



The Sto:lo elders Lodge Cultural Exchange with the Tulalip Tribes

October 4th-6th 2010

The Sto:lo Elders joined the Coqualeetza Elders for a cultural exchange with the Tulalip Tribes, cousins who share the Salish Sea. The three day trip was packed learning, fun and bonding. This was the first trip for the Sto:lo Elders and several meetings were held in advance to prepare for what a trip across the border would mean. We initially began with 11 Elders but unfortunately 3 were not well enough to travel when the date approached. Travel insurance was purchased for the eight remaining Elders. Bags were packed, and repacked and misplaced and located many times before our departure date. Many Elders were excited about the adventure ahead and the trip became a common part of dinner conversation. The anticipation was electric and the air was filled with possibility. Even the Elders not joining the trip began offering packing and travel advice. Old stories were shared and smiles were abundant as nostalgia mixed with the excitement. Finally the departure day arrived. Sto:lo Nation provided two Vans for transport. The vans were pulled up and the Elders poured out into the chilly morning. No one was going to risk being left behind!



A final check identification and we were off.

We travelled across the border with minimal interruption and took a quick break once safely across. Road songs and stories were shared and Johnny Cash played as the open road called.



Some Elders found the open road less exciting than others.

A sense of comraderie was established and easy and new friendships were built between Elders who had lived within 50 feet of each other for a year. Elders began to come out of their shell.

At last we arrived in Lacy Washington. We pulled up to the Tulalip Casino, built on traditional Tulalip territory and looked in awe at the beautiful building.



The three hour trip had worn some Elders out but some were still excited to head to the afternoon adventure.

After check in, some Elders went straight to their rooms for an afternoon nap.



Mary and Bernice, aunty and niece



Half of the group continued on to Shipwreck Beads, reportedly the largest bead store in the World. It was big alright. So big we were afraid we might get lost! Treasure were found, Elders were lost (and found of course) and fun was had by all. A group cup of coffee and then we were making the two hour drive back to Tulalip.

Theresa, Gertie and Richard inside the store.

When we returned, some had eaten and some had not and some wanted to sleep and some did not. We split up, eating in small groups at the buffet with many Elders retiring to bed for a good night's rest before the next morning.

The next morning many Elders were up bright and early (5 am!) and ready to go. They did not want to miss the opportunity to visit with the Tulalip Elders. We departed at 10:00 for a guided tour of the traditional territories of the Tulalip Tribes. Stories, history and future goals of the Tulalip were shared. We arrived at the stunning Elders centre and were greeted by the Elders of the Tulalip Tribes and joined by the Elders of the Nooksak.



*Gertie and Richard outside of the Tulalip Elders Centre (right)
the "backyard" of the Centre. (below)*



To break the ice, a group game of bingo was played and Elders from all groups sat amongst each other with slow introductions made over shared laughter and teasing.





After Bingo a delicious lunch that included crab (trapped on Tulalip fishing territory) was served. After lunch stories, songs and traditions were witnessed. The Tulalip Elders shared that they felt that the Sto:lo were neighbors who shared the Salish Sea. The Tulalip shared how in the past trading and marriage had existed between the two nations and that

although the border and other forces had begun to erode that relationship, the Tulalip very much wanted to repair it. It was the primary reason for their invitation. Many Elders agreed and the whole room felt like a flood of relief and peace had entered. The Sto:lo Elders extended an invitation for the Tulalip and Nooksak tribes to visit for the annual BC Elders Gathering to be held on Sto:lo Territory in July 2011.

Songs and Prayers were sung as small gifts were exchanged.



Many new friends were made, some old friends seen again, and a relationship began to blossom.

That afternoon the Tulalip museum and cultural centre was toured and then the Sto:lo Elders returned to the resort for some much needed down time. Some Elders chose to sleep, some to shop, and others to tour and enjoy the native artwork found all over the hotel.





A real bonding was happening within the Sto:lo Elders, those that did not seek each other out previously were now found together, talking and sharing and laughing.



Dinner was a group event with discussion of the day's events, and stories shared. Everyone agreed that it was a great day and the hospitality of the Tulalip Tribes was excellent and even better than anticipated. Most Elders retired early, completely worn out from the day's events.



In the morning, a group decision was made to return home rather than join the Coqualeetza Elders for a tour of Daybreak Star in Seattle. The Elders agreed that the three hour trip home would be long enough and did not wish to add another four hours travelling plus two more hours for lunch onto their day.

The Elders seemed disappointed to miss the Daybreak Star facility but many were exhausted. Most of the Elders on the trip were over 70 and this was their first trip away from home in a very long time.

We began the drive home with tired but full hearts. When we arrived home most Elders went straight to sleep but at dinner the next night there was laughter and energy that had not been there before the trip. New friendships continued back at home and the whole building seemed refreshed by new stories and hope for new adventures in the future. As one Elder put it "Last week we didn't know anyone in Tulalip, now we have friends all over that territory, maybe we should invite Elders from other places here, to meet us and share stories"

After the trip, a large hardcover photo book was created filled with pictures and memories. It is left out on a coffee table in the sitting area for all to enjoy.

A Tulalip made gift was purchased for each of the seven Elders who were unable to join us on our trip. Since the grant was given to the Elders Lodge as a whole, the group thought it was important to bring back gifts for everyone.

A first nations blanket, along with a group photo and plaque thanking the New Relationship Trust for our amazing opportunity to learn about our neighbors the Tulalip, now hang on the wall of the Sto:lo Elders Lodge.

On that note, the Sto:lo Elders Lodge would like to offer a heartfelt thanks to all who participated in our fundraising. Our journey was a great success and such a thing would not have been possible without your help.

Thank you on behalf of the Elders of Sto:lo Elders Lodge.

