



Library podcast

Bev Sellars reads from 'They Called Me Number One'

[0:00:05] **Podcast Announcer** : Welcome to the Seattle Public Library's podcasts of author readings and Library events. A series of readings, performances, lectures and discussions. Library podcasts are brought to you by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation. To learn more about our programs and podcasts visit our website at www.spl.org. To learn how you can help the Library Foundation support the Seattle Public Library go to foundation.spl.org.

[0:00:40] **Chris Higashi**: I'm Chris Higashi Program Manager of the Washington Center for the Book, here at the library. Welcome to today's event with Chief Bev Sellars. We thank Elliott Bay Book Company. We thank the Seattle Times, our author series sponsor Gary Kunis, and finally this event is supported by the Seattle Public Library Foundation. We want to say thank you very much for your support. Here's Karen Maeda Allman from Elliott Bay Book Company to introduce the rest of the program. Thank you.

[0:01:14] **Karen Maeda Allman**: So thanks so much for coming. Thanks so much for waiting out in the cold. I think that's an indicator of how so many of us in the community have been so looking forward to hearing Chief Beth Sellars speaker at the library. So Beth Sellars at age 31 was elected chief of the Xat'sull, Soda Creek First Nation in Vancouver in BC and a few months ago an advance copy of her book, *They Called Me Number One: Secrets and Survival at an Indian Residential School* came across my desk and I thought this is a story that is not spoken enough about in our communities, whether we're from this part of the border from the US or from Canada. And probably some of you know some of the stories and like you, you may have had friends or classmates or relatives or maybe yourselves had experiences in in these residential boarding schools. And so it is an honor to be able to present an author here at the library who has survived this, survived school and also has been working to share stories about about the residential

[0:02:34] schools, how these have impacted her family, her community, and also the nation. From 1870-1996 over a hundred fifty thousand First Nation Métis and Inuit were incarcerated in these schools in Canada. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Community of Canada, which was established in 2008. And as part of the official government apology that was given that year these commissions were set up to actually bring out and educate our communities about about these stories. So this was also the result of a lawsuit that First Nations people took against their government to get some reparation and also to have the truth come out about them. The story of the residential schools and their part in the genocide of First Nations people in Canada, and the US is not not well-

known. We welcome this rare opportunity to hear a first-hand account and part of our charge today is to bear witness to the story. Increasingly members of our wider community are stepping up to acknowledge, learn more

[0:03:48] about, and actively participate in reconciliation activities. On September 22, 2013 tens of thousands of people gathered in downtown, Vancouver, BC to walk in solidarity with First Nations people in Canada, and I don't think that we've had those kinds of, those kinds of, this kind of attention to residential schools in this country, but I look forward to it happening in the future. Chief Bev Sellars is not only a survivor of the residential school. She's earned a degree in history from the University of Victoria. And she's also has a law degree from the University of British Columbia. She's an advisor for the BC Treaty Commissions and has also spoken out on her community on behalf of her community on issues of racism and also about the environmental degradation having to do with mineral resource exploration in her community, and I hope that you'll address that as well today. Her book is now a best seller in Canada, and it is sold very well at at Elliott Bay and also at this part of the country

[0:04:57] and I look forward to to hearing more of her remarks about about her own story and also the community story. She'll be speaking today. She'll take questions from the audience. And also she will she will be signing books at the at the front of the stage. Please join me in welcoming Bev Sellars.

[0:05:29] **Bev Sellars:** Thank you very much. Even though these, this story is about my time at the residential school and this happened in Canada, these schools were also in the United States and in Australia. And, there's a very good movie I watched it's called Rabbit Proof Fence and it's about the residential school, and two, three young girls running away from it. And, it amazed me that their story was very similar to mine and and I have some relatives and friends in Washington state who said that my story is very similar to theirs. So, yeah, it's it's it's a Canadian story, but it's been in the United States and Australia. So, so thank you for that most gracious welcome. As,

[0:06:32] as was stated I am the chief and it's called Xat'sull. It's it's also known as Soda Creek. It's 350 miles north of Vancouver British Columbia. It's the most northern existing community of the Secwepemc tribe and the literal translation for Xat'sull in our language means on the edge. That's because our community sits on the banks of the Fraser River. So I always take great pride in telling everyone that I've lived on the edge all my life.

[0:07:11] I'm just getting over a cold. So I hope my voice holds out. I was 38 years old when I first entered University attending University had always been a dream of mine, but for a number of reasons that did not happen until 1993. My husband Bill Wilson who's sitting right here with my two nieces. He's got a red coat on was born and raised on Vancouver Island and received his BA from the University of Victoria. He encouraged me to attend University and also to consider UVic. Just as most students entering their first year of University, I had no idea what I what I was doing much less what my major would be. I signed up for four courses and needed another for a full course load. All of the courses I desired that fit my schedule were full. The only one I could fit in was history, which I had no desire to take my reluctance about history had been fueled by my high school experience, and the

textbooks brought, my children brought home all left out Aboriginal history and when it was mentioned, it many

[0:08:26] times it was just as a side note and almost meaningless. Without a broader study and understanding of Aboriginal history the dominant society was left to create its own version of history. I knew that much that was said about Aboriginal people was not true. My grandmother who, who died in 1997 at the age of a 101 told me stories of helping many of the newcomers to this land, but until I went to University I still did not have all of the information or tools I needed to fully process the inaccuracies put forward as history. So in my first year at University, I reluctantly signed up for a Canadian history course thinking that nothing had changed. I was not looking forward to four months of this but I knew I had to suck it up to get the three credits I needed when the professor started to speak in our first class, I knew that something was different. She started by talking of history before the newcomers got here. She continued this for two weeks. I was stunned and so deliciously

[0:09:38] pleased. I will get to my book in a bit. But first I want to quote a passage from the introduction of a book titled, Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture and this is a quote from the book. "History consists of the stories that we tell ourselves about past events, but what happens when a story is incorrectly told or missing altogether? When significant parts are missing then the story is incomplete and understanding is skewed. If the story is incorrectly told than our understanding of ourselves is erroneous. However, if there is no story at all, then humanity is denied. We do have opportunities and we believe responsibilities to fill in omitted story segments, to correct the stories that are inaccurate, and to include missing stories." So that Canadian history course helped me fill in the missing stories that I knew existed and I discovered other history courses with Aboriginal content history opened up a new world and a new way

[0:10:54] of thinking for me. European history was quite an eye-opener. I was raised at an Indian residential school and on an Indian reserve and I had a limited view of how other countries had developed. I ended up majoring in history. I have used my history degree to design a two hour Canadian historical presentation from an Aboriginal point of view. I have taken the two hour historical presentation all over BC and it is been well received by both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal groups. It is a part of history that is not yet known by the mainstream of society. But with so many people now looking to fill in the missing parts, I think it is well on its way. My book will also fill in some of the mystery, missing history and I hope that my book will encourage others who have stories that need to be told to tell theirs as well. I grew up in the interior of what is now known as British Columbia. I lived very happily on an Indian reserve until I was 5 years old. However, because of racist Canadian laws the

[0:12:08] following seven years found me spending only 11 months in my home community. The rest of the time I was away being programmed to be something I was not. Instead of allowing me to be a Xat'sull child with my own culture, my own language, and my own traditions, I was being programmed to be a poor copy of a culture that had its origins across the ocean. My culture and my people were portrayed as evil, as welfare bums, as drunks, as dirty Indians and were grouped in the same category as the mentally disabled and children. This had a devastating effect on me and I start the

book with this entry and I quote, "I was 17 years old, desperate and tired of trying to fit in. All I could think of was to die. I was so young yet I felt so worthless. That night years of abuse and put-downs finally caught up with me and a silly incident was the deciding factor. Although anyone of much more worse experiences should have been the trigger, one small incident is all it took. That moment meant life or death, and I

[0:13:29] chose death. I saw no point to living. I had taken my mum's bottle of sleeping pills away from her earlier that day because she had been drinking, and had talked about taking her life. As unhappy as mom's life was, I still thought she had reason to live. Now there I was holding the pills in my hands. I threw them in my mouth and swallowed easily. I lay down in the bedroom and waited to fall asleep. I did not think about others who were worse off than I was, I didn't think about how, how the family and think about the family and friends I would hurt. I just thought about how lost and lonely I felt, and how desperately I wanted out of this world, a world that seemed to offer only intense unhappiness. I did not have to wait long before I felt myself going to sleep." So my book is about three generations who attended St. Joseph's Mission. My grandmother who was born in 1896 spent nine years at St. Joseph's Mission and then saw her children and grandchildren follow suit. My mum born in 1925,

[0:14:50] attended the residential school for 10 years beginning in 1931 at age 6, and me attending for five years beginning in 1962 at the age of seven. The school remained active until 1981 and other schools in Canada didn't close until the early 1990s. So why did I write the book? The book originally was intended only for my family and especially for the younger generation, for my two nieces sitting here, who had no idea what went on at the schools. I wanted them to understand why there was so much dysfunction with their older relatives. Even my husband Bill who's described in the Canadian Encyclopedia as being the leading theorist in British Indian Politics from 1970 on, and was influential in every major development, did not know what happened behind the closed doors of the schools. Both Bill's parents had gone to a residential school at Alert Bay, but they did not tell him about their experiences there, and even with Bill's 30 years of upfront involvement in Aboriginal politics. He was stunned when he

[0:16:06] read my notes. I understood his ignorance of the schools because my situation was similar. My children knew that my grandmother, my mother, and I attended the schools, but no more than that. I talked to my grandmother and my mother and others who had attended the schools because we didn't have to explain to each other all the painful emotions that were result of our time there. It was as if we shared a secret society. We all know of the pain we carried and we knew the reasons why. When I first started speaking to others who had not attended the schools. I couldn't do it without breaking down time and time again, but it's become easier. Bill encouraged me to turn my writings into a book for everyone to read. At first, the thought of the general public reading my very private notes was unacceptable, but then I started to watch others who had attended the schools and I started to see the negative characteristics that I was trying so hard to overcome, their behavior mirrored mine, and I thought I might

[0:17:19] be able to help them think about their actions. Also through my book, I wanted to provide a voice for those who did not make it, like my brother Bobby or for those who are still alive, but have yet to find their voice. I hope my book will encourage them to tell all the stories that need to be told. Mine is one story and the sad reality is that my story is one of the better ones. I have survived and done fairly well in my later life, but within my immediate family many have not.

[0:17:59] Many charges of sexual abuse came, out of the school's four principals in a row at St. Joseph's Mission 3 who went on to become bishops should have been charged. Unfortunately, only one principal was charged, Bishop Hubert O'Connor, and if the top man top man was doing it, it was easy for others to do so as well. Pedophiles were plenty in these schools and this excerpt from the book is about my brother Bobby who, I found out later from other students, was being sexually abused at the school. And I quote, "My brother Bobby died when he was 18 years old, they found him in a creek at the bottom of a cliff, a month after he disappeared. We do not know whether his fall was intentional or accidental. During his preteen years Bobby developed a drastic personality change. He became very mean and was physically abusive. As a result, the relationship between he and I was one of hostility. This lasted through our teen years until the night he died. We even argued the night he disappeared. One summer when

[0:19:19] Bobby was 11 or 12 years old, the time had come when we had to go back to the school. Bobby and, Bobby and a young cousin of ours, Art would have been around 8 years old, decided they were not going back to the school. They hid in a cabin at the top of the ski hill just a few miles from our house. We all knew they were up there but no one would say anything when the priest came to pick up the rest of us. The boys lived on bag of puffed wheat they found in the cabin and wild berries around the cabin. Hence the nicknames nickname my uncle's gave them, the puffed wheat bandits. Bobby and Art were up there for a few days before the authorities finally found out where they were when they were discovered. They led the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who always get their man, and their dogs on a chase over the mountain to Sugarcane approximately 10 miles away. An elder at Sugarcane provided them with a place to hide under his small bed. The elder sat on the bed while the RCMP and the dog search the house.

[0:20:30] Bobby was later ridiculing them saying that the dogs were in the house sniffing around but did not detect him and Art under the bed. They were finally caught and brought back to the mission. I was in the play room when the RCMP came with Bobby and Art. From our playroom in the basement, we could see whoever walked by there, were two police officers and the boys were walking in front of them. The one walking behind Bobby was holding his shirt at the shoulder and making Bobby walk a little faster. I remember the way Bobby's head hung as he walked. As he was walking towards the boys side of the building. I felt really bad for him at that time. And now I realized that look was one of a broken spirit, there was nothing he could do to end the sexual abuse and I have to wonder if, like many others at the school, he was being abused by more than one person." So in my book, I also tell the story of my brother, my oldest brother, Ray, and his escape from the mission. What is not in the book are the

[0:21:42] memories triggered surrounding the event for my older siblings, Dolly and my niece's dad, Puey. They remember our oldest brother, Ray hiding in the bush or trying to hurt himself to get out of being taken away. Finally one year, he sliced himself so severely across the chest with his hunting knife that his clothes were soaked with blood. Until the book came out and I told the story about our grandmother's memories of harboring her fugitive grandson. Dolly and Puey told no one about this. My sister Dolly went on to become a social worker and looking back on Ray's action she said and I quote, "He was trying to tell someone he did not want to go back to the mission or hoping someone would ask him what was going on. My childhood protection training teaches us those signs. When we see them, we better pay attention." Well, of course at that time for Ray or my grandmother, there was no one to tell who would listen or help. It was Canadian law for him to go to the school and the school

[0:22:54] was paid for each head in attendance. No kids, no money. I remember later seeing the scars and raised chest when he would have his shirt off on a hot day, but I didn't ask him about it. I'm not a social worker, but can easily guess the horrors that were traumatizing Ray at the school. Well, you know, there's got to be a bit of humor in the book to make it bearable Aboriginal people are famous for taking the most tragic tragic situations and turning them into something humorous. We joked about our lives and the things that happen to us. Otherwise, we would have drowned in the tears. We would have cried. This is an excerpt about going to confession from my book and I quote, "Going to confession was equally comical. In fact, some of the comical things we did at the mission were usually during the time we should have been the most serious. Every week we had to go and confess our sins to the priest and we had to tell him how many times we committed that particular sin. We would go to confession and

[0:24:01] lie about what sins we committed that week. We made up sins because there was no way the priest would believe we hadn't sinned and we probably would have been punished for lying if we said we were sin free. A woman from Sugarcane, Sugarcane was a neighboring community, an Aboriginal community testified at the O'Connor trial that young girls who had no idea what adultery was but would confess to it. They they heard adultery was a sin so it seemed logical to confess to it." And the mistreatment of Aboriginal people did not stop once we left the schools, it carried on once we were able to go to attend school from home, and into our adult years. As an example. I want to read parts of my experiences during my first years of high school. And I quote, "Even though some of us could finally go to school from home we were not allowed to ride on the same bus has as the white kids. The department of Indian Affairs hired Mr. and Mrs. Wilson (no relation to my husband Bill), hired, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson

[0:25:15] to bus the Aboriginal kids from Soda Creek and Deep Creek to and from the school, and they were okay people. Mrs. Wilson drove the bus to begin with she didn't say much later. They hired to get a guy named Red to drive the bus. We had an old school bus that backfired on a regular basis, especially when we were going down the steep hill by the Williams Lake Junior Secondary School. We also left a trail of blue smoke from the exhaust to alert others where we had been. Now, I've heard of Indians and smoke signals, but that was ridiculous. The bus probably should have been in the junkyard, but I guess they thought it was good enough for the Indian kids. All the other buses had school district number 27 written on the side of their bus ours said in big letters Cash Creek Motors.

During one of our trips to school the back tire came off just as we were going around a street corner. Luckily, we had just gotten off the highway and we're not going too fast. We thought maybe we would get a new bus but

[0:26:28] that afternoon here came the Cash Creek Motors bus backfiring and smoking into the schoolyard. Red said they put the wheel back on and that was it. I know Mr. and Mrs. Wilson didn't have to follow the regulations of other school buses because they also used the school buses as a taxi for the older people on our Reserve. They charged each, charged each adult two dollars for a ride into town and \$2.00 for a ride back. Sometimes in the afternoon we would get on the bus and our relatives would be on the same bus, drinking and/or fighting. All we could do was try to hide our intense embarrassment and hope that all the kids came right away so we could get the hell out of the schoolyard. I was always so conscious of the kids looking at our bus and laughing. As much as we loved our relatives, it was quite embarrassing. No one else had older people on their buses and no one else had people drinking on their buses, but as embarrassing as it was I would have still preferred to ride that old bus from home

[0:27:42] with all the shame that came with it, then ride a newer bus from the mission." So if you treat people as if they are inferior and constantly telling them that they are no good, emotions will eventually build up and there will be a need to express itself. Many times, this comes out in destructive actions - drinking, drugs, and suicide can be a result of this. There are inward actions, these are inward actions, but there are times when the actions are expressed outwardly as well. Unfortunately, I am not the exception and one of my explosions was directed at three unsuspecting boys who were hitchhiking. Here's my passage in the book about this incident. "While I was going to school in Kamloops, I found out that some of my friends were taking courses that were transferable to universities. I dreamed of going to University but didn't think it would ever happen because of my family and community commitments. The opportunity came in 1993, our community had our elections for Chief and Council coming

[0:28:53] up again in April, and I decided not to run. An incident that happened a few months before made me realize that it was time to step down as Chief and do something else. I was heading into town in my vehicle dealing with the Department of Indian Affairs and ignorant white people in general always made me angry and that day was no exception. I was in a rattlesnake mood and past three young white boys who were hitchhiking. I did not know them and did not stop to pick them up, even though I easily had enough room in my vehicle for all of them. I happened to glance in my rearview mirror as I pass them and saw that one of them had given me the finger. All of a sudden, I felt such intense anger that little gesture brought back full force all of the hatred I felt towards white people. Even though I probably got the finger for not stopping to pick them up, it brought back all the racist policies that the department of Indian Affairs had forced on our people, it brought back the inequalities of the

[0:30:05] justice inquiry, and it brought back all the negative social conditions my people had to endure because of the white ancestors of these three boys. I turned my vehicle around and drove back past the boys then pull the U-turn and steered my vehicle straight towards them. They had to

jump off the side of the road to avoid getting run over. I stopped the vehicle, got out, and went over to where they stood swearing a blue streak at them for giving me the finger. They were big boys and it never occurred to me that I might be putting myself in danger. Instead they seemed to be in shock. I screamed at them and all the hatred I felt came pouring out of me. One of the boys started talking back to me and we got into a screaming match. I finally got back in my car and drove away leaving them standing on the road. I fully expected a visit from the RCMP, but no one came looking for me. Maybe the boys were just too surprised to get my license plate number, but that incident helped me realize I was

[0:31:16] getting way too cynical. My anger at the way my people were forced to live with getting to me." So I hope the book will be used in curriculum for high schools and universities and as one non, as one non-aboriginal University professor said after reading it and this is a quote from her, "It is so powerful and so moving and it explains so many things, on so many levels. We know in a general way what residential schools did to children, but your account takes us so deeply into the fabric of that experience. I think it's going to make a major impact in educating all of us." And I want to end with the last paragraph in my book because, "We have to believe that there can be positive change and this is where I am at this point in my life's journey. Now at 58 years of age soon to be 59, I have finally come to a place in my life where I am comfortable with who I am. I now feel my mission now is to make Aboriginal people realize that it is time. We started living again and not just surviving. It is time

[0:32:37] for us to realize that we need to make ourselves number one in our lives. Someone said that I was a survivor, but I believe I am way more than that, even though I sometimes barely survived the terrible statistics of Aboriginal people. I prefer to claim outright victory in this war in the end. I win. They did not manage to beat the Indian out of me, and my pride in being Aboriginal just keeps getting stronger. I look around and I see many more like me. It makes my heart swell and it makes me me hopeful for the future of our Aboriginal Nations. I win." [Applause]

[0:33:32] Yep? Oh, okay. So the question is about all the dysfunction in the Aboriginal communities and whether I've experienced it in Canada. I think it doesn't matter where you are Indigenous communities have been broken. But well I shouldn't say broken, badly bent, you know, and we're trying to fix our communities and the way we traditionally raised our children is so different than the way we were raised at the residential schools, and that created a lot of problems for - I mean when I was pregnant with my first child, I had never been, I have younger brothers and sisters, but because I was at the school I was never around them to help look after them. So when I was pregnant with my first child, I was panicked because I didn't know what to do. I had no idea what to do with a child, you know, and when my daughter was born, I mean my maternal, I was laying in bed there in the hospital and I was like, I can do this at my, something clicked, and I knew I could look after her. But, but yeah that

[0:34:40] is a problem everywhere. You know, it's been our culture has been just so badly fractured and where this other culture has been forced on us and that doesn't jive with ours. So yeah, it's it's difficult. Hmm. Yeah, the question is why my husband was ignorant of the situation from the past, and

I think because of the residential schools, like I said, I talked to my grandmother and my mom freely because I didn't have to explain to them what happened, but I didn't tell my children what they knew. We went to the schools but talking about it was really painful. So I didn't talk about it to those that hadn't gone, I knew they went to the school, you know, it was, we were, it was kind of a common thing and we could we could talk about it without having to explain. But, as soon as I started to talk to somebody who hadn't gone to the school and then they started asking me questions and then all of a sudden I had to go deeper and I didn't want to do that. So I think that's why and we had the internment

[0:35:48] camps in Canada to yeah. So that's a part of our history as well. Yeah,

[0:35:57] that's exactly right. The question is whether the not being able to speak the language or practice the culture, or have the Aboriginal spiritual views as the same experience and it is. In some residential schools. I mean my grandmother, I found out when she was in her early 90s that when she went to the residential school that she didn't speak English. She was fluent in her language, but once she left the residential school, she she wouldn't speak it, and I, I was absolutely, I mean she raised me, not once did I hear her speak her language. In some residential schools when they, when kids were caught speaking their language, needles were put through their tongue to prevent them from speaking their language. So it was absolutely taboo. The culture there was, oh my goodness. There was no way, you know, we were the one of the things is that somebody said in my community that the food they gave us you wouldn't give your dog, and that was true. And so we would go out, on the, you know on walks, and that

[0:37:05] and we knew what berries and what plants and whatever we could eat but we had to sneak them because if the nun saw them we would get in trouble because she assumed we didn't know the land. And you know, the spiritual views we were, it's kind of funny because they were trying to make us believe in religions that that were not ours. I mean the Aboriginal religion is closely connected to the land - everything, you know has a has, is alive in the Aboriginal, and so when we talk about our religion that that we're talking about the land as well, it's all as one. It's like a spider web. We're all connected. We're not in, the you know, man isn't up here and everything else down here as well. Like in a circle you disturb one place and it disturbs a whole spider web so, you know, but when, it's funny, I tell people that when I was a little girl and we were at the mission we learned how to speak Latin but we didn't, they didn't translate what it meant. We just had to repeat it, and repeated it,

[0:38:13] and repeated it until we said it properly, and the priest would say something and we would have to answer him. But you know if they wanted to convert us they sure didn't, weren't doing it. So a lot of the the things that we went through over there, we just you know, like I know what we had to do but even still today, I don't know the significance of the ceremonies that we were forced to to have. So yeah, sorry. Yeah?

[0:38:39] **Audience Member:** You mentioned Canada and the United States and Australia as having similar problems. Do you know if in South America this went on, or was it something different?

[0:38:50] **Bev Sellars:** Not so much in in South America. I could, be I've you know what? I don't even know, I know Canada the United States and Australia.

[0:38:57] **Audience Member:** Not so much in South America because there were more Indians down there. Yeah, the problem was up here, in New Zealand and Australia other places like that - where the Indians were a minority so they could push them around without. Yeah. It's, down there were of course more Aboriginal people.

[0:39:19] **Bev Sellars:** There's one question there and then there's another one up there. Yep.

[0:39:24] **Audience Member:** Were all of the schools religious schools? And if so, how were they connected to the government?

[0:39:32] **Bev Sellars:** They were all religious schools. They were Canadian. They were, they were Canadian. They were Anglican. They were Mormon and I can't remember what else, but and they had contracts with the Canadian government. Instead of allowing us to go to the public school where we would have learned everything that we needed to learn, you know. So they would go and they would round up the kids and it was a contract, they would... at our school they had, I think there was about 350 of us. So they would get a certain amount of money. So it was all about money and it was about supporting their religion, whatever religious group they were part of. I think there was one up there. Yeah. I just want to say that that's another reason I wrote the book is because people are so quick to condemn the people on the streets without understanding their journey. You know, they just look at them as drunks or whatever, but

[0:40:35] **Bev Sellars:** they had a lot of help to get there, they had a lot of help to get to where they are just as people that are in high positions at a lot of help getting there. So that was another reason that I wanted to write the book. I mean these people a lot of them. Yep. Yep. Yep. No, there was a bunch of them. I don't know.

[0:40:57] **Audience Member:** Hi, so I know that in recent years, there's been a lot of work being done at least in the United States and I assume in Canada as well sort of grassroots things in tribes trying to revitalize culture and language and rebuild communities. And, I was just wondering from your perspective, what can what could the outside community do better? I know that there's still a lot of acrimonious relationships with institutions and governments and the laws and everything have still not caught up to where we maybe are as a culture. But what would you recommend for just sort of everyday people to be able to support that work that's being done?

[0:41:38] **Bev Sellars:** You're doing this by coming to this talk and learning. I think a lot of the problem is that people don't understand each other and so we don't want people to tell us what we need to do. We know, you know, we want to be given the freedom to do what we need to do in our own way, and by your coming here and listening to the talk and understanding how we got to this situation, and then just if we need help we'll ask for it. But the last thing we want is for other people to

come and tell us what we should be doing to get over the problems. That's our, that's our job. The support that that people can give that's that's what an understanding that's what needs to happen.

[0:42:19] **Audience Member:** Hi, I'm Tlingit Haida from Alaska. I worked at Chief Seattle Club for 18 years. I did eight hundred fifty thousand meals for my people. I also, well I've heard a lot of stories from from the Natives from Alaska get a lot of the priests that have done bad things down here with the children are sent through to the remote Villages up in Alaska. What do you have to have to say about that?

[0:42:48] **Bev Sellars:** So I didn't quite hear that. What was the question?

[0:42:55] **Audience Member:** The question was - a lot of priests that are, that are molesting children down here -even, even to this day, because I have so many clients that I would hear the stories. They are from Alaska, you know all the villages up there and they were saying that the priests once they got caught down here, that once they got caught down here, they were sent to the remote villages in Alaska.

[0:43:15] **Bev Sellars:** Yeah, and that was common. At the residential school that I went to, you know, priests all of a sudden disappeared; priests or brothers all of a sudden disappeared and you would hear about them at another, about them at another residential school. And unfortunately, the religious organizations, you know, instead of telling them to get out of here, you know they provide a place for pedophiles, and that has to be recognized. You know, that the pedophiles they look for organizations where they don't have to earn the trust, just because they are a

[0:43:49] **Bev Sellars:** priest, because they are camp counselor, because they're whatever, you know, they put themselves in those positions and people don't don't look at them enough to get them out of there. So the religious organizations they need to do something about that and you're quite right. They just move them around. Thank you so much for coming.

[0:44:13] **Audience Member:** My question is about the similarities and differences between the residential boarding schools and the Contemporary system of juvenile detention and foster care and family court. Because at least in the United States Aboriginal people are way disproportionately represented in foster care, in family court, and in juvie. In Seattle, for example, Native youth are a lot more likely to be suspended from school out of school suspensions and then sent to the juvie or to places like that as a result of those policies. So I'm really curious to hear your reflections about what's changed between residential boarding schools where youth are taken from their family and put into juvie, in juvenile detention, and that sort of system which has come now.

[0:44:53] **Bev Sellars:** Unfortunately, even though the residential, residential schools have closed people still think that Aboriginal people aren't able to look after their younger ones. And, in Canada we have what is called the sixties scoop where they just came in, and I would have been if I weren't at the school, I mean because my family we didn't have material, we didn't have any money. I mean we had lots of food on our table, we were warm, we were dry. We you know, like we were well cared for,

but I would have easily because we didn't have the money, you know, I could have easily been scooped and taken away. And there's all kinds of stories about Aboriginal kids that are just taken. Some of them came down here in the United States. I remember about 15 years ago, there was a young Aboriginal boy we heard about it in Canada and he murdered his foster dad because his foster dad was continually abusing him. There's another story of

[0:45:54] **Bev Sellars:** an Aboriginal girl over in England and she ended up on the streets. She was being abused as well. And and she saw this group of Canadian Chiefs. They were going over to try to get some, you know, get their title and rights recognized here in Canada, and she bursts into the into the meeting and she said I'm one of you, I know I'm one of you. She had no idea where she was from, but she knew she was from Canada and she knew she was native Indian. So there's all kinds of stories like that and we're even still today fighting for to you know, like this Secwépemc tribe. We have 17 existing communities left, and we're fighting for control of our children, you know, we're still fighting for control of our children. That should be a right but we're still fighting for that. So, I can I can imagine it's the same we have the same problem up there and the kids are taken, you know, and they'd be way better off in their home communities, but they're taken and raised in a foreign environment still and and up all with all kinds of problems.

[0:47:07] **Audience Member:** Yes, you being a historian, have you been able to uncover, was there any kind of a movement, any kind of vocal opposition to what was going on in Canada at the time?

[0:47:19] **Bev Sellars:** Oh, yeah, and I mean there was a, there was a report in I think it was in the 1930s that a government official did, and it was called the Story of a National Crime. But, you know there were, and there is, and but nothing was done, and they started in Canada. Now they have the Truth and Reconciliation Commission happening where people are able to go and tell their stories and they're also doing investigations. They now documented 4500 kids that died at the residential school, but they quit taking, they quit keeping track of the number of kids that died in 1930, I think it was after that report came out. So it's, you know, there's probably a whole lot more, and but anything, you know, it was covered up. And, I was doing this presentation at the University of Victoria about a

[0:48:17] month ago and this guy, he was about 60 years old. He was born and raised in Canada and he felt that he was fairly educated and knew a lot. He says, how could that be? How could I have grown up in this country and have not known that? So the government, you know, they really don't want to this history to be told and we did have a an apology from Harper, Prime Minister Harper. I think it was in 2007 but conditions haven't changed. I mean you can't apologize for something and then not make things right. So, you know there, an apology is worthless if it isn't backed up with actions.

[0:49:01] **Audience Member:** You got to remember in 1960s in Canada, it was against the law for Indians to organize a protest. Oh, yeah, that's against the law.

[0:49:07] **Bev Sellars:** Yeah, there are all kinds of racist laws, and we couldn't hire lawyers either that was against the law. There was there's all kinds of racist policies that happened in Canada and probably here. Yes.

[0:49:26] **Audience Member:** I'm just curious if there are many women chiefs in your tribe or is that unusual now?

[0:49:32] **Bev Sellars:** It's not unusual at all. The only time it's unusual is when I go outside of my outside of my community and the non Aboriginal community all of a sudden was - oh my God, it's a woman chief! But, in my community, I mean, you know in a lot of our, in a lot of our tribes, all of the in the matrilineal communities - Bill is from the Kwagiulth tribe on Vancouver Island and and the women, whenever there were important decisions to be made it was the women who made those decisions. And, Bill is a Chief in his tribe, but he will never ever achieve the status that his mother was, she was the matriarch of that that tribe. So, that you know, there's all kinds of clash of cultures and that was really something because, and it's funny because, you know when the Indian Act came into being, they put the men, you know as superior or whatever and whatever but that's not how our tribes were even, in tribes were, that were matrilineal women

[0:50:36] were equal to at least men, and so there was no domination of women. So this this that was all new when they, when the Indian Act was enforced.

[0:50:50] **Audience Member:** I know in The U.S. there is a lot going on in terms of the question of blood-quantum for tribes, and who is admitted, who is still a part of the tribe, is that an issue that's going on in Canada as well?

[0:51:05] **Bev Sellars:** No. If you, in your heart to have a drop of Aboriginal blood and you can prove it. I mean, you know, my father was not Native, but in my heart and my community thinks of me as a hundred percent Aboriginal, and blood quantum is not a issue in our territory, or in many I think. I just want to tell you a story about Bill's mom. Before there was, you know if an Aboriginal woman married and non-Aboriginal. Well, even if he was Aboriginal but he didn't have status, she would lose her status. So she was considered a white woman. Anyway, Bill's mum married a non-Aboriginal person. And so she lost her status. Well in Canada in 1985 they reversed that -

[0:51:56] and anybody that was status Indian would get their status back. In this CBC reporter in Canada said, asked Bill's mom well, aren't you glad that you're that you're finally going to be equal? Anyway, Bill remember, Bill's mom is the matriarch of the tribe and she tells the CBC reporter. I've never been equal in my life - and why would I take a step down now?

[0:52:26] Thank you very much. Thank you all.

[0:52:37] **Podcast Announcer:** This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.

