DÄN HÙNÀY
OUR PEOPLE'S STORY

FIRST NATION OF NACHO NYÄK DUN ELDERS' MEMORIES
AND OPINIONS ON MINING

First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Elders with Susanna Gartler, Joella Hogan and Gertrude Saxinger

Authors: First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Elders with Susanna Gartler, Joella Hogan and Gertrude Saxinger

Contact: susanna.gartler@gmail.com

ISBN 978-1-7750516-2-6 ISBN (electronic book) 978-1-7750516-3-3

Mayo, 2019

Publishers: First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun / ReSDA - Resources and Sustainable Development in the Arctic / Yukon College

This book is an outcome of the research project "LACE — Labour Mobility and Community Participation in the Extractive Industries", carried out on the Traditional Territory of the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun. Project duration: 2014-2019. LACE team: Gertrude Saxinger, Susanna Gartler (both University of Vienna, Austria & Austrian Polar Research Institute), Chris Southcott (Lakehead University in Thunder Bay (ON), and Valoree Walker (Yukon College in Whitehorse [YT]). Funders include: The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for the Major Collaborative Research Initiative (MCRI) "ReSDA — Resources and Sustainable Development in the Arctic" (SSHRC 412-2011-1006), the Yukon Government/Department of Economic Development, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, the University of Vienna, Yukon College, Lakehead University, the Austrian Ministry for Education, Science and Research, the Nacho Nyäk Dun Development Corporation, the German Association for Canadian Studies as well as Arctic FROST - Arctic Frontiers of Sustainability: Resources,Societies, Environments and Development in the Changing North (NSF PLR 1338850).

Picture credits: Alistair Maitland Photography; Elizabeth Blair; Yukon Archives (Dave Hager Collection); Parks Canada History (J.Dunn); Gertrude Saxinger, Robert Gebauer; Wikimedia Commons

Proof reading: John Reid Layout: Eileen Peter email: graphx.ep@gmail.com

Download the book on the Website of the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun at nndfn.com/heritage

Funded by

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

Yukon

Canada

YukonCollege

ReSDA
RESOURCES and SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT in the ARCTIC

Lakehead UNIVERSITY

Federal Ministry
Education, Science
and Research

universität wien

Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien e.V.

Contents

Introduction

This book was put together thanks to the following participants who shared their stories: Frank Patterson, Betty Lucas, Jimmy Johnny, Walter Peter, Rose Lemieux, Catherine Germaine, the late Helen Buyck, Lena Malcolm, Donnie (Donald) Germaine, Bella Peter, Simon Mervyn, Nancy Hager and Margaret Ball.

All thirteen participants are First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun citizens and residents of the small town of Mayo, in the Yukon Territory. First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun is the name people gave themselves at the time of the land claims and Self-Government processes. Roughly translated it means 'Big River People'. Before contact with Europeans, First Nations referred to themselves as Dän, meaning 'people'. When a reference to this time is made the term Hude Dän, meaning 'Old people', is used.

The book is based on an oral history study conducted between 2015 and 2019. The main purpose of the study is to shed light on how Elders understand the influence of the extractive industry, settlers, and other mining related newcomers on their personal lives and the community in the present and the past. Their stories provide information of approximately one hundred years of interaction with and involvement in the mining industry. The time period covered in these accounts ranges from roughly 1915, the time of the relocation to the so-called 'Old Village' or 'Dän Kų', until life today.

Gold and silver mining on the Traditional Territory of the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun brought along massive changes and was accompanied by the introduction of the colonial Indian affairs system, western style governance, and the Canadian residential school system. Elders' memories of mining are therefore not separated from memories of loss, fear, and pain related to colonialism. This book also refers to the intimate relationship to nature – reflected in the photographs – and to concerns about environmental change and how to protect the land as the backbone of First Nation cultures.

Mining, especially placer mining for gold and hard-rock mining for silver, played an important if not always a positive role in most people's lives. The aim of this book is to add to the understanding of the "complex pattern of mutual involvement and unequal impacts" (Winton and Hogan 2015:93). By looking at the history of interaction from the point of view of First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Elders, this book takes a critical

stance toward the common settler narrative that the region was an 'empty space' before it was settled and exploited for commercial reasons.

A special Mussi Cho (Thank you) goes to all Elders who collaborated on the project. Joella Hogan for her continuing support and help in the LACE project and with this book as well as Elizabeth Blair for providing her stunning nature pictures. Chief and Council for proposing the study. Alistair Maitland for the impressive Elders portraits, Robert Gebauer for the professional video recording of some of the interviews and taking pictures. John Reid for careful proof reading. Eileen Peter for the beautiful design. Everyone else who provided their help and time. There are many more stories out there about First Nation's life and mining. We hope to be able to document more in the future.

Some notes on methods

In 'Life Lived Like a Story', renowned anthropologist Julie Cruikshank notes, "Documenting life histories has always been approved fieldwork method in anthropology, particularly in North America. Until recently though, such accounts were treated as supplementary material to academic inquiry." (Cruikshank 1990:2). In this book, these oral accounts and subjective memories become the centerpiece.

Apart from the narrative interviews, participant observation, research in archives and museums, and a literature review form part of the methods used in the LACE study and subsequently in this book. The methodology for it was inspired by oral history, especially the work of Julie Cruikshank (1990, 1998), Alexandra Winton, and Joella Hogan (2016), and indigenous methodologies (e.g., Kovach 2009).

Oral history results from a collaboration between the person who conducts the interview and the respondents (Abrams 2016). The outcome of this kind of 'deep exchange' (Portelli 1997) is very much dependent on the relationship between the interviewee and interviewer. Sometimes this relationship can be trustful, while at other times it can take more efort. Class, gender, age, ethnicity, and other variables affect the relationship. As researchers coming from a different place, Susanna Gartler and Gertrude Saxinger strongly feel that all people they talked to tried their best to make themselves understandable and to teach us the things we needed to know.

Oral history interviews are “not usually a question-and-answer session but give and take, collaborative and often cooperative, involving information-sharing and autobiographical reminiscence, facts and feelings.” (Abrams 2016: 10). When a lack of knowledge of the cultural background lead to an inability to interpret details the participants or another person were asked who could explain parts the interviewer didn’t understand, without revealing confidential information of course.

Upon completion of the interviews and their transcription all participants were shown a copy of the transcript, asked to double-check for any errors that might have occurred, and asked to say whether or not it’s okay to have a copy stored in the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun’s heritage department’s file system.

It is good practice to have original copies of the audio files as well as the transcripts stored and thus made available to the First Nation in the sense of ownership, control, access and possession of research (OCAP™). It also means that the material gathered may be reinterpreted and/or more fully understood by others in the future. Furthermore, before the publication of this book Joella Hogan consulted the participants to make sure they approved the contents. In one case, where the participant has passed away, permission was sought from one of her family members.

What people chose to share varied considerably, depending for example, on when and where someone grew up. Some of the participants were employed in the mines or had a partner who worked in Elsa, a mining town sixty kilometers away from Mayo in the Keno Hill area. The conversation also depended on if the person went to residential school or lived ‘in the bush’ for a long time.

Some shared stories of Dän Kų, (meaning ‘Our Home’ in Northern Tutchone) also called the Old Village, and life in Mayo in the 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s. Others chose to discuss contemporary issues; e.g., the necessity to carefully navigate between being stewards of the land while being dependent on the extractive industry for employment.

“First Nations people have lived in our Traditional Territory since time began. Historically our ancestors lived on the land, maintaining a balance between the environment, the animals and our people.” (Peter, Hogan and the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Lands Department 2006:86). This book is organized according to the different themes which emerged throughout our talks. It includes interview sections as they unfolded, and the narratives are a little shortened by necessity.

Cruikshank explains that, "...elders of First Nations ancestry in the Yukon Territory continue to tell stories that make meaningful connections between past and present. Stories, like good theories, make connections that may not at first glance seem straightforward." (Cruikshank 2015:181). The aim of this book is thus to build bridges and help create new relationships, based on mutual respect.

The structure and grammar of Northern Tutchone and other Dené languages is entirely different from English and is reflected in some of the quotes. Their speech reflects the fact that these Elders grew up with a Dené language as their mother tongue.

Louise Profeit-LeBlanc, First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun citizen and prominent story-teller writes, "So many things have been taken from Aboriginal peoples, but our sense of humour has remained intact. It has provided us with solace, a healthy escape, and a way to learn both acceptance of and detachment from what life dishes out." (Profeit Le-Blanc, 2005: 147)

Therefore, we would like to end this introduction on a funny note. On the way back from an ice-fishing trip Donnie (Donald) Germaine says to Susa: "*You know you can roll around in the dirt, and then when you go home you soak in the bathtub*." Following her confused reaction, he laughed and said: "*You soak in the bathtub and then you pan out the gold. Yeah, that's how much white people care for gold!*"

Susa Gartler, Joella Hogan, Gerti Saxinger – Mayo 2019

Dän Kų – Our Home

Early memories of mining and life in the 'Old Village'

Dän Kų (Old Village) as seen from the opposite side of Nacho Nyäk Gé (Stewart River)

The time before indigenous people started settling permanently around Mayo is often referred to as 'the early days'. In pursuit of fish, moose, caribou, sheep and many other animals people moved between distant places. In the 19th and early 20th century trading with representatives of the Hudson Bay Company took place at Łyok Män ('Fish Lake', Reid Lake) and Tekwänt'e Män ('Fire Lake', Ethel Lake) (Gotthard 2006:85). First Nations knew about the presence of gold but had no particular use for it. Rapid change started to occur when gold was found by miners in 1880s on Nacho Nyäk Gé (Stewart River) triggering the first gold rush in the Yukon Territory (Aho 2006:12).

"When the Duncan Creek discovery was made known, a gold rush occurred on that creek in 1901-02 that triggered the establishment of Mayo. Mayo grew as gold was found on other creeks in the district and boomed with the development of silver discoveries." (Mayo Historical Society 1990:xiv). The town site of Mayo was surveyed in 1903, and a road was established between Mayo and Duncan Creek the following year.

"How does a place that is the homeland of the Nacho Nyak Dun First Nation get a name like Mayo? This is part of the comedy that First Nations people across this land know all too well. Mayo is not short for mayonnaise", writes Louise Profeit-LeBlanc (2005:146). In fact, the town was named after Al Mayo, an Italian prospector (whose real name was Georgio).

In 1915 Reverend Julius Kendi, a Gwich'in Anglican catechist, met a large number of Hude Dän at Tu Nínlin ('*water flows over the rocks*'; Fraser Falls). He asked the people to decide on a site where they could establish their own village. The decision was made to locate two miles below the village of Mayo on the banks of the Stewart River (First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun 2018).

Simon Mervyn recalls:

Over time, First Nation people became more and more involved with the gold and silver mining industry. Many first memories of the Elders who participated in this study stem from growing up in Dän Kų. Some memories are directly connected to mining like the big sternwheelers coming into Mayo during the summer or the noon whistle:

> *On an extremely cold day you could hear the noon whistle from Elsa, right from the village, that's thirty miles away. So, all the folks knew what time it was. Pretty cool. I remember that. And all the mining gear and all the implements that the mines required came up by steamboats! So, our association, my peoples' association, with the mining industry goes back long ways and it was huge.*

The memory of the steamboats is also connected to tasting foreign foods for the first time, as **Betty Lucas** tells:

> *First time we see new people on the steamboat come in. Only time men make one Dollar, when the steamboat come in, they all come to Mayo. All the men from First Nation, they load and unload steamboat. When the steamboat go by down village, they used to throw apple and oranges to us - doesn't matter out on the river – we still go out and grab it. First time we taste something good, oranges and apple, that we never see. So anyway, men make a few little Dollar to buy grocery for their family, my dad was there too.*

> **Rose Lemieux:** *I remember the boats coming in on the Stewart River picking up the ore bags. The whole front street was full of ore bags. We used to play on them, and we watched the boats coming in and going out. That's my earliest memory of the mine.*


Helen Buyck

Betty Lucas: *Yeah, that was the first time we saw new people, on the steamboat, landing in Mayo. All the men from our First Nation loaded and unloaded the steamboats.*

Walter Peter: *My dad worked on the paddle wheeler at Devil's Elbow - that's between here and Stewart Crossing. He used to winch that steamboat around Devil's Elbow with cable. And my dad and them, they worked on loading up the ore on the barge. They used to come up the river from the Old Village and roll up those barges. Not only him but all the village people. That's the only income they had; you know.*

The late **Helen Buyck** tells of speaking her language and what life was like as a child growing up in Dän Kų:

I lived down in the Old Village just three miles from here. I grew up there until I was about fourteen years old and I did all the culture way of living and just only spoke our language 'till about I was twelve years old. Then we started to learn how to speak English, a little bit. And from there on we learned to speak little English, slowly. That was my village life – you just live off the land. Well I should say, we never lived off food they serve today. When I was growing up down there, we found our own fun and we play baseball and we play tag.

She remembers childhood as a good life. She emphasizes that you don't need much to be happy:

In wintertime we were just our parents and us, went out to the lake and get some fish and meat. We kids just stayed home and did our chores. The boys did their chores and the girls helped the mother. That was our winter. We slowed down and we always find some game, we always find something to do. No boring life, that's for sure.

We didn't have much like people have today. My mom and dad worked so hard to make sure we eat good and they made sure we got clothes on our back. To me we were a pretty well, happy family. There was always play and things to do. In springtime we had to live in a tent while my dad and brother were out trapping for things and we were still happy. We don't say we were cold. No.

Yeah, when I was growing up, we didn't have much, but to me, we had a happy life. To me that's the way I look at it. We didn't say oh, I grew up so poor, you know. Maybe we didn't have everything like today, but my mom and dad made sure we got everything. We got enough to eat, and we got enough food for the winter to get us by. In winter time they went to Mayo Lake and Ethel Lake to get fish.

Bella Peter tells of how they made their own toys:

> *We used to pull out a fox tail because it got long hair, we make doll out of it and we play with this. And boys, they make their own truck and a little boat out of wood, that's how they play too.*

Margaret Ball remembers a fun and carefree time, picking berries and making medicine:

> *We used to have lots of fun down there, we didn't think about town, we never thought about candies or anything because we'd never seen them, we just lived the bush life. We played all kinds of games like softball. We picked berries, went in the bush, got sap off the tree. We put the sap in a cup and just eat it like that, you know, it tastes like ice-cream. Tastes really good. We got things to do every day, you know. I remember when we were kids, they used to let us pack water up from the river to the house. That's what we would do.*
>
> *Every month there were different things we do, like picking blueberries in August. All kinds of berries we got. It's funny, in those days we didn't think about bears. We weren't scared, because we were all going to the bush together. We were not scared of nothing.*

Rose Lemieux remembers how mothers made pacifiers with rose hips:

> *Some mothers, to calm their child – or not to calm them but just to pacify them – they would get some kind of a cloth and put rose hips in it. When they were just budding, and put a little bit of sugar in it, and have the child suck on that. You know and that's a source of vitamin C right there. I remember, I used to love doing that, sucking on that rag with the rose hips. And a lot of my friends and I would go out and do that. And now I realize that yeah, there is medicinal purposes in that.*

She tells of the good times, staying busy and mutually taking care of each other:

> *I love the life in the village. It was fun. We were always out doing things and never idle. We had our chores. Like we had to carry water from the river to the house and chop wood and stuff like that; go picking berries. We were always busy. That's what I remember of the village life. Everyone took care of each other; they shared their meat. No one went hungry.*

Every travel was by river. And in the wintertime, they of course walked across the ice. . . Everybody had a dog-team, and everybody had dogs at the village. That was your means of going on the trapline and travel. And a lot of the women in the summer would walk along the river and then someone would pick us up by boat to bring us over to the other side.

In the following story told by **Bella Peter**, the paternalistic relationship between the state and First Nation people at the time becomes apparent. The state was presenting itself as the generous caregiver, while really creating dependency. Of course, First Nation people always knew perfectly well how to look after themselves.

When I was raised up with grandma, all she got me to do was work, work, work. At that time Indian Affairs don't look after people, so people got to go out and cut their own wood, pack their own water. So, every day, we go out, she cut wood, pack up my bag and I had to pack it home. Going out again, we do that all day, until we got enough wood for the night.

She tells how she learned to fish with her grandmother:

And then we had to pack water. I think that's where I learned how to fish. In wintertime – I don't even know how – she made a hole already in the ice. At twelve at night she told me: 'Ok, let's go down river.' So, we go down the river, I sat there and hold candle, while she fished, fished, fished. She didn't think that no animal won't come to us or anything. Everybody go to sleep – us we sat on ice till' two or three o'clock in the morning until she catch fish. Sometimes she caught two or three fish and then we go home. The next night we do the same thing. She don't eat fish but she liked to fish and then she cut it up and passed it on to everybody, that's what she do. I think that's how I learned how to fish. I never fished for three years now, I used to be all over the place. I told my kids: I say I even want to fish on Dempster Highway. I fish grayling, sometimes I passed it on to the Elder that can't go fishing. My girls, they used to tell me: 'Mom what do you get out of fishing', they say. I say: 'Oh, lots of fun when you catch fish!' Now they are all fishing.

Making crafts, beading and sewing played an important role in everyday life, just like today:

And at that time down village, well they sew and sew and sew. Us girls we learn how to do bead work. And then all the ladies, they make Mukluks, canvas tops, slippers, kids moccasins, kids mitts – oh they make all kinds of thing. And then when Mayo up here was having a bazaar before Christmas, they got a table too, so

Rose Lemieux

they put all their sewing together. Everybody was sewing, nobody said this is mine, they put everything together. After they sold everything, that money went to the church in the village. So that's how they did it long time ago.

Lena Malcolm tells this story of living in Dän Kų (she calls it *Indian Village*) and some of the rules they had to follow as kids.

Oh, Indian village. I talk about that one first. When we stay in Indian village, long time ago, people, our dad and mother, all of them, we had to sit down on one place. We didn't walk around when people were eating. We had to sit down in one place and big people were sitting around and we sat down on the floor.

We don't go on a boat. We don't go town. They kept us down there. (laughs) We played around with the ball, later on we picked some berry, cranberry – yeah was a good life.

Then people – wintertime – they got their dog team, sleighs. Lots of men go fishing down to Ethel Lake, from Mayo way down to seventeen-mile, way up the hill. They went down to Ethel Lake. For a long time, good way Indian live, moose meat and everything. Oh, hunt there, come back, then they partied on Christmas Day. It was good, no drinking, not allowed to drink down there. Long time, a good life down there. Now I really miss it.

She is not the only person to miss life at Dän Kų. The late **Helen Buyck** offers her view: "We used to have our own village. To this day I still dream about our village and the house we had there. Everyone worked hard and made a good living. My generation were once the children that lived in the village. When I look at our old people, I think of how hard they worked to provide for their families. I doubt very much if anyone today would duplicate their accomplishments without a great deal of physical and psychological conditioning. The land was their teacher and the knowledge they have of it is far greater than most people can appreciate". (Helen Buyck 1983 in Mayo Historical Society 1990:253)

The flood in 1936 stands out as a singular event in the history of the village: "Julius Kendi started a school with two people from the Old Village as teachers, Charlie Jimmy and Mary Moses. Classes were held in the church at the village. In 1936, the river flooded the village, destroying the church and many of our traditional clothes for dancing. After the flood, children either went to the school in Mayo or the residential school in Carcross or elsewhere.

Eventually the church at the Old Village was rebuilt further away from the riverbank . . ."(Peter et al. 2006:88). The flood also caused the abandonment of an important dwelling and trading site, Lansing Post.

The sternwheelers stopped coming in at the time the Klondike Highway was built in the 1950s.

> The late **Helen Buyck**: *When the road opened and when the steamboats stopped coming in, it changed quite a bit. No more fun to see steamboats going by. Now there were trucks. They brought the ore down right from the mine.*

ORE TRUCKS ON THE ROAD TO ELSA AND KENO CITY

STERNWHEELER 'AKSALA'

ORE BAGS ON THE RIVER BANKS IN MAYO


Lena Malcolm

Relocation

Not long after the road was built a relocation was undertaken from Dän Kų in 1958 to the east side of Mayo. This proved to have several negative repercussions. Accounts of the relocation to Mayo are often met with regret or framed as a mistake.

> **Walter Peter**: *Ah – How was that? I think that was a bad mistake. People got rich, good now I guess, better life. But what happened was people moved out to here and they got into alcohol. People start drinking heavy. That's the worst part of it. Down the old village people don't drink at all.*

> **Betty Lucas**: *They told us to move. We should have just stayed and instead we listened to somebody telling us what to do. We had nice cabins. My husband and I we got two children when everybody moved out. It was sad because we got kicked out of the village. We had our own cabin down there in the Old Village. People moved to different areas across the river and way over to the sawmill. Other people moved around, just living in tents. People had a hard time after we left our old cabins down there.*

Some families, instead of moving to Mayo, relocated to their trapline or other places along Nacho Nyäk Gé (Stewart River):

> **Jimmy Johnny**: *Back in the 1950s the doctor ordered the First Nation to move to Mayo. This was something my family didn't do. Instead of moving into town we moved twenty miles down the river. We lived in a tent for a while until we built a cabin. We hunted and fished in that area for many, many, many years.*

First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Elders emphasize how they regained their self-esteem and tell stories of how they eventually quit drinking.

> **Betty Lucas**: *While we were living in a cabin and I got eight children with my husband. We got three little bedroom, one little kitchen and sitting room out there, for eight, nine, ten of us. We filled up in that little house and we never complained. We got something better than a tent. Anyway, when some of my kids grew up and they take them to residential school. My kid. Then we've been having problems, my husband and I, we used to drink liquor then. We both quit. Now we are thinking about our family, he told me let's move to a trapline. Let's move to a trapline, save our children, my kids.*

The relocation to the other side of the river took place because of risk of potential flooding and polluted water flowing down from Mayo – also from the hospital, which was located on the banks of the *Tedze Nyäk* (‘*muddy water*’; Mayo river) near the confluence with Nacho Nyäk Gé.

The late **Helen Buyck** tells that there might have been systemic reasons for forcing people to leave: “They never told us what we could do about the water, we were given no alternatives. A well could have been drilled; something could have been done because there is plenty of good water there. Maybe at that time government people did not want Indians to get too wise.” (Helen Buyck 1983 in Mayo Historical Society 1990: 252f.)

The fact that the First Nation was relocated to an area on the east side of Mayo, affected by marshy ground and unstable permafrost as well as lacking infrastructure such as proper roads, can be seen as an instance of institutionalized violence and discrimination. The so-called East End is sometimes also referred to as the ‘Rez’ (as in reservation), a name which pointedly acknowledges the shift from having your own place to being relegated to the outskirts of settler society and handed a piece of land of lesser quality to live on.

The time of relocation from Dän Kų to Mayo is also remembered as the time when people’s eating habits changed. **Bella Peter** mentioned this move away from wild foods such as moose, caribou, and berries toward store bought meat and other groceries:

> *After everybody moved to Mayo, they started to eat bacon and eggs, turkey and ham and all that.*

The late **Helen Buyck** tells that although people were allowed to get food from the Mayo grocery store, it took years before this opportunity was taken advantage of: “Everyone kept putting it off because nothing like that had ever been done for them before and they did not understand it. They had always worked hard for their food and clothing. Although still afraid, my mother and Alice Hager finally went to the Northern Commercial store and got groceries.” (Helen Buyck 1983 in Mayo Historical Society 1990: 253)

She criticizes that money and other financial opportunities were withheld from her people for years, just as it was from other indigenous peoples in Canada. Parents were threatened to have their kids taken away, forcing them to build a school as quickly as possible in Dän Kų: “So, our parents had to stop whatever they were doing and immediately build a school. Even then, the government sent some of the children to residential schools in other parts of the Yukon. They were pretty lonely kids.” (Helen Buyck 1983 in Mayo Historical Society 1990: 253)

Childhood in town after the relocation is also fondly remembered, for example in this account, which is part of the story ‘Ruby Lips’ by First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun story teller Louise Profeit Le-Blanc (2005:147f.):

When we were children, every day of summer held a promise of adventure. In the dusty long hot hours of continuous daylight, we would constantly cruise around on our bikes waiting for something exciting to happen. And most times it did. Life was good. . . the main event was always on Main Street. This was the popular locale. This was the place where the street theatre in our village really took place.

So picture this. On this main street were the Silver Inn Café & Beer Parlour and the Chateau Mayo Cafe & Bar, exotic names left over from a previous era, the silver rush at Keno Hill mines. On the corner by the Chateau Mayo Hotel was the CP Air ticket office, as well as the post office, which had more general deliveries than box addresses. Across the street was Danny's store and farther down Main was Graham's. These stores, in stiff competition with each other, both sold rotting fruit and vegetables and mouldy bread at exorbitant prices. People who didn't have cars would be at their mercy, not able to drive south to the capital city for supplies selling at half the cost. All these places were close together, handy for any Main Street action. There would always be a guaranteed audience of grocery shoppers or those who were picking up their mail. The centre of the action was usually the bar or the post office, which became popular on family allowance and pogey (unemployment insurance, annotation by the authors) days.

On one corner of Main, perpendicular to the street that ran straight up towards the hospital and police station, was the infamous "sewer box." Painted hunter green and built out of plywood, this box covered the pump for the town's main sewer line. The box was perfectly harmless, but it was useful as a seat on which the elders would often be resting or as a gathering place around which the elders would stand, telling stories, sharing gossip or patiently waiting for something to happen like the rest of us. This sewer box sits there to this day, and if it could speak it would have many, many crazy stories to tell.

Resistance and Resilience

Settler food and beverages were the tangible things that were brought into people's lives by the steamboats coming in from Whitehorse. Different views of the world, gender roles, values and cultural beliefs that came along can't be physically touched but had just as profound an effect on people's lives and livelihoods.

This period was marked by racialized policies and a forceful separation of First Nation citizens and non-First Nation citizens. Experiences of outright racism are hard to forget, as **Simon Mervyn** tells,

> *When I was a boy, I remember hanging on to my grandma's skirt when standing in line at the store. The Indians on this side, whites on this side. It's hard to erase those things. And we heard: 'You Indians take your hats off!' You know, when you're talking to white men. 'Don't talk to white man!' Oh geez, it was tough in those days.*

> **Bella Peter**: *Well, when we were growing up we were not allowed to go to the white people's school. My older sister and I never went to school. Some of my other brothers and sisters went to Carcross residential school. They did not take us to Carcross, so we were raised in the village.*

The Residential School system constitutes an experience of multiple separations. Close and personal bonds between parents, their children and the whole community were severed. Children were separated from knowledge of their culture, land-based practices, their language, and from a happy childhood.

> **Margaret Ball**: *But then in school life, they changed our life. We were not the same anymore – we think they raise us as if we're not Indians. 'Do not talk your language' they told us in school every time we tried to talk our language, because we can't say things in the white words. Next thing, a ruler or something hit you, clapped you over, when you're using the word. They tell us 'You quit using the dirty word and talk English'. Right away kids would have to try and speak English, only that's why lots of us forgot the Indian's word.*

A lot of knowledge is relearned today in community courses, informally on the streets, within families, or during culture weeks and festivals. Still much tension still exists that needs to be resolved today. Many people fought to have their stories heard and only recently has the history been acknowledged through the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission and the 94 'Calls to Action' (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2012).

At the time of the interview with **Walter Peter**, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was completing their work and the subject was discussed almost daily on Canadian radio and television. When asked if he lived in Mayo all his life, he tells:

> *Oh, off and on, away. In 1955, I was stolen from my home. Until 1960 the government took me away to residential school. That's what's all the commotion going on today, it's about that. Government taking them kids, forcing them – well not forcing – where they don't want to be. But still, they take us like we're criminals or something. If we don't go, they said they gonna put our parents in jail. That's how they were.*

He tells how going to school was like working, but under terrible conditions:

> *I started working at an early age. Since 1955. I was going to school. You had to work too there, scrub floor on your hands and knees with brush. Big room, big, big, big. Dormitory, stairway, hallway, big school playroom. Keep changing every month, keep changing different chores. You do dormitory, then next month you do stair way, three storey, eh! From that you got to get every corner with toothbrush too. It was strict there in the school. Treat you worse than jail. Awful place. Then I start working there ever since 1955, right through five years.*

Walter Peter was only thirteen years old when he decided to run away:

> *I never came out, I ran away. Yeah, some of us run away. It took us three days to get back to Mayo. Some time you walk long ways, some time you hitchhike.*
>
> *When the principal came, he came to my mom place down here: 'Where's Walter?' My mom said: 'What are you talking about "where is Walter"? You took him!' He said: 'No. He ran away.' She said 'What? He ran away? How come you guys didn't tell me nothing?' Yeah. 'You don't tell me nothing, you come here look around for him, you don't say that he ran away? Why didn't you tell me? You see that door? Get out!' To the supervisor and policeman: 'Get out.' And then my mom said: 'When Walter come back, he's not going back. He's staying here. Get out, don't bother. Go.' They didn't even bother trying to take me back.*


Walter Peter

Although his mother was able to protect him from having to go back, the negative repercussions proved to be far-reaching, making it difficult to learn in school for example. Many members of this generation as well as their children and grandchildren have to deal with the intergenerational effects on their healing journeys today. It has been a long and difficult road for this dark chapter of Canada to become known. The lack of acknowledgment for so long is what has been additionally damaging for many survivors.

> **Simon Mervyn**: *And same thing when they took our children away, you know, take them to residential school. They were just babies! You know they never compensated the mothers, grandmothers and the uncles and aunts. You know what I mean? They just compensated us guys, the survivors. And I'm telling that's wrong. Why are you doing this? It's the other generation that you hurt too.*

"Just like a new world"

For some, growing up in Dän Kų and then coming back from residential school meant they had to adjust to an entirely new situation.

> **Margaret Ball**: *Everything changed when I left, you know. When I came back to Mayo it was just like a new world. I don't know how to explain it, but you come into a new world. After you've been stuck in the dark school, you know, everything changed. You just see doctors and nurses, all working at the hospital. There were all kinds of people there, Indian people, white people, . . . all mixed. I was scared to talk to people, I thought I might say something wrong.*

She compares her experience in residential school to being in the army.

> *I worked at the hospital but not very long, another woman came in. And then I started working in the Café to wash the dishes and clean up and things like that. When I was an upstairs chambermaid, I make the beds and I learned all that at school, you know. How everything had to be tidy and clean. It was just like an army when you were in school, your bed had to be straight even. If it had gotten a little lump on it, you had to strip it apart and do it over again – it was just like the army. Oh my goodness, they taught us just like we were in the army.*

Frank Patterson: *When I was younger, when I first came to Mayo from Whitehorse, I was a pretty disturbed little guy, from alcohol and drugs, from my father side. My mother stayed there. That's why I came to Mayo. But as soon as I got here the Elders have grasped me and taught me traditional ways and how to live off the land.*

The process of becoming a resilient person was not an easy one:

Frank Patterson: *I worked as an operator in placer mining and then I went on to road construction. You know I made a lot of money in those days. But then, with my trauma and stuff I didn't deal with I spent a lot of money on alcohol and drugs. And it wasn't until I was 42 years old that I woke up, smelled a coffee, I had my own kids, three of them and a wife. And I had been through a couple of other partners and it just wasn't my life. So, I threw it out, quit drinking, quit smoking dope and realized how life is precious. And I dealt with all my trauma that I've had in the past.*

Many survivors have gone through a process of personal healing and are now proud of the knowledge their ancestors held, trying to bring it back into their life and the lives of their children and grandchildren. This beautiful quote shows the nature of resilience – that a person can learn to love him or herself again, while acknowledging the experience of loss:

Rose Lemieux: *I love myself now. I love that I accomplished everything I could. I've learned to love myself again and I'm proud to be First Nation again. I wish I had learned more from my grandma and my mom though. I wish I would have listened more to my mom when she was talking about the old days.*

Life at Tthinimágé (No-Gold creek) – "After all, they are not my boss."

A remarkable account of resistance and resilience was told by **Betty Lucas** who lived at Tthinimágé. She reflects on the hard times for her and her husband, when some of their children got taken to residential school and how they made a decision to go and live on their trapline:

We took five kid out of the public school. I tell my husband, I'm scared, I said we are going to go jail over take our kid out of public school. Then I said: I don't want to move – I don't want police put me in jail over take kid out, take kid in the bush. I thought government was my really boss.

After all, they are not my boss. So, I said ok, we take five kid out of public school. We went to a trapline, we went to a trapline and we been living there, twenty-three years. Up the trapline. Then my husband, he became the teacher, he teach all our boy how to hunt and make them shoot moose and show them how to skin moose and cut the meat. And then we do the fishing too, teaching them how to fish and teach them how to trap. Every one of my family, they know how to work.

The practice of small-scale gardening has gained new importance in recent years with private greenhouses and community gardens appearing in many backyards and communities throughout the Yukon Territory. This is also in response to food-security issues and the wish to provide local communities with fresh supplies of fruit and vegetables in this Sub-Arctic region. Betty's account describes how settler technologies such as gardening were adopted and put to use by her family.

And then there were a few white people living with us too, they show us how to plant a garden, we got big garden at No-gold. We got a greenhouse with lots of vegetables and we got lots of fish for the winter and dry meat and fresh meat for all the winter. We doing very well.

Betty Lucas hung on to her Christian faith:

We had praying three times a week, Monday, Wednesday and Sunday. So all my family know about the lord. And I still hang on yet with my lord.

She and her husband educated their children themselves and the men all trapped together on the trapline:

We teach our kid really good. And my husband take them out, cut all the log up river. And there they flooded down the stream, where we were living. They bring lots of log and they build house. My boy all learned that. We got ten boy, you see. Just having eight, nine boy with us. Seven of my son and two grandson, so big group with my husband go out, they all worked together.

She describes her role to provide for the family and be a homemaker, while also going out trapping, hunting, and gathering:

I stay home cook, cook. Kid are hungry. A big bread, every three days, lots of bun. Kid just ate, ate, ate, ate. I even learned how to bake pie and cake, homemade cake like that, from book. And so we doing very well,


Betty Lucas

thought it's going to be on like that forever. We been living twenty-three years when my husband passed away with cancer. So I tried to hang on to trapline but my boys all left me. They all left me, they said no good without dad anymore.

When her husband passed away, and the other people who were living near her too, she had to abandon the trapline:

So I hang on by myself, but somebody come up and got me. Those white people are living with us, about three of them die. There are two husband and wife and another old lady is living with us, they all die off too. People are dying out, so I'm all by myself but somebody come and get me, so I had to go. I don't want to go. I think about No-gold trapline. Lots of good things happen and I thought it was going to be there forever. Never know what's going to happen to us, today or tomorrow. So anyway, all break apart, my trapline.

To this day she remembers life on the trapline fondly, even though there were hardships:

I take over after my husband died, I used to trap too, I have lots of fun. Go out trapping with skidoo, run around with skidoo. After that my both ear drum all broke up, run around skidoo too much. So, I still got my name on that trapline, yet I still think about the wonderful time we had. I been busy tanning moose skin; all my family are wearing moccasin. I was just a good mother.

It is this reconnection to the land and her culture that helped Betty regain her health so she could be a better parent and grandparent:

When I used to drink when I was young, I was sorry, I think about why I drink. And I should have been good mother to my kid, look after my kid. I was sorry after that. But right now – must be about fifty years – now I never touch, no drink or wine, nothing – no smoking. It's good to be clean every day. And so that is from No-gold.

Life in Mayo & Elsa

In the following years, some First Nation men worked in mines around Elsa and Keno City, respectively fifty and sixty kilometers north of Mayo. Sometimes they relocated from Mayo to Elsa with their wives and children. This went on until the mining enterprise United Keno Hill Mines was shut down in 1989. While Mayo and Elsa were rather independent in terms of infrastructure there were numerous ties between them. Many First Nation women married and/or had relations with miners and other settlers.

> **Rose Lemieux**: *Some of the native women got involved with some of the men, so they moved up to Elsa. It was called Millerville. The outskirts of the camp. And my dad actually lived up in Elsa too. And my aunt and uncle were both First Nation, but he worked for Elsa in the mine, so they moved to Millerville as well, because it was more convenient than travelling back and forth every day.*

Walter Peter tells of life in Elsa and Mayo:

> *After my brother got older, he got married down there, and then he moved up to Elsa and worked up in Elsa mine. Johnson Peter. And my sister married Mike Karkotka who was a miner and they stayed up in Elsa too. People were living up there and had families. It was also good for Mayo, at that time. On the weekend they came down to buy groceries. They made pretty good money off the miners. There was a bar down here too. They came down to have a drink. That was pretty good in those days in the 1950s, 60s, 70s and 'till the 1980s when the mine shut down.*

Not all memories from this great influx of outsiders were fond ones. **Rose Lemieux** tells how it was intimidating to be surrounded mainly by men:

> *It was a community in itself. We never associated with the kids from Elsa because they had their own school up there. Just for high school, they had to take the bus down every day to go to the high school down here. But I never went up there, I was scared to go. Too many men! I went to the café once with some friends and I was just so scared I didn't want to stay there.*


Margaret Ball

In fact, many of these people who worked in the Keno Hill mines came from European countries such as Great Britain, Ireland, Poland, Germany, Yugoslavia and Italy. Winton and Hogan (2015:93) remark: "The Nacho Nyäk Dun weathered environmental, economic, and social changes, while struggling to maintain their traditions, language, and culture. Perhaps the most severe impact was the newcomers themselves – an influx of hundreds of single, Euro-Canadian men, who streamed into the region to work at the mines. Many of the newcomers entered into relationships with local Nacho Nyäk Dun women and, whether they were considered legitimate or not, these relationships forever altered the cultural makeup of the region."

> **Rose Lemieux**: *I don't think the influence that the mine had on the First Nation people was good because it was mostly alcohol related. You know, the guys from the mines would come down and ply the women with alcohol. My memory of the mine is – I don't know – it just seemed like there were lot of foreign men and we weren't used to that. It was kind of scary. As you get older, you realize that they are there to work.*

Opportunities to work for the United Keno Hill Mines company in the Keno City and Elsa area were taken advantage of by young First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun men too.

> **Frank Patterson**: *I always remember Keno as a mining town. And it was good to go there and see what they were doing and also to work there for a bit. But underground was not my fancy. I didn't like the underground. I worked there for one month. And it was because my brother had worked there and quit. So, I thought I could replace him, but I didn't like the underground. It's too dark, too wet. I just didn't like the feeling of going under ground in the dark and coming back in the dark. So, I moved on to operating machinery and I did a lot of operating in placer mines and stuff like that.*

Many children of miners learned to be miners from their fathers or uncles, starting early underground or in other jobs in the mines. They take pride in being successful in this sector, emphasizing how it came 'naturally':

> **Frank Patterson**: *I was probably seventeen. I had to quit school at grade ten, because our family was so big. We were eleven in our family and my mom was a single parent. So, I had to go to work. That's what I did. But I was very fortunate, because I was a natural born operator I guess and I just moved on to equipment and learned Cat, scrapers, trucks, loaders, graders, so on and so forth. Naturally born is when you jump onto a piece of equipment you learn fast; you learn within a week. And the only thing that I had left to do was to learn how they wanted to push the dirt, see? So, that's what I mean by natural born operator. All my brothers are that too. It's just something, every person is gifted somehow when they are born.*


Frank Patterson

Catherine Germaine shares her story about growing up on the Rackla River, not very far from Keno City:

My name is Catherine Germaine, my husband's name is Tommy Moses. My family Germaine lived at Rackla River. Homesteaded with three uncles, great-grand parents, grand-parents, mother, auntie and uncles. My uncles trapped, they used dog teams in winter and used moose skin boat in summers. I remember going to Keno City, mining was going on there, it was a busy town, had a store, a bar, two cafés, assay office, lots of prospectors brought in their samples. At six, seven years of age I had to go to Keno to get groceries. My family came from Northwest Territories, Fort Good Hope, at that time there was a big village in Lansing, many families. Grandfather decide to take the family away from Lansing because illness started to come. My Grand parents and parents were not really involved in mining. Ms. Erickson ran the road-house, she was friends with the family. There was the time when my great-grandparents had a cabin in Keno, where they stayed, I was around eight. I used to go there. My grandparents hunted gopher, grouse, rabbits, when mining started in Elsa, he stopped doing that, because big ore trucks were coming in and out.

I was raised in Rackla, I stayed there until I was seven and a half or eight years old. When we lived in the bush they did not have alcohol. I did not see anyone drink or drunk until when I was eight. I remember the first time I saw someone drunk I got scared. My family got involved with alcohol, probably normal, I guess, when they got invited to someone's home, they would offer a drink. My stepfather, John Olin, he wanted education for me. He was from Sweden, Stockholm. He spoke his language with his friends. I stayed with my mom and then with great-grand parents and grandparents. I have really good memories from my upbringing in bush, really different from Keno or town. Out in the bush, more things to do, more relaxed kind of atmosphere. I felt calmer and happier than in Keno because people always busy. Grandparents set snares but didn't trap in Keno. Maybe because it was forbidden.

Why Rackla? Maybe we were already there before, my family came with dog team and moose skin boats from Fort Good Hope in NWT. Schools were not for Indian kids, just for white kids. My stepfather gave me his last name so I could go to that school. Years later I heard about it, later on, after I had my own family. Then I went and checked out my records and I changed my name back. I had nine children. The First Nation would not give us a band house, because the kids and I carried the name Olin – even though they knew I was raised by Indians. So I had my name changed to Germaine – that was one or two years before I got my status card. Had to pay 900 dollars every month for housing, probably from 1958 when my oldest son was born. Tommy did build a couple of cabins, one at Five Mile and one at his trapline at South McQuesten. My husband was a hunter and trapper, but he worked also at highways. He worked for Elsa two years underground as miners-helper and two years in the mill, he stayed in the bunkhouse.


Catherine Germaine

Well at that time, because of the mining in Keno and Elsa, Mayo was busy too. Two cafés, two bars, a liquor store, two taxis. People my age, 30 years old, the fun thing was going out, partying and having a fun time. Alcohol was always there, you just needed money. First Nations were not allowed to drink, if the police would smell alcohol they would get sent to jail. I don't know what year that changed. Before that there were ways to get alcohol, because some people made home-brew. Still a lot of people were going out on the land and hunt and trap. In summer they had to get their traditional food. When I was growing up people still used to go to Ethel Lake. Now I don't see too much of it now. And I think it is because the Elders have passed on or they are not healthy enough.

My family, after they moved to Mayo things were different, not the same, I had to go to school, nine to eleven I had to go to residential school. After eleven I lost my grandmother, I only had my mother, it was kind of hard at that time growing up. In Elsa they had hockey, dances, curling, younger people would go there, and dances in Keno. Ore trucks bring ore down and pick it up on the riverbank and at the time First Nation men and women would run back and forth on the plank to put ore on the steamboat. We used to play hide and seek with my girlfriends. Truck would bring it there night and day. No highway then, just steamboat. When high way came there was no more steamboats. First Nations people were not hauling ore anymore then but work ing in Elsa as core cutters and so on.

Women did not work in the mining sector. They started working at an early age as babysitters, in the restaurant or in the hospital. **Catherine Germaine** explains:

My first job was when I was twelve as a dishwasher in a café, I was proud of my pay cheque, I got seventy-five dollars. Lots of young girls started like that, peeling vegetables, waiting on tables. Later on, I worked in the hospital and kitchen. When I was thirty-eight, I went to work in the school as a language teacher. I learned at the Yukon College.

Bella Peter tells of working in the hospital:

To tell you the truth – 50 cents an hour – we make four dollars a day. Out of payroll, they take out income tax, we got to pay rent, then I don't know where the rest go – I don't even see money. Then I went to work in the hospital. At the old hospital, they had a wooden cook stove, so we got to cook on that. Sometimes we got eighteen, nineteen patients. And when we do laundry, we got to use those washing machines. Then we got to dry clothes outdoor on the line and when you bring it in, you got to iron it with iron, so it wasn't an easy job at the time.

Betty Lucas tells about difficulties with childcare while working:

> *I used to work for a while in First Nation class in school. I worked there for a while and I've been working at the hospital for about four years, I guess. I had a hard time getting a babysitter, and one of my grandsons, in wintertime he stuck his tongue on steel outdoors. His tongue froze onto the steel. I quit right there. One of my boy, my son, looked after the kid for me, but he wasn't a good babysitter, so I quit.*

Margaret Ball talks about what life in Elsa felt like to her, when her and her husband lived there for a while:

> *They don't let you to go anywhere. You just can sit at home and cook when he comes home. And then toward the end, I must have stayed there for about six or seven months, I got fed up. So, I just packed up and came home back to Mayo. He wouldn't let me go nowhere, so what's the use to be there. It was just like in residential school again. When I came back, I felt better and opened up again. That's all from residential school, what I was going through.*

The late **Helen Buyck** cleaned houses and babysat before going to work in the restaurant:

> *I went to work – when I was fourteen years old – for some white lady cleaning the house. And I babysat. When I was fifteen, I went to work at the restaurant. At first, I was washing dishes and then I was promoted to waitress and then I was promoted up to cooking. That was my life, I guess, I dedicated myself to working.*

She shares her story of how she gradually became more used to different people.

> *I babysat for Dale Robertson, he used to work for the mine recorder, and his wife Betty Robertson. They had two kids, I used to clean the house and iron and for Bud Fisher and his wife too. I used to clean house and wash the floor and shine their silver (laughs) and stuff like that. And then I used to work for Rose Zeniuk, cleaning and ironing, but we didn't use electric irons like those today, we used to iron with that thing you heat down in the stove. Oh, I used to be scared I might burn some clothes. From there on I started getting used to people, you know, but I was so shy I never hardly talked to anybody. When they talked to me all I could say was yes, or no. I just grew up in the old village and didn't know white people that much.*

Margaret Ball reflects on the benefits of the mine, but also expresses her unease. She even stopped picking berries as she narrates:

> *The mine was good too, you know. They had grocery stores there and a bank. It was just like a town for the miners and for their wives. Yeah, it was pretty good, but it also was kind of. . . I don't know how to say it. I don't know very much about mining, what they were doing. Just big checks were going back and forth there. I didn't go out to pick berries up there: I don't know what it was about it, I just didn't go out to pick berries.*

Other people spent more time outside and with other people, as **Bella Peter** tells:

> *For me – I had two kids – it's quite a way to walk to Elsa. They only got one store, post office, that's it. And a coffee shop. So, no place to go, we just stayed at home – stayed at home with the kids and worked with the kids and sewing beads. At that time, we used candles. Sometimes I had a candle on all night, I sew beads. Then after that we used gas lamps, that's what we all went through. I think everybody did, not only me.*
>
> *For quite a while we were up there. And two of my girls went to school there, I don't know, I forgot how long we stayed there. Some people from other community were staying up there too and they work. I did cleaning, washing clothes – I had time. We sew, bead, do cooking. Then summertime when berries grow, we go out and pick berries – blueberries, raspberry, cranberries – high bush, wild strawberries.*



Bella Peter

Mining Today

When United Keno Hill Mines shut down in 1989 it had a profound effect on the area. Many miners and their families moved away, and never returned. Planning for the closure and environmental remediation of the Keno Hill Silver Mining District is currently underway. At the same time Alexco Resource Corporation, today's owner of the mine, continues to prospect and extract silver.

The character of the extractive industry has changed significantly during the last decades. A change has occurred from mining towns such as Elsa, which is abandoned, toward shift-work operations. Mine workers are flown, driven, or bussed into remote temporary camps such as Victoria Gold Corporation's Eagle Gold Project – soon to be the largest gold mine in Yukon's history – which will start producing in the Potato Hills area, eighty-five kilometers north of Mayo.

Upon the signing of the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Final Agreement in 1993 with Canada the First Nation now owns 4,739.68 square kilometers of settlement lands divided into category A (surface and sub-surface rights) and B (surface rights only) lands. **Chief Simon Mervyn** explains:

> *You want to approach the mining issues like this: We gave up such a huge resource potential through signing the agreements. We signed away so much of our land, that's trillions of dollars, in terms of resources.*

The First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Final Agreement and legislation, like the Yukon Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Act (YESAA), form the basis for the relationship between the First Nation and the extractive industry today. With this new framework mining companies negotiate Impact and Benefit Agreements (IBA's) with First Nations.

> **Simon Mervyn**: *We developed a process that we have to abide by. The first step is, you must contact and communicate with the First Nations of Yukon. Without that nothing will happen. We must be part of the planning process. For the proponents that come in to our country, we expect them to have the IBA's in place before any construction happens.*

He explains, that although Impact Benefit Agreements are in place, realistically they do not always work well.

Corporations are still geared toward, you know, three big garages full of Bentleys and all that sort of stuff. Our people are not geared toward that sort of thing. None the less we try to create a good relationship with the mining corporations that come into our country.

Yukon Government as a mediator between First Nations and the federal government does not simplify things:

Simon Mervyn: *The system that we signed with the federal government: Sly as a fox, they got Yukon Govern ment as a mediator in the agreements. This is the difficulty that we are having. If we could have direct conver sations with the federal government, it would be different.*

"You take it with a grain of salt"

Sitting on the banks of Tagé Cho gé (Yukon River) during a Yukon First Nations General Assembly **Simon Mervyn** explains:

. . . the opportunities, you take it with a grain of salt, that's what First Nations do. This mine over here (pointing toward Minto Mine), it's a big hole in the ground, all the resources are going south.

Keno City is populated by only a handful of people during winter these days. During times of high mineral prices, a lot of prospectors come in to try their luck. Several First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun citizens and other locals are currently employed in the mining sector or run businesses for nearby mining operations. Still some Elders emphasize – probably from negative past experiences too – that mines should always make sure to hire locally:

Nancy Hager: *You know when they build a mine up here, they should always ask the First Nation boys and girls to see if they want a job. They usually get somebody from out of town, and then you don't even get to know them.*

Shift-rosters that allow for longer periods of time off work seem to provide enough time for most people to pursue hunting, fishing and other traditional activities, including obligations related to kinship – such as birthdays, feasts, funerals and so on. Making good money is the main motivation for people to work in mining. Apart from the environment, job opportunities, royalties and training are of concern to many First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun


Simon Mervyn

Elders. Companies are expected to engage even more actively with the local population and provide training and other benefits.

> **Nancy Hager**: *I don't mind mining going on as long as they have jobs for people, and training and royalties for people. I think they should invest more in the community, like in housing. Housing is a big one. Youth is another, and education. They need a representative or liaison all year long to keep people aware of when they are going to open. Then people can get their education and training in time. And they should invest in wellness, help people tackle the problems that keep them from being able to get a job.*

Yukon College in Mayo helps out when someone wants to update their resume. A mining liaison works at the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun to make sure people are aware of opportunities. During times of low mineral prices, it is good to get further education. Having different skills helps people who want to find a job somewhere else, too.

> **Simon Mervyn**: *I would say that mining as a whole has been beneficial in a sense that we learnt a lot – I mean we got welders and electricians and all that sort of thing. But during a bust, industry is not supporting that, our children, our trained people they got nothing to come home to.*
>
> *Right now, all the money that we get from the mines in our country its going into our business trust. And we got scholarships. When we negotiated the Impact Benefit Agreements, we make sure that they kick in for education and social issues that we need help with.*

Not all Elders are aware of what happens exactly with benefits from mining, as **Catherine Germaine** explains:

> *When the land claims agreements were signed it said citizens will get more say. For the people working up there in the office, it is good because they get good wages. I can say for myself I don't know what happens with the money and I think a lot of others don't know too. Because of citizens with addictions I don't think it's good to give it to individuals. Better to build tourism facilities at Ethel Lake – or build a treatment place and have Elders and people teach traditional work, traditional hunting, even building their own dwelling place on the land.*

Nancy Hager says companies need to invest more in youth and training:

> *They do scholarships, but I think they should do more. One mine was saying 'We only want to do the ones that are in the Yukon'. Well, I'm sorry, but our First Nations citizens are all over Canada and the United States. They should have access to that type of funding as well.*

She stresses spreading the information and keeping people informed:

> *They need to do a plain speak newsletter or do DVDs. And send it out to people, so they can watch it on TV at their own pace. So that the older people don't have to rush and watch it at a meeting.*

A challenge that remains is that First Nation individuals, especially young women, are often employed in low-paying, entry-level jobs. Moreover, the industry is extremely volatile, meaning that people can lose their jobs over night. Sometimes it takes a long time to get a job at a mine. Young, inexperienced people can be overwhelmed by long hours and shifts up to four weeks long, prompting them to quit their jobs prematurely. Already, companies like Victoria Gold Corp. and Alexco Corp. employ a large percentage of Yukoners. **Frank Patterson** encourages young people to get a job and training in the sector:

> *If that is what they are interested in. Because there's always going to be mining here. So rich this land. Yeah. I would recommend that the school has a training part to teach the younger people that are interested, for drilling for example, instead of digging ditches and being the drillers helper. They could have their own drill and also be leaders of the mining companies. So, if a mining company wants to come in, they don't have to bring in their own people. Which takes a lot of work away from our people and then affects the social life in our community.*

The boom and bust nature of mining does not guarantee long-term jobs and investment, and other options such as gardening, cultural & mining tourism, and agriculture are now being discussed. However, it is widely acknowledged that mining has a long history in the community, and it is seen in a positive light provided it is 'done the right way', with a concern for future generations. The fact remains that there aren't many other job opportunities.


Nancy Hager

Simon Mervyn: T*he mining is not going to sustain the nation into perpetuity, right? It's not. It comes and goes. But yeah, mining and our people go back long ways, long ways! And as the world demand increases, we're going to have to find some way to tap into it, because many other self-sustaining activities don't exist for us.*

Rose Lemieux: *Well I think mining is essential up here, we need it, because we have almost nothing else. Except the Yukon Government that gives jobs to the people. And maybe some private businesses. But more or less I think our people depend on the mine.*

Unequal impacts of mining can be mitigated to some extent by First Nation land ownership and self-determination. Instead of thinking only for one generation the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun wants to make sure that the resources will be there for future generations to make use of too.

Simon Mervyn: *We don't care if the resources stay there for another hundred years. We can dig it out when we are ready for it.*




Donnie Germaine

Respect for Nature

Standing on thick ice on Et'o Nyäk Tagé ('to paddle against the current'; McQuesten River), his arms stretched out wide, **Donnie (Donald) Germaine** points toward the nearby Eagle Gold mine:

> *This is where the mine is. The river comes down that way. I hear they want to use the heap leach method to mine the ore. What if some of those chemicals leak in to the McQuesten River? It is where we fish, where we get our grayling, pike, white fish. Depending on the season, we always fish here.*

Many First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Elders share his concern and stress the role of environmental protection:

> **Simon Mervyn**: *Our position in regard to mining is that we must be part of the development of the mine. The integrity of the environment is very important for the First Nation of Yukon and we look forward to environmental protection. First and foremost.*

Hunting, gathering and fishing are important activities that sustain First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun cultural identity and well-being. Sharing traditional food is an important part of everyday life and Elders, who don't go out hunting or trapping anymore, often get moose meat from younger relatives, as **Betty Lucas** tells:

> *One of my sons or one of my grandsons always get moose for me, whenever I need it. Right now, I still got moose meat in the freezer, my son got moose this spring. I even got black bear meat. My husband killed a black bear for us, one time. He said someday you're going to eat it, you might want to try, he told me. Nice and fat. I ate it two times: I cooked ribs. I like the black bear meat; I like it better than moose.*

Catherine Germaine tells how getting meat and fish from her relatives helps her to get by on a small pension:

> *I manage quite well from my pension, because I have sons who go fishing and hunting for me, so I don't have to go to the grocery store. Two weeks ago, I got lingcod.*
>
> *When the mining comes it is there for some time, then it is gone. It is good for activities. Mining does lots of*

damage to the land, water and animal habitat. The air also gets polluted. First Nation people get their food from the land. It provides fish, moose, caribou, berries — all the food we need comes from the land. It is important to keep the land safe and protected for our generations to come.

Since the Victoria Gold Corp. mine is being built in the vicinity of Mayo traffic has increased a lot on the nearby road. Many community members take advantage of the new opportunities that come along. Still, concerns about pollution are voiced by Elders, who fear the negative impacts of the extractive industry on their livelihoods.

Nancy Hager tells how mining can disturb hunting:

Hunting practices really decreased. Because where Victoria Gold is, that's where everybody used to hunt. And it disturbs it. They have to have signs five miles around the mine area, saying you can't hunt. And it takes a lot of land away from where the moose are. And that's the same with Alexco; I told them too: 'You need to put signs saying, "not allowed to hunt", in a five-mile radius around the mine, because you could hit somebody.'

Catherine Germaine tells of the time she and her family lived in the area where mining occurs today:

When we stayed at Ladue Lake, we used to go to McQuesten Lake. And we went to Potato Hill, that's where my grandpa used to hunt gopher and during some winters they would trap there. They used to set snares for lynx and beaver. I know the area quite well. Now the mining is there — my husband had a cabin there, he turned it over to one of his sons, my other one also has a trapline.

We have a little creek with a cabin where we stayed, but after the mine came, I was afraid of drinking the water — at the time the miners said they put bleach in the water. I'm also afraid for the animals. There must be other ways of cleaning their mines or they should do it somewhere else. I understand that the companies have to make money, but they shouldn't pollute the environment.

Simon Mervyn reflects upon his own behaviours during the time before environmental rules and assessments were in place:

As a young man I used to haul fuel up the mountains — and I probably did more damage than anybody. Not intentionally, but that's how it used to be back then. There weren't any fines. That was prior to the treaty agreements.

Things changed with tighter environmental regulations following the signing of self-government treaties. The Keno Hill area reminds everyone what should not happen again.

> **Simon Mervyn**: *The disruption to the land is still there, it's still evident. There are junk containers everywhere.*

This major, not yet remediated mine site right around the corner of town enhances people's apprehension of what mining can lead to if not done extremely responsibly. It's not just the mines themselves though, roads have major impacts too. They make it easier for hunters to access an area, but also for wolves, thus increasing the pressure on the moose population.

> **Frank Patterson**: *So, for an example if a mine is going to make a road, then they have to get people's okay and then take it forward exactly the way they want, without destroying the land.*

Referring to resource management regulations, **Walter Peter** mentions that he doesn't need to be told how to manage the animals or the land. Traditional rules are laid out in Doolí, the set of rules that have been handed down orally over many generations:

> *Bringing people up here and trying to teach us? Nah! We have already been taught since we were small, because we got our own law, our own rules. And that was handed down to us through generation to generation way back then. And from my great-grandfather to my grandfather right to my dad and to me now. Those rules got to be followed. You break it, you're going to have hard time. This is true. You don't break it.*

In recent years Yukon First Nations were going to court over the consultation process for the industrial development of the Peel Watershed, a part of the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Traditional Territory.

Walter Peter voices his opinion on the pressure the land is under:

> *It's not good at all, that's what changed, a lot of things changed. Nowadays the premier wants to start a mine down in Peel River and all that. We tell him no, never open nothing. We're fighting and going to court over that.*


Jimmy Johnny

Jimmy Johnny: *I worked at Keno Hill mining for a few years. I went guiding every season. I've been going out to the Peel River Watershed since 1958. I guided and hunted out there and I encountered a lot of non-remediated mining sites. Mining can be good for people – they say we're going to make money. But they have to learn how to respect the land and water. There should be no pollution.*

"Nature is the best healer"

Walter Peter: *You know what's the best healer there is? If you're down, frustrated or want to commit suicide or whatever? You don't feel too good about anything? The best medicine is if you go out in nature. You forget about everything. Clear your mind, breathe the fresh air and listen to the birds as you walk. Then you sit down beside the river, you watch the river running by, see ducks, beavers swimming around. And watch the driftwood coming down. You know, it clears you mind.*

Simon Mervyn explains how the land is important to people:

Our Elders used to tell us: If something bothers you, get out on the land, get in your boat, get your little pack sack and toothbrush and go! Don't go back until you feel better.

Elders are also concerned about the impact mining had on people's health. Many people are fighting illnesses that are associated with a typical western sedentary lifestyle and diet.

Frank Patterson: *It's a very touchy subject when it comes to the land, because of the plants – there is medicine all over the place. And also, the animals, because we need them when we live off the land. We know for a fact that a lot of the stuff that you buy in the stores is not really good for you.*

Betty Lucas explains what a day out trapping looks like, getting a lot of exercise:

It's fun to trap, people don't even know about it. I've been spending most of my life in the bush. Life is better there, than what's going on in town. You do a lot of running around, you do a lot of working. In town here I sit all day in the house. Oh, I get bored every day. In the bush – there you do lots of things. If you got to tan the moose skin, you got to get busy.

The late **Helen Buyck** talks about how things changed when people settled down and the impact of the mines:

> *Now it has changed because the Indian people don't move around anymore like they used to. They just live more or less like. . . they got a house in town, and they live there and only in fall time they hunt and get enough meat for the winter. It's not the same anymore. We're surrounded by mines – so we don't have – I think the moose and caribou they move away far, far away. Yeah. But there's still some around, you know.*

One of the reasons why environmental protection is so important to First Nations is because rivers, lakes and mountains are sentient beings, meaning they are alive and respond to how you treat them.

> **Simon Mervyn**: *We've been trained like that, all our lives – right from when we were kids, to respect the animals and the land. Everything has a spirit. And you respect it, you don't cut the tree down just for the sake of cutting it down. The same goes for animals, you only take as much as you need, and you use everything that you take.*

Walter Peter tells this story about respecting the river:

> *There is lots of stuff my dad told me. You always have great respect for the river. You do not make fun or talk about it. 'You know why', he told me? People say, 'river is not alive'. But that's a lie. River can hear you. If you talk about it can hear you, everything. So, you have to abide by the rules, to have respect for it. You don't talk any nonsense. The river, it's alive, it can hear what you're saying about it. 'Have respect', my daddy told me.*

Frank Patterson explains the many reasons why the water is important:

> *Well, first of all it's a trail for the fish and the animals to drink water. It's pure water and we use it for travel and also for sightseeing, and also of course mining needs water. So, that's why it's important to make sure that they do it right. We're not against mining though, we've been dealing with mining for a hundred years and more.*

Margaret Ball tells how placer mining impacts the creeks:

> *Mining, I don't know about mining, I don't know what to really think of it. It seems like they're spoiling the country, they dig up the earth here and there, and then just leave the garbage the way it is. And other people have to go up and clean up behind them, that's not nice. And then the water and the creeks, they used to be really clear, right now it's just like mud. It looks like dirty water.*

Lena Malcolm talks about not picking berries in the Keno area:

> *I walk up the hill too sometimes. Up the Keno way. We go hunt up that way, we stand there for a while. I can't pick no blueberries that way because too much mining. Dirty water maybe. They tell 'you don't pick no berries anymore'.*

> **Jimmy Johnny**: *The destruction of the land has a big impact on the animals and the fish. And my main concern is the water. We got to keep the water clean for us to survive. The water, that is the main thing, for us human beings and the animals and the fish. You know that's how you survive, through the water. It's a strong medicine too, it keeps us alive.*

A common problem associated with mining is the increase in availability of recreational drugs. **Catherine Germaine** reflects on this issue:

> *Drugs only started fifteen years ago, people bring it from other communities and sell to young people. They should encourage them more to get out on the land. And more than one week, better three weeks. Treatment happens out there too, while you are hunting. I think it is better to take them out on the land and show them the nice life they could have.*

She comments that it is the young men that seem to struggle most today:

> *I find with the twenty-year-old or so boys, they seem to be without traditional teachers. Somebody should be out there to teach them how to hunt beaver and make muskrat soup. My husband knew how to make it. Kids need more guidance after they get out of school, fathers are sometimes busy working, they don't want to spend time in the bush. There should be teachers available for young men, so they can provide for their family when they have one.*

Another commonly discussed issue concerns the use of technology. **Frank Patterson** explains how it's important to prioritize being on the land:

> *Life is putting those cellphones in a basket, going out on the land. That's where the healing is.*

Chief Simon Mervyn sums it up:

> *The biggest issue with mining is that we want them to clean up their mess. We don't want to pollute our land. We want to be able to take our grandchildren by the hand and walk right up that creek and say: You know what, there used to be a mine here, do you see it? No, it's all back to the natural state, right? That's what we want.*



About the Project

In June 2014, Gertrude Saxinger and Susanna Gartler proposed to conduct the study “LACE - Labour mobility and community participation in the extractive industries: Yukon” on First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Traditional Territory. As part of LACE, First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Chief and Council asked us to perform this oral history study on memories and experiences of Elders with mining. The opinions presented in this publication reflect those of the participants and not necessarily those of the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun.

Elizabeth Blair is a passionate photographer and a member of the White River First Nation who lives in Stewart Crossing. Her stunning pictures of local animals and plants are printed in this book. The pictures of animals and nature reflect the intimate relationship Yukon First Nations share with their lands and its inhabitants. Liz also helped set up some of the interviews that form the basis of this book.

Joella Hogan is a member of the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun living in Mayo. In her former role as Heritage Manager of the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun she facilitated the LACE project from day one. She is a passionate advocate for research and innovation as well as the small business owner of “the yukon soaps company”, combining her love for the land with successful entrepreneurship.

Chris Southcott is a professor of sociology at Lakehead University. He has been involved in community-based research in the circumpolar north for over 30 years. He is the Principal Investigator for Resources and Sustainable Development in the Arctic (ReSDA), with base funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada’s (SSHRC) Major Collaborative Research Initiatives program.

Valoree Walker, Yukon College in Whitehorse, has been the coordinator of the ReSDA project. She contributed endlessly to LACE with her organisational and emotional support.

Eileen Peter is a First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun citizen, and former member of the heritage department. She now resides in Calgary where she pursues her passion in Graphic Design.

Alistair Maitland is a visual storyteller who lives and works on the traditional territory of the Ta’an Kwäch'än Council and Kwanlin Dün First Nation territories in Yukon, Canada.

John Reid lives in Mayo with his family and works as Yukon College department head for community education and development, Northern Community Campuses.

Gertrude Saxinger has conducted long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Mayo and the Yukon Territory since 2014 for the LACE project. She is an adjunct researcher at Yukon College and assistant professor at the University of Vienna, Austria and a founding member of the Austrian Polar Research Institute.

Susanna Gartler has since 2014 conducted several long-term field stays in Mayo. This book is part of her PhD project "First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Re-Indigenization and Planning in the context of Extractivism" at the University of Vienna, Austria.

SUSANNA GARTLER

JOELLA HOGAN

GERTRUDE SAXINGER

EILEEN PETER

ELIZABETH BLAIR

CHRIS SOUTHCOTT

JOHN REID

VALOREE WALKER

ALISTAIR MAITLAND

Susanna and Gertrude would like to thank the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun for the fruitful collaboration which resulted in several outreach products so far:

Behind the Scenes in Yukon Mining: Work, camp and family life in Yukon mining today (2015) Stories collected in 2014/15. Full text with pictures from the presentation given by Gertrude Saxinger to the community of Mayo in October

Behind the Scenes in Mayo and Mining: Nacho Nyäk Dun Elders' Opinions on Mining and Community History (2016) Stories collected between June 2015 and March 2016 by Susa Gartler and Gerti Saxinger. Presentation given by Susanna Gartler to community of Mayo in July

Film 'Mining on First Nation Land: The First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun', 13 min. (2017) produced by the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun, filmed by Gertrude Saxinger, Robert Gebauer, Jörg Oschmann, and Susanna Gartler

Gertrude Saxinger and Susanna Gartler (2017) The Mobile Workers Guide. Fly-in/Fly-out & Rotational Shift Work in Mining. Yukon Experiences. Whitehorse, RESDA/First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun/Yukon College

Linklater, Leonard (2017). Mining Labour Relationships, big and small. CBC Radio Interview with Gerti Saxinger and Susa Gartler. Online at: https://soundcloud.com/cbcyukon/mining-labour-relationships-big-and-small

Joannou, Ashley (2017) Shovel ready: Researchers to publish guide on work life balance for prospective miners. Yukon News (April 2017). Online at: https://www.yukon-news.com/business/shovel-ready-researchers-to-publish-guide-on-work-life-balance-for-prospective-min

Gertrude Saxinger together with First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun (2018) "Community Based Participatory Research as a Long-Term Process: Reflexions on Becoming Partners in Understanding Social Dimensions of Mining in the Yukon", The Northern Review, 47: 187–207

Susanna Gartler and Gertrude Saxinger (2018) Memories of Mining. First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Elders Perspectives. Poster produced for the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun

Susanna Gartler (2018) Some Lessons from Yukon Cultural Centres and Heritage & Museum Organisations. Report produced for the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun

Sources and Further Readings

Aho, A. E. (2006) Hills of Silver. The Yukon's Mighty Keno Hill Mine. Madeira Park, Harbour Publishing

Abrams, L. (2016) Oral History Theory. New York, Routledge

Cruikshank, J. (1990) Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press

Cruikshank, J. (1998) The Social Life of Stories. Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory. Vancouver, UBC Press

Cruikshank, J. (2015) Oral History, Narrative Strategies, and Native American Historiography. In: *The Canadian Oral History Reader*. Llewellyn, K. R.; Freund, A. and N. Reilly (Eds.), 180 – 200. Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press

First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Website (2018) History. Online at: nndfn.com/history

MacDonald, L. E.T. and Bleiler, L. R. (1990) Gold & Galena. A History of the Mayo District. Mayo, Mayo Historical Society

Kovach, M. (2009) Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts. Toronto, University of Toronto Press

Peter, D. L, J. Hogan and First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Lands and Resources Department (2006) The History of the First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun. In: Heart of the Yukon. Bleiler, L. R.; Burn C. and M. O'Donoghue (Eds.), 82 – 133. Mayo, Village of Mayo

Portelli, A. (1997) The Battle of Valle Guilia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press

Profeit-Leblanc, L. (2005). Ruby Lips. In: *Me Funny*. Hayden Taylor, D. (Ed.), 145 – 157. Vancouver/Toronto/Berkeley, Douglas & McIntyre

Shearer, W., J. Hogan and B. Slater (2019) Keno Hill Silver Mining District Cultural Heritage Report. Final Draft March 2019.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2012). Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. Winnipeg

Winton, A. and J. Hogan (2015). "It's just natural": First Nation Family History and the Keno Hill Silver Mine in Canada's Yukon Territory. In: *Mining and Communities in Northern Canada: History, Politics, and Memory.* Keeling, A. and J. Sandlos (Eds.), 87 – 116. Calgary, University of Calgary Press

Northern Tutchone Place Names

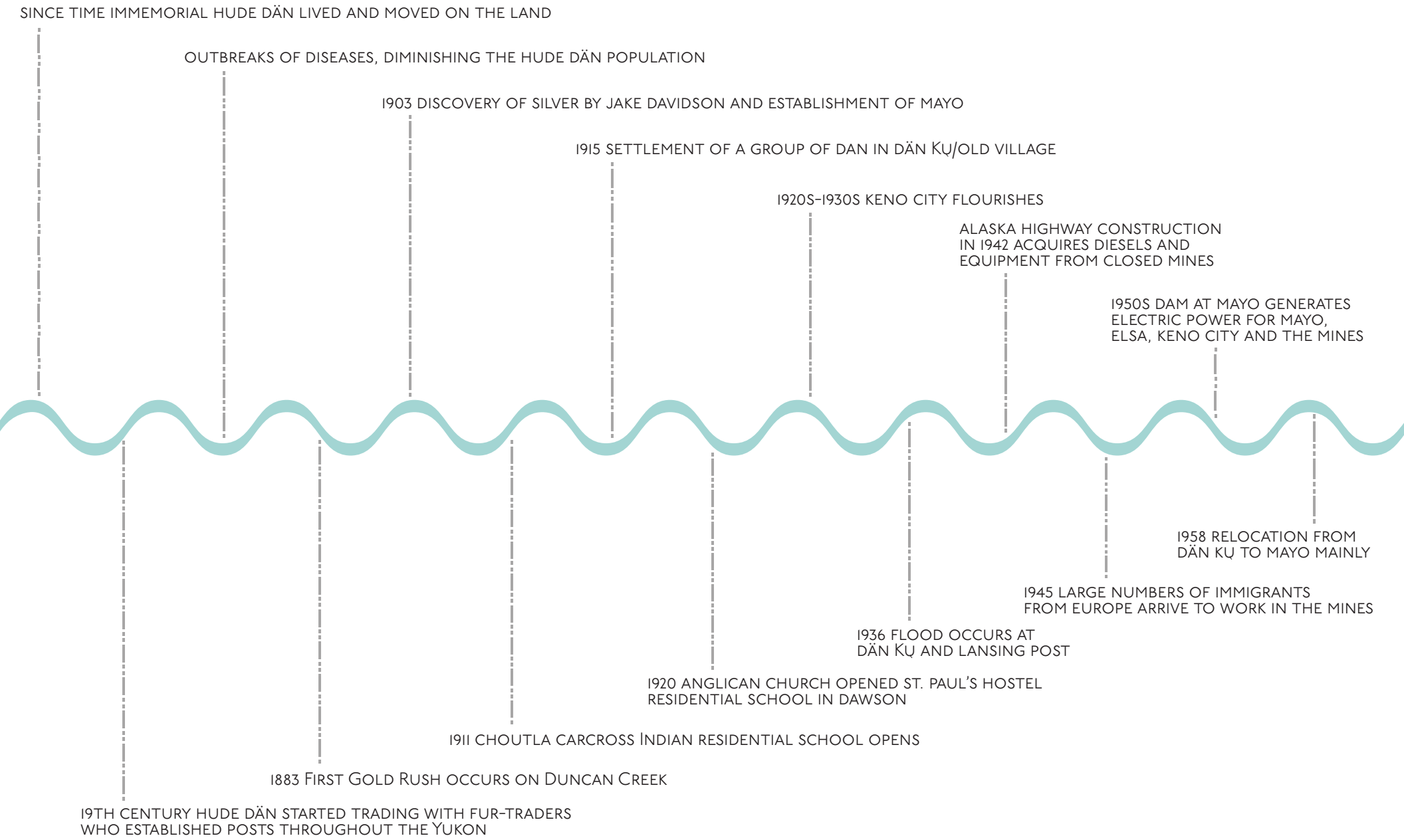
Nacho Nyäk Tegé	→	Stewart River
Et'o Nyäk Tegé	←	McQuesten River
Et'o Nyäk Män	→	McQuesten Lake
Tekwänt'e Män	←	Ethel Lake
Tthinimágé	→	No Gold Creek
Tegé Cho	←	Yukon River
Łyok Män	→	Reid Lake
Tu Nínlin	←	Fraser Falls
Tságro Män	→	Fork Lake
Tedze Nyäk	←	Mayo River

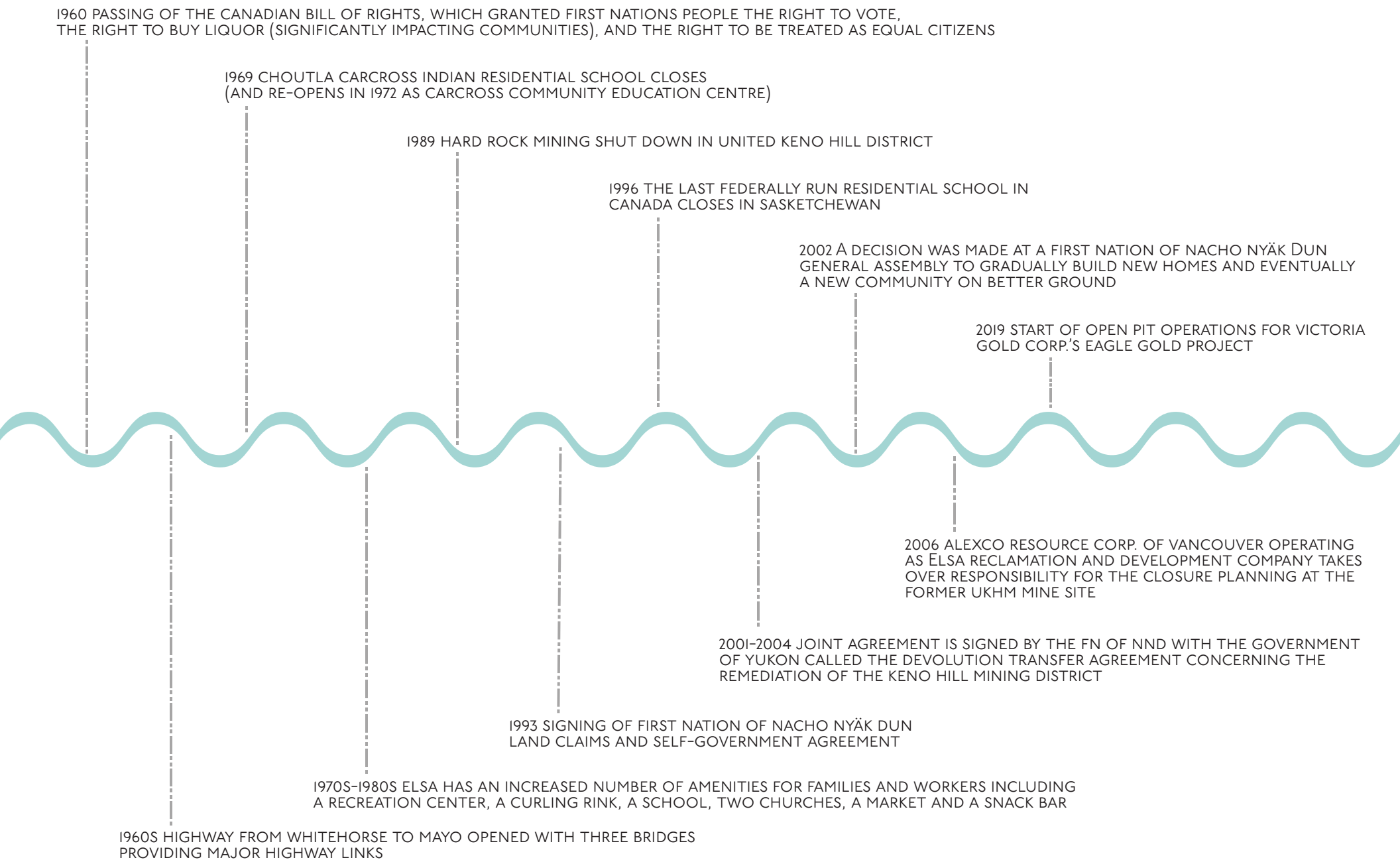
We acknowledge and honour that our language reflects where our people came from and that this diversity is reflected in the various spellings. The translations below come from the work of our "old Elders" mainly Sam & Lucy Peter and Mary Hager. More recently, they have been reviewed with Cathy Germaine.

It is only recently, that our languages were written down in collaboration with language speakers and linguists. There are usually many different acceptable spellings since there was never a universally agreed upon written form.

Source: Northern Tutchone Learning App © First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun, and in consultation with Catherine Germaine

A short timeline of relevant events




1960 PASSING OF THE CANADIAN BILL OF RIGHTS, WHICH GRANTED FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE THE RIGHT TO VOTE, THE RIGHT TO BUY LIQUOR (SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACTING COMMUNITIES), AND THE RIGHT TO BE TREATED AS EQUAL CITIZENS
1969 CHOUTLA CARCROSS INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL CLOSES (AND RE-OPENS IN 1972 AS CARCROSS COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTRE)
1989 HARD ROCK MINING SHUT DOWN IN UNITED KENO HILL DISTRICT
1996 THE LAST FEDERALLY RUN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL IN CANADA CLOSES IN SASKETCHEWAN
2002 A DECISION WAS MADE AT A FIRST NATION OF NACHO NYÄK DUN GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO GRADUALLY BUILD NEW HOMES AND EVENTUALLY A NEW COMMUNITY ON BETTER GROUND
2019 START OF OPEN PIT OPERATIONS FOR VICTORIA GOLD CORP.'S EAGLE GOLD PROJECT
2006 ALEXCO RESOURCE CORP. OF VANCOUVER OPERATING AS ELSA RECLAMATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMPANY TAKES OVER RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CLOSURE PLANNING AT THE FORMER UKHM MINE SITE
2001-2004 JOINT AGREEMENT IS SIGNED BY THE FN OF NND WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF YUKON CALLED THE DEVOLUTION TRANSFER AGREEMENT CONCERNING THE REMEDIATION OF THE KENO HILL MINING DISTRICT
1993 SIGNING OF FIRST NATION OF NACHO NYÄK DUN LAND CLAIMS AND SELF-GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT
1970S-1980S ELSA HAS AN INCREASED NUMBER OF AMENITIES FOR FAMILIES AND WORKERS INCLUDING A RECREATION CENTER, A CURLING RINK, A SCHOOL, TWO CHURCHES, A MARKET AND A SNACK BAR
1960S HIGHWAY FROM WHITEHORSE TO MAYO OPENED WITH THREE BRIDGES PROVIDING MAJOR HIGHWAY LINKS

Dän Hùnày – Our People's Story tells the stories of thirteen First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Elders and how they experienced over one century of interaction with the mining industry in the Yukon Territory. First Nation of Nacho Nyäk Dun Elders experienced several major shifts during the last century: The former nomads settled at the onset of galena ore extraction, then relocated to the townsite of Mayo in 1958. Some men went to work in Elsa and Keno - the former mining dwellings nearby - and some women worked as baby-sitters, at the restaurant and at the hospital in Mayo. Contemporary concerns with the industry are discussed too – such as pollution, economic benefits, local employment and increased pressure on wildlife due to easier access via mining roads.

YukonCollege

NA-CHO NYÄK DUN
BIG RIVER PEOPLE
MAYO, YUKON

ReSDA
RESOURCES and SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT in the ARCTIC