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### **“My Lesson”**

When my younger sister was named, we had planned a potlatch for many weeks. She was very honoured to receive the name which was once my grandmother's. All seemed to be exultant, there was food, gifts, song, and dance. I saw smiles on even the oldest of our elders. I didn't believe that any thing could go wrong, but as my sister handed the blanket she was wearing to the chief, white men came between them yelling angrily. Apparently one of the men was of great merit, and he told our chief that it was illegal for us to have such a gathering.

For many years we have had potlatches, it was a way for us to share wealth, to celebrate life, death, marriage, and names. Taking away our dances, and our traditions was like erasing who we were from the face of the earth. We would not stand for any one to take away what represented so much to us!

Although the whites had told us to stop, we would some times sneak to an area in bush so we would not be caught, and in that area we would wear our masks, tell our stories, and celebrate the way of our people before the white man came.

My mother had once told me that the white man was trying to make us more like them, and I didn't understand why. I didn't understand why they wouldn't let us be when we had not done harm to them. I did not think that it was awful to be different from each other. Now at this age I know that they were intolerant people, who seemed not to like any thing that was different from them.

I remember when I was fourteen white men told the parents in our community that they would benefit us more if we went to the white man's special schools. I remember my mother and father both weeping as my sister and I sat on a trailer with many other children, and watching them shrink smaller as we drove further away.

At the school I was given the name Catherine, I was not allowed to speak my own

language, and I was not allowed to have my own beliefs. I was taught to read, write, and pray. If any of us misbehaved we were beaten, we were not shown love, and we did not show love. To rebel we spoke our language out loud, calling many of the nuns bad names, and some tried to run away. During one winter several children had gotten a fever, and many of the ill children died, my sister being one of them. After my sister died I was lost, I had wished that I could have gone with her, instead I stayed in that purgatory.

When I was finally sent home I did not know who I was, I did not fit in with white people, nor did I fit in with my own people. My family did not know what to do with me, and I grew into a river of depression, anger and hate. For many years I drank to try to console my self, but I found that could not help.

I could have continued this way to death until my mother one day took me to the forest where my sister was named and smudged me. She told that me I needed to find my self, to cleanse my self, and to save my self. I told her that I did not know how to do such things because I didn't know who I was. I told her of how I hated the white man for what they had made me become, which was a monster in my eyes. My mother took my hand and told me the story of our people, she told me not to hate the bottle but to hate the poison in it. She told me I was not lost, because if I looked hard enough I would realize that I was on the path that the creator had chosen for me, and to take each lesson I had endured and to use them to benefit my people. I now know who I am, I know my traditions, I am not ashamed of my self or of my people. I am very old now, and my life has taught me much, so as I give you this story, learn from it, don't let any one take away who you are, and if you fall down, or forget, there will always be a reminder to help you pick your self back up.

I teach you what I have been taught, so you can teach the same to your children. If we continue this, we have truly lost nothing, and we will never be forgotten.