# Oral History: Roberta Price

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| Title | Title of Document | Rebeca\_Salas\_With\_Roberta\_Price\_081616 Complete |
| Accession Number | Catalogue Number of the File | (Administrator Only) |
| Interviewee | Name of Interviewee (SURNAME, given name(s), middle initial) | Roberta Price |
| Interviewer | Name of Interviewer (Surname, given name(s), middle initial) | Rebeca Salas |
| Interview Date | YYYY/MM/DD | 2016/08/16 |
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| Summary | Brief summary of the interview session (Copy and paste from Form 13 – Session Summary) | Roberta Price begins the interview with the First Nations ceremony of introduction, which was taught to her by her elders, and explains its significance. She describes her experience being forced into a Caucasian foster care home and the torture her and her older sister endured there. Roberta then explains her reasons for participating in this oral history project. Roberta moved to Richmond to be with her older sister and was surprised when she first arrived in the city because she felt the freedom to go anywhere without being judged for her First Nations heritage. She then moves on to talk about her work as a cultural educator for both children and adults, and outlines the knowledge sharing customs she learned from her elders. |
| Keywords | Keywords indicating interview subjects (Copy and Paste from “Keyword” section of Form 12 Interview Summary.) | First Nations, Snuneymuxw, Cowichan, Coast Salish, Halkomelem Language, Indian Day School, foster care, torture, assimilate, Steveston, Moncton Street, Cooper Island residential school, Cultural Exchange, Freedom, Richmond. |
| Subject | Subject headings applicable to the Interview. The OHC uses Library of Congress Subject Headings. | Richmond, Coast Salish, Residential School, Culture, Knowledge Sharing, Diversity, First Nations, Customs, Tradition, Teaching, Special Items, Advisory Committee, Community Kitchens. |
| Duration | Length of Interview Session (if applicable) hh:mm:ss | 00:53:28 |
| Interview # | Number of the interview (interviewees according to date) | 1 |
| Session # | Session # of the recording (X of all interviews in the session) | 1 |
| Location | Where the interview was conducted | Richmond City Hall |
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| Restriction Type | Open (Open access)  Restricted (Interview has some restrictions detailed below in “Restrictions”)  Closed (Closed/No Access) | Open [[1]](#footnote-1) |
| Restrictions | Details regarding any restrictions on the file’s use (as outlined in Form 6 –Consent) | N/A |
| Rights | Release Information regarding copyright and access through the repository (as outlined in the Release Agreement) | All rights given to the interviewer (Rebeca Salas) and the Oral History Centre |
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**Transcription Legend:**

. . . = Ellipses used to indicate where an interviewee does not complete a thought.

[?] = Used to indicate indecipherable words or unknown spelling of words.

### START OF TAPE PART ONE OF FOUR

[00:00:12]

*REBECA*

So if you want to start out.

*ROBERTA*

Thank you.

*REBECA*

Sure.

*ROBERTA*

So, good afternoon. Very, very important in our culture is taught to me by my elders’ ceremony. Ceremony guided each and every step of each and every day of our lives. Today, our larger society just does ceremony like certain times of the year, like birthdays or anniversaries but ceremony actually guided every single step of every single day of our lives. As was taught to me is the ceremony of introduction to say your name, your nation, your family, and if it isn’t your traditional territory to ask permission to be on that territory. So good afternoon, my name is Roberta Price. My heritage is I am Coast Salish. I am Snuneymuxw on my dad’s side and that’s where I was born. When they came to our lands they didn’t know our names, they didn’t know our language. So, perhaps, when they couldn’t say Snuneymuxw they called it Nanaimo. I was born there right on the Number One Reserve right on the waterfront in Nanaimo and I am Cowichan on my mom’s side. The language as taught to me on this side by my elders is called the Halkomelem language. I knew and understood and spoke my language fluently until I was six years old. Beyond six years old I was actually tortured to have anything to do with my heritage and my culture. I have spent well over forty years reclaiming back my identity, searching out for my family members and, especially, searching for my mother. Through that journey, due to those horrific experiences, I used the contemporary Western method of healing: counselling and psychiatry and psychology. I really feel that the greatest part of my healing journey came when a boss of mine, who is First Nations, was helper to the elders, she brought me to my elders. These are the teachings that I’m sharing with you today. Those elders brought me under their wing. They taught me, they guided me, they prayed for me but most importantly of all they loved me, loved me unconditionally because when you are ripped away from your family whether you’re three, four, five, or six years old, what you’re missing in this world is unconditional love. They showed that to me and guided me to be where I am today. I never ever dreamed that, close to forty years later, I would be walking in their footsteps sharing the same unconditional love with so many others as they shared with me and many others. So thank you. Thank you for listening.

*REBECA*

Thank you. So, why don’t we start learning about your life story, um, a little bit, maybe over time where you started and then maybe moving towards your journey to where you are now.

*ROBERTA*

Okay. Well, as I shared in my introduction, from age six onwards I was not able to be with my family and for certain reasons in our nations there are arranged marriages which are usually arranged by the great grandmothers. The grandmothers, they’re the ones who say yay or nay that you can stay or you can go. What happened in my mom and dad’s situation was that my mom went back to her grandma when I was two years old and my sister was four and my other sister was just born. My grandmother on my dad’s side let my mom know that the children, like us, would be staying with my dad and with them. At two years old I didn’t know the difference. In our house we were well loved, well cared for, well nurtured, well fed, and we never actually knew the difference. To me, that was the happiest time in my life up until I was six years old because we were well taken care of. I didn’t . . . Even though our cousins and other households had moms and dads, that wasn’t part of our life and we didn’t miss it. On most of the reserves across Canada they had what they called the Indian Day Schools. So you go to those until you have to go to the public school in grade one and it was when I went to the public school that people said to me “Oh, you don’t have a mom” and I said, as a six year old I thought “Oh, I don’t have a mom. I miss my mom. I want my mom” where I didn’t even miss her before that.

[00:05:13]

I started to miss her and then part of the situation from the federal government, when the residential schools weren’t as successful as they thought, they had an agreement to continually forcibly remove us from our homes and our families and putting us into the foster care system to assimilate us. My sister and I were actually grabbed by two social workers on the way home from school one day when I was six years old and my sister was eight. They had promised us that we would go home to our dad really soon and we actually never ever went home again. We were forced into a Caucasian foster home where we were tortured to have anything to do with our heritage and our culture and our language. When I would be whispering to my sister in our language “I want my dad. I want to go home” and we would get pulled out of bed and beaten for that and beaten for anything to do with what seemed to be our Coast Salish heritage and never ever being able to go home again. So growing up being disconnected, being tortured was a very, very difficult life. For me and part of why I want to be a part of this project is I really feel that the museums and the libraries are a great place for people to go and learn about different things and look at books and look at history. Finding out about things is a really healing place to go. Reading books was a really great escape for me in my life and school was a really great escape for me so I really, really went into that. I believe it helped me. It helped me quite a bit even though I suffered a lot. Having been tortured in the foster home, like we really didn’t know that there was any kind of lifestyle out there where you didn’t get hit, you didn’t get hurt, and married into a wealthy family where the person was very spoiled and easily turned to violence so that when that violence happened I didn’t know that you actually had any rights. I just thought everybody lived like that, that that was okay. After suffering pretty horrific near death experiences I was able to get out of that and my children are very, very young. My sister actually had moved, her and her husband had moved to Richmond and she wanted me to come and be near her. So I moved here when my children were very, very young. In the small place where I lived, race was very, very big. There was a big division between the First Nations people and, what I term, the larger society. Living in that kind of un-acceptance was just a given, like, you just knew it. There were places that you didn’t go. There was just ways that you were always treated that you just lived under that cloud. When I moved to Richmond to join my sister, I was very, very surprised because I felt like I could go anywhere and people weren’t looking at me like I was strange. I just really felt that when I looked at Richmond, at how it was very diverse in the population, and of course it was bigger compared to where I had come from, because this place was pretty small, and it just seemed so welcoming to me. When I came here I just felt like I heaved a sigh of relief that I could actually walk about without being looked at in a different way. I just really felt that it was, for me, I guess it was a new start. It was just a new part of my life. [Whispering]: Can we stop?

*REBECA*  
Yeah.

[00:10:25]

END OF TAPE PART ONE OF FOUR

START OF TAPE PART TWO OF FOUR

[00:00:04]

*REBECA*

Okay, we’re ready.

*ROBERTA*

So, in my journey, in my life, I have . . . when I was about fifteen I sent away for my birth certificate and found out my proper name and I had a secret to myself to search out for my mom. I started to think about that when I was fifteen. That began a lifetime journey of searching for my mother. When I moved to Richmond I continued that journey throughout the years, on and off, and finally in 1994 when I became a grandma I found my mother. When my sister and I had moved to Richmond she had found Steveston and she really, really loved it so that was the first place she brought me to in Richmond. We both loved it. We’d go there all the time and we’d have fish and chips at our favourite restaurant and that brought us really good memories because my dad, amongst the many jobs that he did in his lifetime, he worked as a longshoreman, he worked as a logger, he worked in the mines, and my dad and my grandpa actually built and owned their own salmon fish boats and we always had salmon and that always brought us good memories to have those fish and chips in Steveston. We just loved it. We just loved that sense that when we were in Steveston we really, really enjoyed it. So when I found my mom in 1994 the first thing that my sister and I said to my mom is “we have to bring you to this place. It’s so incredibly amazing. We have to bring you. We’ll go to our shops and then we’ll bring you out for lunch for fish and chips.” I think that my mom heard fish because she loved fish. She’d eat fish all the time. So we bring our mom to Steveston and we’re going into our shops and then we’re getting ready for lunch. So we’re walking up the main street of Steveston which is Moncton Street and we don’t know our mom. We just met her and she’s up there in her age. Our mom, my sister, and I are walking down the street and my mom start’s chuckling away to herself. My sister and I kind of look at each other, really kind of nervous, we don’t know whether to say anything or do anything so we didn’t say anything. We get in the restaurant, we order lunch, and I can’t help myself. I just have to find out from my mom. I lean over to mom and I say “mom, why were you laughing back there on the street?” and my mom looks at me and my sister and she goes “well, I was laughing because the last time I was here it was mud and boards.” Our mom told us the story about Steveston and how she came to Steveston. For many of us, it was our great auntie and uncles, and everybody in the family worked to keep our children out of the residential schools, hiding them from the Indian agents. To keep my mom out of Cooper Island residential school my great auntie and uncle would come and work in the canneries in Steveston. From the time my mom was three years old until she was eleven, she came to Steveston with my great auntie and uncle and would sit on the fish boat. In Cowichan you would start to learn to knit when you’re two years old. My mom says when you’re three you can start on slippers. She would sit on the fish boat and knit while great auntie and uncle were in the cannery and she told us of how, in the cannery, that if you don’t work fast enough you get fired. So what would happen is my great auntie would race onto the fish boat, she’d tell my mom to come in, because she was very small, to push the cans ahead so that she could keep getting caught up. Getting caught up so that she wouldn’t get fired. My mom said that she would do that and so when she didn’t get fired my great auntie and uncle would bring my mom up to the Japanese store in Steveston and buy her an ice cream cone. When you’re three years old that’s quite a big treat and that’s why mom was laughing away to herself was from those memories. Later on I found out, about four years later, I found out what happened to my mom when she was eleven. She was actually caught and put in the Cooper Island residential school. That connection to Steveston was very, very strong and we kind of realized that.

[00:05:19]

I was taking a course and this First Nations leader, a chief from the Okanagan, he would always talk about how us First Nations are so connected to the land. We’re so connected to the land it’s like the blood that runs through our veins. We kind of . . . I never . . . I always wondered “why does he say this? Why does he say this?” and then I went back and I thought about how strongly we felt connected to Steveston in that way. Then, in my journey of finding out about my family, finding out about my history, looking at it and researching it out was that I found out that our Cowichan ancestors, and Snuneymuxw, but largely our Cowichan ancestors actually had our permanent summer fish camps right in Steveston, right in Steveston and right at the airport where the planes land, at the airport we had. And not just four a couple of hundred years I found out but for thousands of years we had our permanent summer camps there. So when this First Nations leader says that “we are so connected to the land it’s like the blood that runs through our veins” it’s really true because we felt that connection. We still feel that connection and it’s because our ancestors were there for thousands of years. It’s kind of like emotional, it’s heartwarming, and it brings you around to center you and your sense of identity. So I just wanted to share that. The other part, like very shortly after we moved to Richmond I had to register my children in school classes and they were in grade two and kindergarten. There was a bit of an un-acceptance about when certain people found out that my children were of First Nations heritage. Sometimes, you know, I look back and I think that if they were of other heritage it might have been different but they weren’t treated very well which really, really affected me. Having had that experience of un-acceptance, of mistreatment in all of my school years I just decided that this is not going to happen for my children. Although . . . and I volunteered and everything, I volunteered in the schools, I volunteered in the community, but I made it a goal to actually become involved in the school to share about First Nations. Through that goal it came around that one of the wonderful principals, who’s long retired now, welcomed me into her classroom to come and talk about the First Nations culture. Although in the very, very beginning I had this sense of anger, I had this sense of injustice, I really feel that now it’s coming up to thirty years that I’ve been going into the classrooms, that I’ve come around that full circle of healing in that journey where I started out in a little bit of anger, a little bit of hurt, a little bit of resistance about . . . But also feeling the importance that if you educate and you talk about it that attitudes and behaviours will change. I really feel that I’ve come full circle in that sense of healing where, now, and because in the beginning it really wasn’t a hundred percent welcoming to me, that it was usually just one or two professionals welcoming me in and so you don’t feel that full sense of welcome and you feel more like you’re an imposition. Today, I feel like it’s moved from that sense of being an imposition to being a treasure. I feel like when I come into a school people are saying “oh, Roberta’s coming today” or they come and greet me. That everyone is so excited and so warm and welcoming to me and I feel that great sense of healing from that. So I believe, I truly believe and actually I have lived my life that when you meet resistance, when you meet un-acceptance, if you create that education and awareness, you create relationships, that attitudes, behaviours, and treatment will change.

*REBECA*  
Mhm.

END OF TAPE PART TWO OF FOUR

[00:10:34]

START OF TAPE PART THREE OF FOUR

[00:00:03]

*REBECA*  
Alright, ready.

*ROBERTA*

So the other . . . Coming to Richmond . . . I want to talk about how it’s so important to be involved in the community where you live and involved in your children’s school if you’re a parent. Part of what I feel is so important and so, like, health giving and creates a sense of happiness is volunteering. I’ve actually volunteered for most of my life and have been a volunteer in the Multicultural Friendship Club for well over twenty years but just in the classroom as a whole, for all of my children, being a volunteer and going in to give the First Nations awareness circles what I’ve noticed more and more over those thirty years is the diversity of cultures that live here in the community of Richmond. To honour each and every one of those cultures for the languages that they bring in with their families and in that circle of teaching, because I have everybody come into a circle, and finding out, sharing that ceremony of introduction, asking each one of the students to say their name and their birth place and the languages in their families. Some of those children speak three, four, five languages sometimes. It’s just incredible because their parents might not necessarily be from the same culture so those parents have their own languages. Two parents, they can have multiple languages. I always honour those children to say when you grow up, when you get married, when you have children, share the language of your family with your children. They giggle a lot and they think that’s really silly at that point in time but very, very important because language is a really strong, strong connection to our culture, each one’s culture. In that journey of just . . . And being involved as a volunteer with the Multicultural Friendship Club, we also do train the trainer where the coordinator of the club would encourage so many different cultures to be involved as to teach something from their culture and really saw the importance as, I felt, that who needs to teach about that culture is a person from that culture. I really, really supported that. So I’ve met, literally, hundreds of volunteers through the trainer events and through going to the classrooms. It’s so incredible how rich the cultures that have come, the people who’ve immigrated to Richmond have come from their country or their nation and so much . . . If we could all just share that in the world I feel that there would be a lot of peace out there. To learn about the different ways, the different ways to dress, the different ways to speak, the different mannerisms of all the different cultures is so enriching and I really feel that. I have acknowledged that over and over and over again of how I honour the people who come from all of those countries of how brave they are, of how I feel I would not go to a country where I didn’t know the customs, I didn’t know the language, that I don’t think that I would do that. And how I honour all of these people who have come to Richmond to become a Canadian, to be part of Canada, to be part of Richmond is incredible. That, in itself, to be involved, is really good for your health, good for your sense of happiness, and I really feel that it’s very, very important for everyone to be a part of. In that journey of creating that awareness, bringing my own sense of teachings and many of those teachings have come from the elders I’ve been involved with in my journey of healing, and close to thirty elders that I’ve had the privilege of working with in my journey who shared their teachings with me. In those teachings the elders had said when you receive a teaching, and I share that in the classrooms when I go in of how you can watch television or watch on the internet something that someone’s creating, and then you go and replicate it and you go and do it on your own. Well, in our culture we’re taught that if you’re taught something that you honour the teacher by asking their permission to share those teachings. That’s what I’ve been taught by my elders.

[00:05:21]

And give a small gift whether it’s a sacred plant or whether it’s a gift of any kind to give to that elder, that knowledge keeper, to say “I ask you permission to share these teachings with others.” That’s what I was taught. The workshops that I do throughout the schools and throughout the communities, I really feel that they’ve been successful because I followed the proper ways of doing it: listening to my elders, by asking permission, and then sharing that teaching with others to say “Yes, you can go out and share what I’ve . . .” because what my elders taught me, too, is that you cannot take it when you go. It is not yours to keep, that you share it with others, and that others can carry it on after you go. That’s the importance in our culture, in our ways. So bringing all of those teachings into the classrooms and I’ve brought some very, very special items with me. I was gifted, just recently, I was just gifted with a cedar headband by someone who is re-learning about her culture and it’s so beautiful. I don’t teach the cedar weaving. I would like to take a few more classes before I do that but another item that I bring into the classroom with me is one of the treasures that I’ve kept for my mom who passed away in 2002. She knit those Cowichan sweaters for over seventy years and I carry that as a display item with me into the classrooms. I’ve been taught by a cultural knowledge keeper from the Kwakwaka’Wakw territory how to make button blankets and the teachings of those button blankets. I have a beautiful big button blanket that I chose to tell the story of the butterfly on that one and then she led another cultural teaching workshop where I made a little mini [truss?] size button blanket with a butterfly. So I’ve carried that with me today. The other special items that I carry in the classroom to share with others is that I was gifted an eagle feather wand. So I carry the eagle feather wand and I share it in the circles and I pass it around. I share the teachings of the sharing circle and the teachings around the eagle feather and how to hold it and how to pass it and the meaning of it. I share that which is very, very powerful. So I carry that around and I carry around other sacred plant items like the cedar and the teachings behind it, the sage, the sweet grass, and the tobacco. I share that and what has been taught to me by my elders of how to do that but most importantly of all in sharing my own culture. By sharing my own culture and opening it up for others to talk or ask questions in the circle is to really honour each and every one of them about what’s in their culture, what was taught to them in their culture, how to hold that dear to their heart in their journey, to teach their children when they grow up, and to honour the parents to keep their culture. Even though they’ve come to this country and they love being here to, like, keep all of the important parts of their culture, to keep it in their family. Part of my journey of volunteering, I was on the steering committee for what they call “the community kitchens” and I was on this steering committee which is kind of like an advisory committee. One of the facilitators had to leave suddenly and they were stuck and we did not want to let the people go because these are a lot of emigrants coming to Canada and then trying to settle here in Richmond. So I said, “okay I’ll volunteer” like a couple of times. I actually led the community kitchen for three years because I just loved it so much and it was only once a month but I could not believe, like, everyone that came there and what I did as I created an atmosphere of acceptance where, as we’re learning to cook . . . Some people came from countries that don’t use ovens, like, don’t use the conventional Canadian oven like we do. We learned a lot. We learned a lot from each other and I created an atmosphere where the women could practice their English in a safe manner.

[00:10:25]

What we would do is we’d learn all the ways to cook the Canadian way and then we’d all sit down together to eat the food. What would happen in those circles is the women would share . . . Like, one day we made these tacos or wraps. There were so many different cultures from around the world that shared a similar food from what it is in their countries. So we all had a different way, but very similar way, of our food and what we did. That created, I really feel, a great sense of understanding, a great sense of belonging with a good start for the women who really were, kind of, shut in because of their language, because of not knowing anyone in the community. In one community kitchen we had, I think it was, thirty-three women and we had thirteen different languages. It was so incredible. That was given to us through the Saint Elwyn’s church. Their community hall allowed us because they had a gigantic kitchen because they used to do a community meal for everyone. That was an incredible place and an incredible time in our life to come together, to meet each other, to welcome each other into each other’s families, worlds, and life. I have to share that near the end of my time there one of the women joined with another woman. She came and she says “Oh, Roberta, Roberta I was very, very eager to come here.” And she was a recent, very, very brand new, like, here two weeks from Taiwan and she said “I heard about you when I was still in my country and my relatives said you have to go see Roberta in the community kitchen when you go to Canada.” I just thought, “Wow, this is so incredible” to be able to share and to have that sense of welcome to say “Oh, this is the place to go. You go in Richmond and you will feel very, very welcomed and it won’t be too bad.” So sharing, volunteering, sharing my own culture, as well as learning about so many different cultures of the people who live here in Richmond has only enriched my life. It has really given me a great sense of happiness, a great sense of belonging, and a great sense of welcome.

*REBECA*  
Sounds beautiful. One thing I was curious about, and if you’re able to, it would be lovely to hear the story of some of the items, maybe some of the stories you share with the children. It would be really great.

*ROBERTA*  
Okay. Sure. When I go and I’m welcomed into the classroom, sometimes they already have a theme. The teachers will let me know whatever it is they’re learning about, whether they’re learning about the environment, whether they’re learning about different cultures, and what is important. So, part of my teachings when I go in, the biggest part of my teachings is the importance of learning about the sharing circle, as I call it. I call it the sharing circle because I’ve known a few other very esteemed, wonderful women elders who . . . in our journey of healing there is different things that occur where when they’ve been part of . . . this is across Canada as a nation, across North America as a continent where they have this concept of the teachings of what they call ‘the talking circle.’ People have not honoured the teachings of the elders because in the talking circle there are certain ceremonial protocols that happen. In that, they have used the talking circle almost like it’s a weapon. These women elders that have encouraged me to use the teaching of the sharing circle as opposed to the talking circle. So I always call it now the sharing circle. Teaching about what I’ve been taught in the sharing circle and all the ceremony that goes behind that. The teaching is that we sit in a circle so that we can look at each other when we’re speaking and for not just the First Nations culture but, perhaps, many cultures across the world.

[00:15:38]

When you’re speaking I think it would be very rude to be sitting in rows and speaking to someone’s back. The importance of the circle is people really have a sense of understanding of that right away. So we sit in a circle and part of the ceremony of that is normally when it is First Nations involved we would have a First Nations elder or a ceremonial person open up the circle with a prayer. We would have a very special item. As I’ve shared earlier, I have my very special eagle feather wand. We could use a cedar bow, we could use some sage, we can use a sweet grass, we can use any herb, maybe a sacred . . . if the Nation honoured certain types of rocks or even shells, we could use any special item that we would use in the circle. We would open up with a prayer, we would open up, like remember I shared earlier to say your name, your nation, your family, and if it isn’t your traditional territory to ask permission to be on that territory. So to pass that special item around for people to hold and people don’t always realize that when they involve First Nations cultural teachings that it doesn’t fit between twelve and one o’clock. It doesn’t fit in a certain amount of timeframe because everybody needs to speak. Everybody needs to speak and everybody needs to be heard in a respectful way. So to pass that special item around, and part of the teachings of the talking, or the sharing circle is that only the person holding that special item is the one to be speaking and that part of the ceremony is that everyone is supposed to be listening respectfully so that there’s no interruptions. That’s how disputes were settled in the past is to have that sharing circle and so everyone hears, everyone gives input so things are often settled without too much of an argument or a fight. So going around that circle and teaching that is pretty well, actually, very well accepted and a big learning path for people. A lot of people, both children and adults, they express surprise because they have an opportunity to speak. They have an opportunity to be listened to without interruption. So I use the sharing circle not just teaching in the classroom but teaching in professional development with adults as well; so very, very important. Some of the teachings that I’ve learned from my elders is to create cultural items. When I bring those cultural items to display, sometimes I will leave it in the classroom for a week or two weeks and the children can look at it and touch it and feel it. Part of the teaching when I do teach about that cultural item, and the children are able to create it, I share that these are not art. We call it art today but they were actually items that we used on an everyday basis in the past. Now we create it to share some of that past. I have been taught the tiny picture-size mini button blankets, and we also do that in the multicultural friendship club. I have been taught the teachings of the medicine pouch so I share those teachings and all the sacred items that could go in the medicine pouch and recreate that. I have been taught the teachings around the dream catcher and how there’s hundreds and hundreds of stories that go because those families were many, many different families within the cultures around the teachings of the dream catcher and so that there’s many versions. So acknowledging to people who don’t know anything about our culture is that what was taught to me by my elders is that nothing is right or wrong.

[00:20:31]

Nothing is right or wrong. It is who is your teacher, how you accept those teachings, and how you carry them on. So if someone in the circle heard this version of the dream catcher and someone else heard another version of the dream catcher is not to say that my teaching is wrong and whatever each one of those heard is right. It’s where you received those teachings and how you carry them on or how it goes on from there. So really getting people to accept that and to acknowledge that is very, very important. And so, I do many other different teachings like the teachings around the eagle feather and that process is that under the environmental guidelines of Canada, because the eagle was almost extinct, First Nations people could have the eagle and its eagle parts but use it for ceremony only. If I had this eagle feather wand just to have it to possess it is not right. It is for us to use it in ceremony and so I share those teachings and share the teachings of the sharing circle. What I use is use feathers of other birds like goose feathers or duck feathers or whatever those feathers that are commercially produced. We use them but the children can get that sense of identity about the sharing circle and the passing of the feather and then they can create their own. So I share those teachings as well and a few other teachings I share in the schools and community.

*REBECA*  
That’s great. So we’ve learned a lot of really amazing things about your teaching, especially what you share within the schools which I think is amazing that the children are able to, hands on, relate to what you’re saying. I’m curious about what life is like now in Richmond outside of education. So, possibly with . . . I know you have your hands full with the grandchildren a lot but what just life is like now currently for you. The reason why I ask is I’m curious about what your hopes and dreams are now, possibly, compared to when you first arrived in Richmond.

*ROBERTA*

Well, I feel that I still feel the same as I felt when I first came to Richmond, that it is a great place to come to, it’s a great place to live, and that the diversity of cultures is just amazing. I think that I will continue to go into the schools, continue to be involved in the community for as long as I’m physically able to do that because I just find it so amazing just to continue to meet people of so many different cultures, to be involved in the community, to witness people also being involved from different cultures from all over the world. I think that, although Richmond continues to grow, I think that it’s still a place that welcomes diversity‑‑that welcomes all different ways of cultural practices. I think I’ll be here for, hopefully, a long time.

[00:24:39]

*REBECA*

[Laughs]. One story that I was personally curious about, and please let me know if it’s too much of a hassle to learn about, is the butterfly story with the blanket.

*ROBERTA*  
Oh! So why I chose the butterfly is, now they share those teachings for the whole world because it’s so important to learn about the teachings of the button blankets and what it meant to all of the different nations that wear the button blankets for their regalia, is the fact that when it was only us here in North America, when it was only us practicing our cultural customs and practices, is that only the family from that animal totem, if you can call it that, like people of the clan, like the [indecipherable] clan, the bear clan, the eagle clan, the raven clan. Only the people of that clan could wear that animal on their button blanket. Although people could choose different animals I really felt very, very strongly to honour the fact that I am not of the button blanket heritage. I am not of the button blanket clan and the butterflies were . . . when the cultural teacher shared that the butterflies weren’t of, and I think there probably is a clan throughout North America of the butterfly people, but not of her teaching so that is why I chose it and I’ve always . . . I don’t know why all of my life I’ve collected butterflies. I have everything butterfly; ornaments, gifts, jewellery, everything. Butterflies has always been something that I’ve really felt connected to and so that’s why I actually chose the butterfly button blanket to create and really wanted to honour because this is what she was teaching but she was also open to people choosing whatever animal that she had available but I wanted to honour the teachings of the past. [REBECA: I see]. And, plus, I love butterflies.

*REBECA*  
[Laughs]. Aw, lovely. Okay, well, I think that’s all of the questions I have for now but I’d like to thank you for sharing so much of yourself today. It’s a beautiful, beautiful story and if there’s anything else that you would like to add to your journey here I would love to hear it. If you feel like, you know, that’s good for today then that’s fine too. I leave it open to you.

*ROBERTA*  
Well, maybe, I’ll just add in that how important it has been to be a part of the Richmond, it used to be the Richmond Delta Heritage Fair, each year. How, to be a part of that since 2007 and almost, like, be . . . it’s been so . . . creating such a sense of welcome, such a sense of being part of the community and to still continue, because it’s open to the public on the last day, to continue to share that education and awareness with anybody who comes, who’s interested, and they come from all over the place, all over the lower mainland or if they’re here on holiday from around the world, they come into the Richmond. It’s now the Richmond Heritage Fair because it just got too big and they had to separate, but how to be a part of that to continue sharing that education about First Nations cultural practices has been such a journey of happiness and a sense of health and wellbeing. I really have enjoyed that.

*REBECA*

We’re lucky to have you.

*ROBERTA*

Thank you.

*REBECA*  
Okay, thank you so much.

END OF TAPE PART THREE OF FOUR

[00:29:24]

START OF TAPE PART FOUR OF FOUR

[00:00:00]

*REBECA*  
Okay, we’re recording.

*ROBERTA*

So in volunteering and sharing the First Nations education awareness both in the schools and the communities, I really felt this is important to role model that sense of education and awareness to create community relationships and welcome and being a role model, being a role model not just to my children but also to my grandchildren. In my introduction I forgot to share, and I want to honour my family now, is that I’m a mother of four and a grandmother of eight. First of all, I thought that I would do this work to make a difference for my children. I’m still doing this work and I have eight grandchildren and to also involve, now in that journey of growing up with my children helping me out and creating the items for the workshops, but also involving my grandchildren to help. For example, my grandson, my first grandson was born when my daughter was two years old. So they were together growing up. So involving him quite a lot, as a toddler and preschooler he came to all my workshops with me. He came to the community kitchen, he came to the multicultural friendship clubs, and helped me out and continued to help me out up until he graduated. Involving my grandchildren in helping create that awareness, also was, I felt, was good role modeling to them to be involved in community, to commit to volunteering, creating a sense of being a good member of the community, creating a good sense of identity. So I really feel it’s so important not just to be involved in the community but to be involved in your family and welcoming your family to be involved in the community too, creates that sense of identity, sense of wellness, sense of being a full member of the community. So I wanted to share that part, that it continues on and, perhaps, like I said I wanted to be here in the schools and be in the community for as long as I’m able to but, perhaps, in doing that role modeling that one or more than one of them will continue to do that, what I had been doing for so many years now. So, thank you.

*REBECA*

Thank you, so much.

*ROBERTA*  
Thank you for listening.

*REBECA*  
Oh, thank you.

END OF TAPE PART FOUR OF FOUR

[00:03:05]

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)