

# A New Skin for an Old Drum: Changing Contexts of Yukon Aboriginal Bahá’í Storytelling

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**Abstract:** This article examines the construction of the religious self through the storytelling processes of Yukon Aboriginal Bahá’ís. Previous anthropological work has studied the social factors involved in the maintenance of faith amongst Aboriginal Bahá’ís. This sociological study focuses on the manner in which people put together stories to construct their contemporary Bahá’í identity. Examining recorded life histories, public stories, and archival materials, I present one perspective on how people story their religious identities in changing historical contexts.

## Background to the Study

In 2003, I was the recipient of funding from the Northern Research Institute to conduct a qualitative research project. The focus of the project was twofold: to recuperate materials about the history of Yukon Bahá’ís,<sup>1</sup> and to record life histories of Aboriginal women in this community.

Between the years 1960–1975, 204 people became Bahá’ís in the Yukon, 104 of which were from one family—the Johns (Tagish Nation).<sup>2</sup> Since the beginning of the religion in the Yukon (1953), materials such as oral recordings, archival paper records, family pamphlets, and other written works have become widely disseminated. My intent was to bring the materials together, catalogue them, and then deposit them in the Yukon Archives. There they would be protected for posterity and accessible to local Bahá’ís, the interested public, and researchers.<sup>3</sup>

The initiative to record life histories of Aboriginal women arose from my doctoral work on religion and identity in the lives of elderly Canadian Bahá’í women.<sup>4</sup> I was not able to include any Aboriginal women in this study (1990s) because the women who were early Bahá’ís had passed away. And

although I had been advised to record Yukon stories, I was not able to travel to the North for various reasons. It was serendipitous for me, then, to acquire a position at Yukon College in 2002.

In my first few months in Whitehorse I learned a number of significant things that encouraged me to embark on further research here. Aboriginal elders had approved documentation of their stories and histories in the English language—a significant boon and encouragement for a non-Aboriginal researcher. I knew the anthropological research of fifty years of Yukon cultural history would provide contextual material, and recent work<sup>5</sup> offered the opportunity to study rare interviews of deceased and contemporary Bahá’ís. As well, the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Bahá’í Faith in the Yukon was to take place in 2003. This meant that local people and those that had moved away would be coming together for a reunion to celebrate and share their reminiscences—a prime opportunity for a researcher to engage in participant observation and documentation.<sup>6</sup> Finally, I learned that no *in-depth* life history project had been conducted to record personal stories of religiosity, and no full story had been contributed to local families’ histories. There was, then, a possibility to contribute to local women’s history by recording life stories. (For those interested in further details about my methodology, see this note<sup>7</sup>).

As a sociologist, I am interested in how people, particularly women, make meaning of their lives and how they translate that meaning into action through social processes. I share a community of meaning with the participants based on our membership in the same religion. I also share, with contemporary scholars, an academic interest in agency, resistance, and strategies for survival. My academic work is grounded in symbolic interactionism, which recognizes that identities are multi-dimensional, and personal stories are filled with ambiguities, tensions, and contradictions, as well as intersubjectivity.<sup>8</sup> However, if you are looking for an analysis that would tease out such findings, you will not find it here.<sup>9</sup> This article focuses, instead, on experiences the individuals willingly offered and found important to mention, in the context of their becoming, or being Bahá’ís. In no way is it an authoritative explanation of Bahá’í storytelling in the Yukon. It remains for Yukon Aboriginal peoples themselves, if and when they deem it necessary, to explore and interpret the full range of elements involved in identity formation and sacralization.

### **Long Ago Stories: Types and Functions**

Much has been written about the importance of oral tradition in the lives of peoples worldwide, and a large academic literature has been established,

which documents genres of narratives and many aspects of storytelling, such as how stories are told, and what functions they hold for listeners.<sup>10</sup> The sharing of memories and narratives in a group provides significant “clues to the past,” and “windows on the making and remaking of individual and collective consciousness.”<sup>11</sup> Stories are told to live with and to make sense of social change and everyday relations. They offer metaphors, analogies, and storylines that provide a foundation upon which to build present-day understandings. As well, people will find new meaning in old stories according to their contemporary cultural environment.

Yukon Aboriginal storyteller and cultural educator, Louise Profeit-LeBlanc<sup>12</sup> has identified four categories of stories in Yukon Aboriginal traditional storytelling: *classic* stories, which include the creation story—for example, how crow made the universe, how man became a human being; *regional* stories, which resemble folklore stories from other cultures such as how the south wind came to be, and which talk about certain Yukon environmental characteristics and about relationships of people with actual places; *familial* stories are those that are specific to individual families; and *communal* stories are accounts of events that took place in the local community (usually also kin-based).

The past functions of Yukon First Nations’ storytelling tradition were many. They helped people know about the range of human virtues and about how people overcame animal qualities and became fully human; they taught about the law of the land and the history of the people; they inspired by sharing tragedies; and they entertained with humorous stories. Many traditional stories were used to orient people to the social order, and to their position in that order, as well as to teach them how to survive on the land.<sup>13</sup>

In listening to sound recordings of early public meetings and recorded life histories, as well as reading and listening to contemporary accounts, an important function of these present-day stories seems to be the same as in the past—teaching people *how* to live. For people in this study, survival is not about life and death in the bush, but rather about living in societies whose interventions and attractions are a challenge in maintaining a spiritual orientation to life. People sharing their own life story, and the stories they have learned, continues to be an essential part of the ongoing construction of personal and public Bahá’í identity. People choose to tell certain stories over others according to what is important to them and their audience, as well as to conform to their community’s expectations of storytelling. They also shape their accounts using particular stories that have been accorded significance by elders in previous and contemporary times.

While traditional classic and regional stories have been used to explain the Bahá’í Faith in the twentieth century, a more general practice today is for Yukon Aboriginal Bahá’ís to use familial (family) stories and individual stories, as I will explore later.<sup>14</sup> It must be noted that, while many of these people come from an extended family and hold a common kinship (Tagish), there are First Nations people I cite here who are from other Yukon First Nations.

### **Prayers, Prophecies, and Dreams**

The stories being conveyed about the beginnings of this religion in the Yukon extend back fifty years, but the foundations for many people’s adherence to the Bahá’í Faith are drawn from much older stories from the late 1800s and early 1900s.<sup>15</sup> In the narratives of the first generation of people who became Bahá’ís in the 1960s, I found three major themes—prayers, prophecies, and dreams.

#### *Prayers*

In every life story or public presentation of life history, prayer was identified as an essential part of living. The function of prayer—to supplicate for God’s grace and to spiritually guide families in their everyday life—is a touchstone in the life stories. People identified their grandmother’s (or great-grandmother’s) prayers as being influential to their spiritual growth and to becoming Bahá’ís.

Louise Profeit-LeBlanc: I’m from the Northern Tutchone Nation ... I was raised in Mayo ... I’ve always been aware that spirituality is an important part of life. And I think that that was because of my training from my grandma ... she taught me ... you should pray everyday ... and ask for guidance and give thanks ... she just brought me up like that.<sup>16</sup>

Doris McLean similarly traces the spiritual heritage of her family through the wisdom of her grandmothers:

So we know that, because of the wisdom of the elders. It [accepting the Bahá’í religion] wasn’t a “fly by night.” They had a lot to think about. So my family, really, in their wisdom ... because they had a mother on my father’s side, that would really pray [Mariah Johns]. And on my mother’s side—they say that there was a ... greatest shaman ... her grandmother. Her name was Tudeshgíá.ma’ ... that she was so powerful that they said she even walked on

water ... And that she did healing and things like this. She was a great shaman, shaman lady. And I imagine a lot of the things that she had is passed down to my family, whereas a lot of them are dreamers. And they'd pray a lot ... they always had that spiritual connection.<sup>17</sup>

### *Prophecies*

There are a number of prophecy narratives among Yukon Aboriginal shamans, including those known to the Aboriginal people through oral history, and those documented by anthropologists and early Christian missionaries. The Aboriginal perspective about the prophecies, contrary to the belief of Christian missionaries, asserts that some of these shamans were divinely inspired and foretold future events. This is a stance, as Cruikshank points out, that "argues for the legitimacy of oral tradition as a valid historical perspective."<sup>18</sup>

There are a few stories told by the Bahá'ís that refer to the shamans<sup>19</sup> and their prophecies, which are linked to the advent of the Bahá'í religion. Ida Calmegane (daughter of Angela Sidney of Tagish-Tlingit descent) retells one highly-prized story as she heard it from her mother: In the mid-1800s, Major—a "big medicine man"—died during a winter hunting trip and was then given a shallow burial by his fellow clan members, who planned to return and give him a proper burial later.<sup>20</sup> Some time passed and another hunting party in the vicinity heard a voice calling from under a pile of stones and gravel. Major was "able to read their minds" and direct them to help him out. Subsequently, he was taken back to his people and foretold many things to come.<sup>21</sup> Of interest to this article is the fact that he said there would be two men who would come from the East, like two stars, and if the Indian people followed their teachings, everything would be all right. Later it was interpreted that the central figures of the Bahá'í religion fit this description: the two Messengers, Bahá'u'lláh and His forerunner the Báb, who were born in the Middle East.<sup>22</sup>

As well, another prophecy concerning the appearance of a nine-legged animal that would nurture the people is recounted in past and present stories. As Angela Sidney observes, the elders understood that the animal symbol was a spiritual metaphor; during her lifetime (1902–1991), they were able to recognize the meaning and the fulfillment of this prophecy:

Tells about how it's going to be the last day someday. So he [Major] said, "It's not going to happen right away. Its going to be a long time yet," he said. "And," he said, "That animal is going to have nine legs. A nine-legged animal is going to be our food." And that is

the one us Indians think maybe that's Bahá'í. The Bahá'í Assembly has nine points. That's what we think. Well nothing happened like that until Bahá'í people started coming here telling things like that. That's why we think—my family—we think that's what he meant, because there is no animal that has nine legs. And he said, "That's going to be your food, isn't it?" It's just like food. So there's lots of us that joined in.<sup>23</sup>

Prophecies for Northern Tutchone people had similar teachings. These prophecies are accorded present day meaning by Aboriginal Bahá'ís because they resonate with the existence of two Prophets in the Bahá'í religion as well as the foundational Bahá'í teaching, namely the oneness of humanity. By remembering and telling about her grandmother's teachings (circa 1950s), Louise Profeit-Le Blanc constructs a narrative account in the year 2000 that confirms traditional teachings for her, and her belief that they have come true:

... Cause when I was young, she used to say ... "there's gonna be two medicine men ... come here ... they're gonna bring us medicine. When they come ... they're gonna make everybody go under one big tent," ... You know, "Chinamen, even the black one" ... "White man, Indian, gonna get together" ... "under that tent."<sup>24</sup>

The metaphorical spiritual imagery that Louise's grandmother shared with her is contextualized for the reader here in the following quote from the Bahá'í writings written in the early 1900s:

Bahá'u'lláh has drawn the circle of unity. He has made a design for the uniting of all peoples and the gathering of them all under the shelter of the tent of universal unity. This is the work of Divine Bounty, and we must all strive with heart and soul until we have the reality of unity in our midst. As we work so will strength be given to us.<sup>25</sup>

#### *Dreams and Visions*

While shamans had a vision of future events, First Nations elders were also visited by dreams and visions. Keish (Skookum Jim Mason) is one such outstanding example, and his experience would become significant to many Aboriginal communities in the Yukon.

The "white man's" version of the discovery of Klondike gold at Bonanza Creek has become legendary and continues to fascinate people. For those unfamiliar with these stories, they highlight the "conquest" of the "frontier,"

and have obscured the key parts that Keish and his family played.<sup>26</sup> Nowadays, this story has been reworked by Aboriginal people and, with the production of several films and a book, it has become part of local and national First Nations history, aired regularly on Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN).<sup>27</sup>

As an example of this revisionist story, Calvin Lindstrom (2003) presents the saga of Keish (Skookum Jim) from the point of view of his descendants.<sup>28</sup> In Lindstrom's film, the story is told about how Keish, with the help of his pious sister-in-law, Mariah Johns, followed the proper behaviour toward animals and thereby received good fortune. The narrative in the film states that:

Wealth Woman appeared and thanked him for saving her life when she was a frog. To thank Jim she gave him a walking stick. The end was covered with gold. Pointing to the east to a light in the sky she said, "not that way, that is for someone else" ["that is for others" is the wording given by Jim's descendants]. Pointing north she said, "Go that way." He did not know what the dream meant until after he found gold in the Klondike. In early June of 1896 Jim and his two nephews, along with their wives, travelled 600 miles down the Yukon River and into the history books.

Though the two directions pointed out by Wealth Woman (the mythological being of the Tagish Tlingit)<sup>29</sup> are an integral part of Jim's vision, the direction promised to "the others" was the obscure part of the story. The descendants of Skookum Jim who have become Bahá'ís interpret this to mean that Jim received the material riches while his descendants received the spiritual riches.<sup>30</sup>

The film makes these connections for the audience and then takes up the twentieth century statement of Pete Sidney, Mariah's grandson (and a great nephew of Keish), with the narrator stating:

[He] said that all four of Mariah's children,<sup>31</sup> through their own visions and dreams, had been inspired to embrace the Bahá'í Faith. Pete felt that the light from the east is the Bahá'í Faith and Mariah's family was shown the light because she is the one that paid that frog. Today there are one hundred Bahá'ís who are the descendants of Mariah, and the Faith continues to attract Yukon First Nations people.

Today, with a retrospective view, First Nations citizens know that Skookum Jim's vision was a prophetic sight into a future that would forever

change the lives of Yukon Aboriginal peoples, materially and spiritually. The discovery of gold and the building of the Alaska Highway introduced non-Aboriginal people into their territory.<sup>32</sup> The white people brought radical social change, Christianity, and eventually, as the people of my study noted, the Bahá'í religion.

The dream of Keish, it appears, serves as a meta-communal narrative. While Keish did not live to hear about the religion during his lifetime (so he did not become a Bahá'í), his prescient dream provides part of the framework upon which his descendants have ordered their construction of belief and experience. In the early 1960s, within a few years of each other, a number of well-known and respected Yukon elders (most, but not all, from the Tagish people) became Bahá'ís. This influx of elders is noteworthy in terms of both personal and group identity formation. The elders adopted the Bahá'í principles and teachings, and used stories of their own dreams, experiences, and new understandings to socialize younger people of their extended family.

The fulfillment of the spiritual part of the prophecy was seen by the elders as a confirmation of their traditional beliefs. For example, Patsy Henderson, a nephew of Keish,<sup>33</sup> is said to have recognized the progressive connection between the old clan beliefs and the Bahá'í teachings. Here, Clara Schinkel recalls Patsy Henderson's interpretation from the 1960s and uses that to narrate her own contemporary understanding of the continuity of spiritual verities between the old and new religions:

When Patsy Henderson declared [became a Bahá'í] in Carcross, I remember that. I'd always repeat his words. Because he said that when the white people came they took the clan system away. And then new people came and they gave it back to us—better. You know, because the laws ... the laws are, how should I say it? The clan system is built on the laws of the Bahá'í Faith. So we know that's eternal, you know, that it's always been there. These laws are all spiritual laws. It's ... it's something that's just passed on, and Bahá'u'lláh just really re-emphasized it. It reminded people that you had this before, you know. And that's what Patsy Henderson said. And the [Bahá'í] Faith brought back the clan system stronger than before.<sup>34</sup>

Clara obviously attributed great importance to Patsy Henderson's understanding of the effect the Bahá'í teachings had on regenerating those traditional values upon which the religious system of the clan was based. She also expresses her belief that the Bahá'í teachings about the continuous

covenant between the Creator and mankind<sup>35</sup> resonate with her own understanding of the spiritual truths in the clan system.

Another influential story comes from a dream that elder Dora Wedge had in 1948. Her family knew that her dreams contained great meaning and that they always came true. The younger people of the family remember her telling them about this dream on the very morning she awoke from it. It heralded her family's entry into the Bahá'í religion, and has become an integral part of their Bahá'í life stories. Here, Doris McLean (Dora's niece) relates the dream:

Well we were children. My Aunt Dora got up one morning ... "Gee ... you know, I had this dream last night!" she said. "I don't know what this dream means and I don't know who it was that I dreamt about," she said. "And I went to this strange place." She said, "There was Annie, there was Leslie, there was you, Doris," she said, "and myself. We were in this boat," and she said, "we were floating around in this boat." And she said, "It was a big lake or big water," she said. "All of a sudden," she said, "there was stairs leading right up into the sky," she said. "And we landed the boat, and we walked up these stairs," she said. "When we got up to the top," she said that, "we ran ... we seen the most beautiful place," she said, "this most beautiful building—strange looking building," she said. "I never seen a building like that before," she said. "There was flowers ... it was just so beautiful". She said, "Standing in the doorway was this man," she said. "He looked different. He wasn't Indian and nor was he white," she said. "I don't know who he was," she said.<sup>36</sup>

Annie Austin (Dora's daughter) recalls, moreover, that her mother said, "[T]his man was standing outside the house ... the gentleman had a long beard and a long gown and waving for us to come in, come in. The house was full of many, many people, everyone having a good time laughing and happy."<sup>37</sup>

More than twelve years later, in 1953, when visiting a family member, Dora was reported to have been astonished to see a picture of the building in her dream, and another photo of the man who welcomed her (Sir 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, son of the Prophet-Founder, Bahá'u'lláh).<sup>38</sup> After making inquiries, she learned about the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith and then became a Bahá'í. Other members of her family would follow in her footsteps. In 1980 she went on pilgrimage to the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel, and found herself standing in the exact spot she stood in the dream, at the bottom of

a mountain; this was Mount Carmel. This last experience she incorporated into the retelling of her Bahá'í story in which the totality of her dream was realized.

Aunt Dora's dream is a familial/kinship story and it has also now become a larger narrative identified with the Yukon (it has been broadcast often on national Aboriginal television).<sup>39</sup> Like the vision of Keish, Aunt Dora's dream is seen to be prophetic—not that she or Keish were considered prophets, but that their dreams gave indications of future events.

Nowadays, the extended family of Dora use her dream in narrative accounts to illustrate a person's mystical connection to the world of dreams, and to show that this dream has become manifest in reality. As well, for Dora's family, the story of the dream tacitly serves to affirm their choice to become Bahá'ís. In their accounts and many others, Aboriginal people would be welcomed into the Bahá'í religion, as Dora and her family were in the dream, and they would become active in service and governance, locally and internationally.<sup>40</sup>

Another well-known account is that of Chief Albert Isaac of Aishihik, who had a vision during a near death experience in 1957:

The Chief ... [told] the story of a stirring spiritual experience he had three years ago, a story which he apparently has told to many of the Yukon Indians. As I understand the story, he was in the hospital and close to death. As he described it, in broken English, he considered himself dead for two days and walking down the broad highway that forked to heaven and hell. Beyond the fork—on the way to heaven—a Man with a long flowing beard stopped him and talked with him. He reverently described this Man as "God" and told of being asked, "What do you drink?" and his honest answer, "liquor!" The Man replied, "Is not the water I created good enough for you?" He then showed him a small object of unusual shape and design and told the Chief he was sending him back home. Chief Isaac then went on to relate how he seemed to miraculously and quickly visit New York and California, and then suddenly found himself in the hospital bed again feeling well—returned from the dead.<sup>41</sup>

Three years after this dream, Chief Isaac visited Ted Anderson<sup>42</sup> and, after sharing the story of the dream, he was shown a photograph of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The four people present witnessed his deep emotion as he identified this person as the man in the dream.<sup>43</sup> Upon hearing about the Bahá'í teachings, he recognized their import for his people and vowed to share them.

The three dreams mentioned here incorporate the universal metaphor of travel in seeking spiritual enlightenment. In Keish's dream, he was instructed to journey north to receive his reward. Chief Isaac travelled great distances and received lessons for his earthly life. Dora Wedge and members of her family travelled by canoe to another land where they were welcomed into a new community. Using dreams in contemporary times to teach others is supported by and continues the construction of the spiritual self in Yukon traditional legends. In the "old time stories" women and men travelled through visions or dreams to other realms of being, where they had various experiences and then returned with stories, and sometimes material objects and/or lessons and songs, for their people.<sup>44</sup>

It is well-known in the field of narrative studies that stories are not static; they are, as has been mentioned previously, living texts that inform and socialize people, and enable them to understand their position in present-day society. The people that use Chief Isaac's story are not part of his clan, yet they have adopted his story and incorporated it as part of Yukon Bahá'í history. Similarly, the stories of the shamans are about people from diverse clans. In sharing these accounts, people actually model traditional expectations to use dream content to teach others, as well as to honour the ancestral matrix. Most importantly, it seems that sharing these dreams, today, functions to provide a continuum to the collective history of the Aboriginal Bahá'ís in the Yukon.

### **White Society and Christian Teachings: Stepping Stones to Change**

The role of adopted (or adapted to) culture is also very evident in Yukon contemporary narratives. Losing the nomadic lifestyle and having to adapt to white society caused a falling away of Aboriginal peoples from traditional culture. They were faced with the manifold advantages and disadvantages that the larger civilization offered. The older generation grew up in residential schools, and their descendants attended Christian schools and churches, and were cared for in Christian hospitals. These Whitehorse residents explain their experiences with this new way of living and being:

*Ronald Bill: I was one of them ... born in 1936 ... and just like from stone age to jet age ... Yeah, we used to live out in the bush year round ... When we moved here to town, nine years old, I was forced to go to school ... It was good. I learned ... teach us how to read and do math ... But one of the things they teach here, like forgetting your culture, was wrong, eh?*<sup>45</sup>

*Edwin Scurvey*: Fifty years ago Indian people were very independent. They hunted and trapped and lived off the land, kind of leading a nomadic life ... and were very peaceful ... Modern civilization spoiled that. Meaning I've gotten used to electric lights, I have to turn on my radio in the morning to listen to my CBC news, or it's not a day.<sup>46</sup>

It was not unusual for the Bahá'ís in these small communities to have, within their families, people who were affiliated with various denominations of Christianity. This was a direct result of the mission school system at the turn of the century that took children and placed them in schools run by the Christian denominations.

*Doris McLean*: There was my mother's ... generation. They went to mission schools. They put the fear of God into them, the message was forced on them, they were compelled to accept and give up their language, their beliefs, their Aboriginal identity. And they were taught that they should not teach us the language ... like the Tagish or the Tlingit, because they were forbidden to speak the language.<sup>47</sup>

In later years (1940–50s), the Sunday schools and vacation bible summer schools (Anglican, Baptist, Roman Catholic, and so on) became a welcome attraction to the young children of the village. These schools were often the only organized event happening in the community on a regular basis.

*Doris McLean*: And my mother ... did not worry about what church we went to, as long as we learned about God. So some of us went to a Catholic Sunday school, some went to the Anglican Sunday school, and I chose to go to the Baptist Sunday school. So I grew up as a very young child, you know in kindergarten type of thing, going to Sunday school. And going to all kinds of Sunday schools, actually.<sup>48</sup>

In the 1960s, as people came to know about the Bahá'í religion, their Bahá'í activity increased and their church connections decreased, or in some cases were abruptly halted. Within this cohort of people there are memories of some kindly church members; however, when the new religion started to gain a following, some church leaders directed people not to associate with the Bahá'ís. Certain young people were told not to pursue their interest in this new Faith, but these warnings did not deter them.

In the more tolerant religious environment of the late 1980s another orientation toward religiosity is seen in the life of Angela Sidney. She was a staunch Anglican from her young adulthood, and then in her late 80s became a Bahá'í—one of the last people in her extended family to do so. She was able to maintain some connection to the Anglican Church at the same time that she began to understand and practice the beliefs of her new-found faith. As well, she was able to connect and reconcile ideas from the Shamanism taught to her by her parents with Anglicanism and with the Bahá'í teachings.<sup>49</sup>

One hundred years of learning Christian teachings and parables has provided Aboriginal peoples with literacy and a new lexicon to enrich their religious experience and enhance their narrative creation.

Ronald Bill remembers his own course of study in this regard:

Well I read and became more interested [in the Bahá'í Faith]. And I looked for proofs ... When ... you look for proofs you get more and more convinced, eh? And I did a lot of reading on different subjects ... The book that really helped me too is the Bahá'í World Faith ... I did ... about nine years of study ...<sup>50</sup>

As a matter of course, almost all of the Aboriginal people were immersed early in Christian teachings and studies. The new Bahá'ís, likewise, constructed their stories through Christian terminology as well as the Bahá'í worldview in order to understand new religious concepts and spiritual laws. For example, this story about Peter Johns indicates that he was interested in Bible study and used his Christian learning to investigate the Bahá'í Faith. As his daughter Clara Schinkel explains:

When he went to the mission school ...[he] was taught to be a lay reader in the church. And he really knew the Bible. He knew the Bible! And in his sleep, he would dream about it and give big sermons in his sleep ... And anyhow, when ...[he] started studying the [Bahá'í] Faith, he read all about Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and Christ's teachings, and he did a comparison on it.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, Doris McLean remembers how important it was to her that Bahá'ís had a knowledge of Christian teachings and prophecy, because she herself was well versed in the Bible, and that is *how* she understood religion. In other words, it is evident here that Doris's expectations of the manner in which the Bahá'í religion would be introduced would follow the way in which proofs are given in Christian teaching/storytelling using the Bible:

So we walked in there. And I remember just challenging those Bahá'ís, you know. I went in there and I said, "Okay you Bahá'ís, tell us about the Bahá'í Faith." Can you imagine? So, they had the best, you know, teacher in Jim Walton [Coastal Tlingit Bahá'í], who was there ... for me, anyway, because like I said, I was a Baptist, and he knew the Bible inside and out. He knew his history. And so he goes along and he tells me the history of Christianity, you know. After he finishes, clarifying all those writings and how the Bible was predicting revelations. And everything was predicting that there was going to be another Manifestation of God come to this earth, you know. And he goes through that, and he goes through the history. He tells me about the [central figures of the Bahá'í religion] Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian [Shoghi Effendi] —the whole history. He spoke to us from about nine in the evening 'til about five in the morning. We were, to say the least, we were just completely floored! When he left, in my heart I knew he was telling the truth. In my soul, I knew what he was telling me was the truth.<sup>52</sup>

### New Stories that Model Behaviour and Affirm Capacity

Another aspect of storying the religious self involves the relevance of the religion to people's lives. There is no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, and thus every individual assumes the responsibility to learn about the religion and can accept to serve in its administration if elected by other believers.

An all-Aboriginal Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly, composed of nine elders from the same clan, was established in Carcross in 1962. The importance of this governing council and the need to support and respect it, I was told, was readily grasped by the Aboriginal peoples. This is conveyed using a short and favourite familial story about the election of the Carcross Spiritual Assembly, and the dedication and devotion of a woman to carry out her electoral duty even in extreme circumstances: Elder Dora Wedge, suffering with a broken leg, walked twelve miles with her husband across a frozen lake to take part in the election process.<sup>53</sup>

By all accounts it seems that the heritage of traditional life handed down through oral stories and early childhood experiences formed a natural conceptual bridge for Aboriginal peoples' service in the Bahá'í community. Proselytization is forbidden in the religion, but sharing the Bahá'í message from one place to another (called "teaching") is encouraged. This activity was not constrained in any way by traditional customs for men or for women. "Travelling teaching" to other places is culturally congruent with the grandparents' semi-nomadic past—both sexes seasonally moved from

place to place to do their fishing, hunting, and berry picking, and to visit other people for trade, potlatching, and storytelling.

Many contemporary stories are told that exemplify this adaptation to new religious culture. The manner in which these particular stories are told are windows into Aboriginal people's agency and autonomy. The stories give voice to personal doubts and the emergence of self-confidence gained through practice and opportunity. Clara Schinkel shares how this happened in her own experience:

... In February of 1960, that April I was on the Assembly. And I don't know the first thing about administration, but I learned. It's just like you have on-the-job-training. You learn by doing it. And that's the best way, because it's good to learn by books, but by doing it—that's the way the Indian people learn, by doing things. That's how they teach, by doing things. And when I became a Bahá'í and this is the Bahá'í law ... to teach ... I accepted it just wholeheartedly. And then in 1963, that was the first major teaching trip [to Saskatchewan]. And after that I went to Alaska, I travelled in Alaska. I went to Kodiak Island. I was quite involved in the [Bahá'í] Faith ... in all aspects—as delegate at conventions, took part in gatherings. I think I attended every gathering that I could remember. We went to the Blackfoot Reserve, we went to Montreal [1987 Conference], went to Chicago [Intercontinental Conference 1967]. Just travelled to every gathering.<sup>54</sup>

The Yukon Aboriginal Bahá'ís became well-known nationally for their extensive travels in North America, as well as internationally for their response to the Bahá'í plans for community building. These trips were remembered with enthusiasm and nostalgia:

*Doris McLean:* I've ... left Canada eight times. I've been to the Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan, Iran, Europe, Haifa four times, Russia, Finland, and Slovenia, and Italy ... all those places. I would never gone to any of those places if I wasn't a Bahá'í. Especially as an Aboriginal Indian from Carcross, a village of 250 people at the best of times ... maybe 400. And when I went to Iran on pilgrimage ... it was amazing. To be an Indian person, an Aboriginal from a little village called Carcross, from the Tagish nation, to pay homage to the Báb [forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh], that I only read stories about ... For me ... for no other reason to go there, except I was a Bahá'í. To experience that in this day and age. You know I had the bounty of going all over the world practically ...<sup>55</sup>

## Revitalizing Culture

Another significant feature concerning the construction of self for early Bahá'ís was that the religion recognized the importance of maintaining Aboriginal culture and language. The story of Clara Schinkel and her goal of revitalizing the Tagish culture and language illustrates this point. It also in all likelihood will stand out as a historical narrative of import for her family and her people:

...The language, like, is dying out—the Tagish language.<sup>56</sup> I told Auntie Angela about what the Guardian [Shoghi Effendi, head of the religion 1921–1957] said about our culture and things ... and the language. So we got it started. We started language in Carcross and then it went into dancing ... It was mostly my family that was there. We were all Bahá'ís. We started using the Bahá'í principles to teach. And like I say, the clan system was very, very, very familiar [congruent] with the Bahá'í teachings ... the Bahá'í laws. So it was easy to teach them. And that's how the dance group got started. Just because Shoghi Effendi said that we should encourage the people to keep their cultural ways. [Later] when I first went to work for Council of the Yukon Indians [Council for Yukon Indians, now Council of Yukon First Nations], it was in cultural education. And we had tried to reintroduce the people to their culture. And I was the Director of Cultural Education then, so I got a lot of traditional camps started.<sup>57</sup>

At the same time as people were making efforts to revitalize and celebrate local Aboriginal culture, they were also greatly widening the social circle of their lives. The concept of the world as one country has been vigorously promoted in the teachings of the Bahá'í religion since its inception. While this world mindedness was not immediately understandable to most of the early Bahá'ís in Canada,<sup>58</sup> it gradually became realized through their engagement with the religious teachings; the social processes of Bahá'í community life; and particularly, as mentioned previously, their involvement with the global administrative structure of the religion.<sup>59</sup> In the Yukon, Aboriginal Bahá'ís received an unusually large number of international visitors from many diverse parts of the world. They also travelled nationally and internationally to visit and assist other Bahá'í communities. In this regard, Aboriginal Bahá'ís have both promoted and experienced the oneness of humanity.

If there has been any notion that Aboriginal people who became Bahá'ís simply acquiesced and were timid in joining “yet another religion,” this can assuredly be put to rest by the record of many peoples’ outstanding

participation and enthusiasm for travel and community building. Aboriginal Bahá'ís have taken the opportunity to present their stories in ways that demonstrate that they were active agents in learning, accepting, and advancing the religion. They have also shared their accounts with scholars, which has clearly been an informed strategy to enable the continuity of the history of Yukon peoples in written form.

As the society and economy of the Yukon has grown and diversified, radical social change has occurred. The demographics have changed markedly in the past fifty years to the point where younger generations of Aboriginal people now have many different opportunities ahead of them. As well, their community's successful negotiations of traditional land claims and self-governance settlements open up a new era of potential transformation. The accounts of religiosity here show the continued adaptation and resiliency of Yukon Aboriginal peoples in changing the form of stories. Traditional stories were meant for knowledgeable audiences who were able to catch the implied nuances that are evident and relevant in and for traditional life. While a culturally diverse audience can enjoy traditional stories and pick out themes that are universal (evidenced by the popularity of storytelling festivals), such storytelling was most effective and meaningful with an audience and storytellers raised within the culture itself. This newer generation of Bahá'ís—middle-aged and younger—are standing in two worlds, as pointed out by Clara Schinkel.<sup>60</sup> They are literate, well-seasoned travellers, users of the latest technologies, and many are professionals in their fields. They frame and mould their accounts using concepts and references that will be understandable and that resonate with multicultural audiences who have diverse expectations of what constitutes a contemporary story.

All these changes have naturally resulted in individual and family stories that draw upon many different threads to weave a concept of self and communal identity in this modern day.<sup>61</sup> It may be timely now for interested scholars, some of whom are, hopefully, Aboriginal, to explore these types of stories so that a new typology can be created that will help explain modern narratives, and will in turn document these important contemporary histories.

The stories included here pay tribute to ancestors, provide social commentary, deconstruct colonialism, and, as well, advance personal agency. One of the most important functions of these narratives is to connect past Bahá'í history to the present and in so doing affirm the existence and continuity of spiritual connections between the generations. A number of the older stories have been created in different historical contexts, and

have transformed with changes in the outer social landscape and the inner landscape of dreams, spirituality, and personal meanings.

Stories from the past and the present have been artfully intermingled in new forms. Drawing upon the prophecies of shamans from the late 1800s, dreams of elders in the mid to late 1900s, new Bahá'í teachings, and contemporary accounts of experience in the postmodern age, Aboriginal Bahá'ís continue the time-honoured tradition of constructing individual and collective spiritual identity through the process of storytelling.

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### **Notes**

1. Bahá'ís are followers of Bahá'u'lláh, who they believe is the promised messenger of all ages. The Bahá'í Faith is a world religion whose purpose is to unite all the races and peoples in one universal cause and one common faith. See the Bahá'í International Community web site <<http://www.bahai.org/features/intro>> or the Canadian Bahá'í Community web site <[www.ca.bahai.org](http://www.ca.bahai.org)>.
2. From 1960–2007, 289 Yukon Aboriginal people joined the religion and registered as Bahá'ís with the Canadian Bahá'í National Office. During the same time period, national records show that 5,893 First Nations and Métis people, and 131 Inuit people were registered across Canada. There are no records of people who consider themselves Bahá'ís and have not registered officially with a local community. *First Nations Enrollments*, Letter to the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Whitehorse, 12/14/07, from the Records Office, Bahá'í National Centre, Toronto, Ontario.
3. Lynn Echevarria, *The Yukon Bahá'is: Establishing an Archive of Historical Materials and First Nations Life Histories* (Northern Research Institute, 2004). Copies of this material are in the Yukon Archives and Yukon College Library (BP355.C3 E23 2004).
4. This larger project was undertaken with a Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded fellowship. Lynn Echevarria-Howe, "Working Through the Vision: Religion and Identity in the Life Histories of Bahá'í Women in Canada" (PhD diss., Department of Sociology, Essex University, United Kingdom, 2000). It was the second project about the Canadian Bahá'í community funded by SSHRC. The first is Will C. Van den Hoonaard's sterling work, *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada, 1898–1948* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996).
5. See Carolyn Patterson Sawin, "Native Conversion, Native Identity: An Oral History of the Bahá'í Faith Among First Nations People in the Southern Yukon

Territory, Canada" (PhD diss., Department of Anthropology, University of Washington, 2000a) and "Transcriptions of Oral History Interviews Among First Nations Bahá'ís in the Southern Yukon Territory, Canada" (Unpublished, 2000b). Please note I cannot give page number for the quotes from these transcriptions because they are not numbered consecutively in the original document. I am indebted to Carolyn Sawin's work and I herein use quotes from her dissertation and unpublished transcriptions.

6. I was asked to make oral recordings of the events, stories, and formal talks during this three day gathering. See *Gathering for the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Bahá'í Faith in the Yukon*. A series of ten tapes recorded August 29–September 3, 2003. (Yukon Archives).
7. In 1996 I recorded the life histories of Bahá'ís Joan and Ted Anderson who settled in the Yukon in 1953 (living at the time in Red Deer, Alberta). I therefore already knew the names of people still living in the Yukon. I was fortunate to have Mrs. Doris McLean (Tagish First Nation) express immediate interest in my project. Doris became my teacher and cultural guide. She also encouraged me to ask her sister and elder, Clara Schinkel (a key participant in the early development of the Yukon Bahá'í Community, as was Doris also), if I could record her story. Both Doris and Clara (granddaughters of Tagish Johns and Maria Johns, and daughters of Peter Johns and Agnes Johns) are women who have been active keepers of their culture, and educators in the community at large about oral tradition, history, dance, songs, and the legends of their people. Similarly, Clara Schinkel has worked with a number of social scientists over the years on various studies concerning First Nations in the fields of anthropology and archaeology. The life histories were recorded over two years 2003–2004. The result is an extensive set of sound recordings and two transcripts of sixty and ninety single-spaced pages respectively. These have been placed in the Yukon Archives. Both Doris and Clara have approved my quoting them by name in this publication. It also is important to note that I asked Doris McLean to review this article and Louise Profeit LeBlanc reviewed it also. Both women found it correct, were pleased with it, and approved its publication. For further details about methodology see Lynn Echevarria, *The Yukon Bahá'ís: Establishing an Archive of Historical Materials and First Nations Life Histories* (Northern Research Institute, 2004).
8. Intersubjectivity means the mutual production of relationships and the taking into account of others' perspectives.
9. According to Doris McLean's perspective, Aboriginal people like to keep these personal things very private. It is not in their custom to publicly analyze personal or family circumstances. I knew that this kind of analysis had previously been met with mixed feelings by family members. I went so far as to ask this valued elder whether I should publish this article at all. I did not want to violate the reality of anyone's life by conducting analysis that would be viewed as inappropriate by the Aboriginal community. Doris encouraged me to publish. We can look

forward to the day when more Yukon Aboriginal women and men will write about their own lives and conduct their own analysis.

10. See Paul Thompson *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1992). See Elizabeth Tonkin, "Narrating our Past: The Social Construction of Oral History," in *Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture*, no. 22 (Cambridge University Press, 1995). Anthropologists Catherine McClellan and Julie Cruikshank, in their extensive work with Yukon First Nations peoples, have done much to show that Aboriginal oral narratives provide types of knowledge different from the western scientific model. For example, McClellan, *My Old People Say: An Ethnographic Survey of Southern Yukon Territory* (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2001). Also see Cruikshank's "Myth as a Framework for Life Stories: Athapaskan Women Make Sense of Social Change in Northern Canada" in *The Myths We Live By*, Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) and Julie Cruikshank, in collaboration with Angela Sydney, Kitty Smith & Annie Ned, *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).
11. Samuel and Thompson, *Myths* (1990), 21.
12. See LeBlanc, Louise, *The Role of Storytelling in Yukon Native Culture*. Video recording. Whitehorse, Yukon College.
13. See *The Role of Storytelling in Yukon Native Culture*. Video recording. Whitehorse, Yukon College.
14. I am not able to include any traditional stories herein. A prime example of providing a traditional framework to understand the Bahá'í teachings is present in the stories told by Chief Mark Wedge, Dèshitàn, Carcross-Tagish, as well as his mother, Dora Wedge. Chief Wedge has used the visual image of the split-tailed beaver crest (on his clan regalia) to story, both formally and informally, a direct connection between ancient clan religion and the administrative order of the new religion. I personally witnessed his engaging and informative presentation when it was given formally at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Association of Bahá'í Studies, *A Century of Light: Who Is Writing the Future?* Delta Meadowvale Resort and Conference Centre, Mississauga, ON, August 31–September 3, 2000.
15. While there were a number of Bahá'ís who visited the Yukon in the early 1900s, some of whom gave presentations and talks to the citizenry, the Bahá'í religion was not established until the arrival of Joan and Ted Anderson in 1953. For an overview of this history see the report, Echevarria, *The Yukon Bahá'ís* (2004)
16. Profeit-LeBlanc and Sawin 2000b
17. Life history interview Doris McLean with Lynn Echevarria (2003).
18. Julie Cruikshank examines these stories through a narrative discourse analysis and the present day application of the stories. She points out that the usual orientation to prophecy narratives in ethno-history is to question whether prophecy narratives were Aboriginal or a response to European contact. See

Claiming Legitimacy: Prophecy Narratives from Northern Aboriginal Women, *American Indian Quarterly* 18 (2), (Spring, 1994): 148.

19. For more on Yukon medicine women and men (shamans) see Catherine McClellan et al., *Part of the Land, Part of the Water: A History of Yukon Indians* (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1987), 227.
20. The time frame has been identified as the mid-1800s, because the man who discovered Major alive was carrying a frying pan in his packsack. This pan would have been part of the goods traded with Russian traders and Coastal Tlingit, who in turn would have traded with the Inland Tagish peoples. For interest sake, the pan was also used to dig this man out of his grave. The personal communications of Doris McLean with Catherine McClellan clarified the times when this event would have occurred.
21. For example, he foretold the coming of great monsters flying in the air and water (interpreted later as planes and ships), and of great hardships and bloodshed (interpreted as the First and Second World Wars).
22. This account is storied by the Johns family and can be found documented in Sawin, *Transcriptions* (2000).
23. See Cruikshank, *Claiming Legitimacy* (1994), 160. The Bahá'í Assembly spoken about here is the Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly. This is the local governing council composed of nine members (age twenty-one or older) who are elected by the Bahá'í community to serve for a year on the Assembly. Assemblies also exist at the national and international level.
24. Interview with Louise Profeit-LeBlanc and Sawin, *Transcriptions* (2000b).
25. 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911–1912*. 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1961), 54.
26. Skookum Jim's family and community—the Tagish people—essentially saved George Carmacks from perishing during the winter when he first arrived in the Yukon. The historical account is now rewritten, and stands as a part of Canadian First Nations local and national history. See also Cruikshank, "Images of Society in Klondike Gold Rush Narratives: Skookum Jim and the Discovery of Gold" in *Ethnohistory* 39(1) (1991): 20–41.
27. See the film *Keish, Skookum Jim Mason: A Man Standing in Two Worlds*. Produced by Delores Smith and Northern Native Broadcasting (Whitehorse, Yukon, Skookum Jim Friendship Centre. Video, 1999). Also Wilkie, R. and the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, *Skookum Jim: Native and Non Native Stories and Views About His Life and Times and the Yukon Gold Rush* (Whitehorse, Heritage Branch, Department of Tourism, Government of the Yukon, 1992).
28. See the film footage of Dora Wedge telling Skookum Jim's story, as well as footage of her daughter, Annie Auston, telling the story of Dora's dream, in *3 Visions, 1 Heart*, Lindstrom (NEDAA 2003).
29. See Catherine McClellan for a number of references to Wealth Woman in *My Old People Say*, (2001), 76, 141, 331, 572, 573. Also see McClellan "A Note About

- Frogs" in *Skookum Jim: Native and Non Native* (1992), 50. And Angela Sidney "Frog Story" in *Skookum Jim: Native and Non Native* (1992), 41–43.
30. Specifically, the recognition that Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, was the "light from the East." This information is conveyed in the stories of the Johns family, descendants of Keish, who I have heard sharing this narrative publicly on formal and informal occasions, and privately at family gatherings. See Angela Sidney's rendition of the story of "Wealth Woman" in *Skookum Jim: Native and Non Native* (1992): 47–49.
  31. Johnny Johns, Angela Sidney, Dora Wedge, Peter Johns.
  32. The Tutchone people have prophecies of the coming of "cloud people" who will come to the Yukon over the mountains. Eventually, Tutchone people will "act and look like cloud people." See Carol Geddes film, *Two Winters: Tales from Above the Earth* (2004). Director and co-producer Carol Geddes, co-producers Patty Olsen and Gerri Cook.
  33. Patsy Henderson was seventeen years old and was one of the family members who accompanied Skookum Jim on the famous trip when gold was discovered.
  34. Life history interview Clara Schinkel with Lynn Echevarria (2004).
  35. Clara Schinkel's personal communication with the author during the years 2004–2006. "Progressive Revelation," according to the Bahá'í writings, refers to a principle of the continuous divine education of humanity. Social and spiritual teachings are given through Holy Messengers (Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Christ, Muhammed, and so on) over the ages, according to the needs of humanity in each era. This is considered to be an eternal process for the progressive spiritual and material advancement of humankind.
  36. Life history interview Doris McLean with Lynn Echevarria (2003).
  37. In the film *3 Visions, 1 Heart* (2003).
  38. The accounts of when Dora first saw these pictures (one in the home of Clara Schinkel and the second photo in the home of Joanie and Ted Anderson) are found documented in three life histories: Clara Schinkel (Yukon Archives), Ted Anderson's, and Joan Anderson's (both in the possession of the author).
  39. On Aboriginal Peoples' Television Network through its inclusion in the film *3 Visions, 1 Heart*.
  40. For example, Chief Mark Wedge has been elected for many years (and up to the present 2008) onto the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, as was Louise Profeit Le Blanc.
  41. While we do not have a personal narrative from Chief Isaac, there were four other people present as witnesses at this occasion (original account of dream from Ted and Joan Anderson, personal correspondence September 9, 1960, mimeographed). There are oral stories told about Chief Isaac in the Bahá'í community. See Sandra Johnson reading a poem about Chief Albert Isaac and his vision in the film *3 Visions, 1 Heart*. This story is also briefly mentioned in a small paragraph in Catherine McClellan's book, "My Old People Say: An

Ethnographic Survey of Southern Yukon Indians," *Publications in Ethnology*, no. 6, vol. 2 (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1975), 557. It is not clear if she actually recorded the dream verbatim from Chief Isaac as she does not refer to him by name, only to the fact that in 1963 a "Southern Tutchone man" shared this dream about meeting a personage and a journey to New York and "California City." Several features differ in the two accounts of the dream such as the description of the gentleman he met (who is recorded as Oral Roberts in McClellan's account). No mention is made of the peculiar object; the journey is recalled, but not the message.

42. Joan Anderson kept daily diaries of her experiences in the Yukon and devoted extensive time to recording the development of the Bahá'í community, taking many photos at events and tape recordings of personal stories and public proceedings. These contributed to the Anderson's memoirs of the Yukon Bahá'í Community (unpublished at present). See part of their story in Echevarria, *The Yukon Bahá'ís* (2004).
43. He also spotted a Bahá'í ring, which had been left in an unobtrusive place in the room. Upon closer examination he identified it as the unusual object he had been shown in his dream/vision. This symbol is a mnemonic for the foundational teachings of the religion. The lines in the calligraphy portray the Bahá'í belief in the oneness of God, the oneness of all religion, the oneness of humanity. The stars on either side represent the coming of the latest messengers of God, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.
44. Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like A Story* (1997), 343. Also see *Claiming Legitimacy* (1994), 153–154 for stories about shamans who traveled to alternate worlds and acquired powers and the ability to make predictions upon their return to the material world.
45. Interview with Ronald Bill by Sawin in "Transcriptions" (2000b), unpublished.
46. Interview with Edwin Scurvey by Sawin in *Native Conversions* (2000a), 2.
47. Life history interview Doris McLean with L. Echevarria (2003).
48. Ibid.
49. Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like A Story* (1997), 36, 154–58. Also see *Claiming Legitimacy* (1994), 158–160.
50. Interview with Ronald Bill by Sawin in "Transcriptions" (2000b).
51. Life history interview Clara Schinkel with L. Echevarria (2004).
52. Life history interview Doris McLean with L. Echevarria (2003).
53. I have heard this story a number of times in public and private storytelling sessions.
54. Life history interview Clara Schinkel with L. Echevarria (2004).
55. Life history interview Doris McLean with L. Echevarria (2003).
56. In 2006, there was only one fluent speaker of the Tagish language left, Mrs. Lucy Wren (personal communications with Yukon Native Language Centre, Yukon College).

57. Life history interview Clara Schinkel with L. Echevarria (2004). Clara received many honours and distinctions for her work in preserving the language and culture of her people. Clara was also the first Yukon governor for the Heritage Canada Foundation, a position she served for six years. She passed away in October 2006.
58. In 1898, a young eighteen-year-old woman of Irish-Methodist background, Edith Magee, became the first Bahá'í in Canada and with her mother, younger sister, and two aunts formed the first Bahá'í group in Canada (London, Ontario). See W.C. van den Hoonaard, *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada, 1898–1948*. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996).
59. See Echevarria in “Let Your Vision be World Embracing’: Constructions of Oneness in Personal and Collective Identity, the Canadian Bahá’ís 1938–2000,” in Margit Warburg, ed., *Bahá’í and Globalisation* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2005).
60. Stated in her life history as well as the film *Keish, Skookum Jim Mason*.
61. There has obviously been a choice of what stories to include here. Except for the life histories I recorded, which go into more depth about everyday life and some traditional activities, most of the archival materials I found refer to people’s social experiences in the secular and Bahá’í communities, or their conversion narratives.