DID YOU DO?

Mostly domestic and I worked at the store a little bit down in Rupert, and just there were no openinings for native girls at the time. That was one of the decriminations, but most of the work was domestic, and the thing to for a young girl to stay hame and learn at home, and which I did that too. My mother taught me a lot of what I should do if I should set housekeeping on my own. I was able to do everything. You know that she taugh me, and I am very x grateful for that.

YOU NEVER DID ANY COAST FISHING?

Oh yes, I worked in the canneries. My dad was a fisherman too. Mom and I worked in the canneries until after I got married. I never ever went back. I started to raise my family, I didn't have time for extra things.

HOW MANY CANNERIES WERE OPERATED?

From this side there was East Port. I worked in East Por then I spent a lot of my time in Port Essington. They called it the BIV cannery. That was the big cannery that's the town around it. The canneries were just canneries, just you know the cannery and workers and shacks. But Port Essington was a little town, it would be, we spent a lot of our time there, and then there was Sunnyside and North Pacific and Karl Island and Klax-Smith across the river. Inverness is seven and Port Edward is eight. I guess there was eight canneries along the Skeen, and I think there was one in Rupert too, but I never did know where it was, it was along the waterfront somewhere I guess. So there was probably nine canneries.

SO DID THEY SLOW DOWN QUITE A BIT?

Yeah, we used to go. It was kind of a holiday I remember one year we even went when the flood washed out the railway and we couldn't go down to the coast at the time. I can remember the year that, it was the first year that our parents allowed us to go on our own. My sister Addie and I. We had to go around Vancouver and get on the steamboat and come up through the Skeena and I remember how excited we were 'cause it was the first time that our parents allowed us out on our own. I must have been eighteen. I can remember Teff Wilson was on the thing. I don't know if he was, he might have been with his parents. But you know it was just all younger people, we just had a ball. It wasn't the accommodations on the train and especially the boat. We came up steorage 'cause it was the cheapest way, I guess.

SO THERE WAS A LOT OF PEOPLE ON THE TRAIN?

Oh yes, we just... It was just a lot of fun for us because we enjoyed it. It was different and,... of course as I said, it was the first time we were allowed out on our own.

DO YOU REMEMBER THE HAPPY SIX ON THE TRAIN?

Oh yes, I remember the Happy Six. They were the Happy Six. We had a lot of fun then. We used to travel with them, they went all over. They were quite famous for their good music. Everybody wanted to hire them. They would travel around, I can even remember Hagwilget having a hall. I can remember we, Neil's sister and I were good friends. Her name was Agnus, and we must have been seventeen. We were still going to high school, and we were never allowed out on our own. Either one parent was with us. We always had a chaperone. It wasn't because they didn't trust us, it was because they loved us so much that they wanted to see if we were O.K. all the time. So there was always an adult. I can remember we wanted to go to Hagwilget because the Happy Six was going there and then all the New Town kids come down. Of course mother and dad said no way, you're not going up there.

Anyway my friend and I got working, finally you know got talking about it, finding a way to go up there. Finally her mother said O.K., I'll go with you. So we walked up and she came with us. Jessie Sterritt, she always had a little lantern. I can remember the time we were allowed to stay out after dark. If we stayed just about later than we should have, but we can see this little lantern coming, we'd beat it home.

But anyway, we walked up and then we were able to go. I admire her, she sat all through that evening, just to Agnus and I could have some fun. And we'd walk down with the whole orchestra and it must have been 30 below in January sometime. When I think of that, it's so stupid now, but we enjoyed it. I admire my parents and people like Mrs. Sterritt and there were times when my parents couldn't go with me, that Jessie would because she's my aunt. She would go, and she had to like her daughter Martha, who liked to go too. So I always had a chaperone and even when I had a chaperone, even when I had my dates down the coast, my mother was with me. Florence didn't mind, she was just there. I think I must have been 18 or 19 before I was allowed to go out on my own, but I had a chaperone all the time. I didn't mind, I think it was kind of

comfortable to know your mother or your father was there, with you until you adjust with the other kind of social life.

WHEN YOU GUYS WERE GOING TO VANCOVER, YOU GUYS STOPPED OFF AT PRINCE GEORGE FOR A NIGHT?

I can't remember if they would stop in Kamloops, but I can remember that was the first time that I realized how hot it could be. That day in Kamloops, it was hot, somebody remembered the dates.

Yeah, they had to stop for some minor prejestrian for trade, or something. We didn't care what the stop was for. It was a break, oh it was hot. That was my first time in Kamloops.

DID YOU GO ON ANY HOLIDAYS WITH YOUR PARENTS?

Not what you consider a holiday today, but we did a lot of camping. We did a lot of berry picking. It was sort of combined with the work. It was a lot of hard work, but we also combined it with fun. Families would go out camping, go up nine-mile mountain or up at the Hazelton View Mountain. Or we would camp out at Kispiox in the Valley for a week picking blue berries. Just depending on what there was. So that was our holiday and I consider going down to the cannery ~~for~~ holiday because even though it was a working holiday it was a change.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO GET AROUND THROUGH VANCOVER TO RUPERT?

It took forever, it must have been a week. Two days alone on the Cardena, on the boat. It took two days. It was slow, those old boats 'cause they went through every village along the way. Oh, I'd say it took three or four days.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO GET FROM RUPERT TO HERE?

A day, you can figure a day, because sometimes it wpi;d ;eave ear;y morning here and by the time it got down... like if you were going to Port Essington you would get off a Hasi Port and then the boats can take you across. I'd say a full day.

DO YOU REMEMBER CAMPING THAT HAPPENED DOWN MISSION FLATS JUST BEFORE THE TRAIN TOOK OFF TO RUPERT?

No, I wasn't a part of that.

YOU JUST DROVE OVER?

It would be for the people who came from the other villages, but not those of us who came here we went straight across to the station that they used to have down there.

WHEN DID THAT BRIDGE GO?

1936. This was before that flood washed it out, because I remember going across this bridge to go to the station unless we got on in New Town, I really don't remember if we did, we could have.

No, the bridge went out in 1936, because I can remember when that bridge went, it was agter I had my first child in 1939. It was after I had married Scotty, cause I remember we had Micky with us, when we were going over.

No, I don't think it went out in 1936. You'll have to ask my husband. He's better about the dates than I am. He'll remember the dates, I don't.

I doubt if it went out in 1936. That was the first big flood where the bridge didn't go when the water was up here, we were almost cut off here at that first flood came up as far as that, where that Hotel is now, where Sam's is now, it came up that far. Then up as far as the other side of the school. Maybe around where Fanny Smith is now, it came up, so we just had this narrow strip here. I remember Auntie Jessie was living down that way and she.