

A story about salmon fishing¹

by Marlene Tommy

A long time ago my father always reminded us that in our lifetime we all surely have skills. Our job in life is to search for our skills. In a hwulmuhw family many skills relate to traditional ways of survival—fishing, hunting, and other ways of finding food.

This is what inspired me to write a story about a young man who could not fish. He was embarrassed that he had no fishing skills, so he had to pretend he knew how to fish and earned his nickname because of it. He would go take fish out of other peoples' nets and claim he caught it. So he was called qwuni “seagull” because he stole other peoples' food. It was a story that surfaced among the fishermen.

Although some parents know where your talents are best suited, we are allowed to try many different activities as we are growing up. There were plenty of jobs all year round in our family. My youngest brother was a skilled fisherman. I remember when the fishing seasons began, he was out there, rain or shine. And my mother and the neighboring mothers would all be outside working together getting the smokehouse ready. There were many different ways of preserving fish. It was hard work, but it provided us with healthy food throughout the year. This story is about gathering together working together as one.

The salmon season story is about *quw'utsun'* cultural knowledge of the salmon harvest. The collection of nature's tools from long ago passed down generation to generation. For example, the spear carved from certain trees, the modern carved spear points, and the nets. My brother Fabian Tommy is going on 59 years old now. He was around the age of twelve or thirteen years old at the time my stepfather Victor Wilson trained him to work hard in all kinds of

¹ Marlene Tommy. 2020. [Connecting generations through hwulmuhwqun stories](https://hlcs.hwulmuhwqun.ca/home/projects/ma-projects-theses/connecting-generations-through-hwulmuhwqun-stories/). SFU MA Project. <https://hlcs.hwulmuhwqun.ca/home/projects/ma-projects-theses/connecting-generations-through-hwulmuhwqun-stories/>

weather. My stepfather was always talking about when a young boy becomes a man, he had to learn these cultural ways at that time. My brother became a very strong man because of his upbringing in the strictness of our First Nation cultural ways. There are many things to be taught to young men in our fishing stories—their strength, stamina, and way of knowing comes from being taught at that certain age. My stepfather was strict because it ensured us success in our future. Another thing you can get from my fishing stories is *nuts'umat*, working together as one. The women worked together to preserve food for the many months to come. Our parents never looked so happy as when we had worked together to replenish our supply of food. It's like my father says, it is so important to listen to the elders. Even if you're not liking what you hear, "you listen".

sht'es kws stl'i's tthu stseelhtun ni' 'u tthunu
nuts'uwulmuhw

The importance of salmon to my family

(1) 'een'thu Marlene Tommy, tun'ni' tsun 'utl' qul'ilum'.

I am Marlene Tommy, and I am from Dougan Lake.

(2) tun'a nu sqwul'qwul' 'u tun'a kweyul, qwul'qwul' tsun 'u tthu sht'es kws
hays 'ul' tl'i' tl'i'stuhw tthu stseelhtun.

I am going to talk today about how important salmon was to my family.

(3) ni' ni' 'u kwthu 'apun 'i' kw' toohw tth'ukwsulhshe' tus 'u kwthu 'apun 'i'
kw' toohw te'tssulhshe' sil'anum.

The years were in the mid 1970's to early 1980's.

(4) yath tsun 'uw' shtatul'stuhw 'u kws m'is wi'wul' tthu stseelhtun, nilh tthu
suw'wuy'qe' kwus wulh saay'thut, thuytus tthu s'unums tthu ha'kwushus
kws tsetsul'ulhtun's.

*I always knew when salmon season came along because the men were busy
getting ready, preparing their spears and nets for catching the salmon.*

(5) 'i' mukw' tthu shunlheni' 'uw' stitiya'xw 'i'luqutus tthu thithumel's, susuw'
they'tus tthu shuptun kws hwu 'uy'a'ths, 'a'luxutus tthu sts'esht swe's kws
ha'kwushus tthey' s'akw'ust tthu stseelhtun ts'ey'xel's q'ilaam'.

*And the women would all be busy buying freezing bags, sharpening their
knives, and gathering sticks that they would use for hanging fish to smoke.*

(6) nilh yath 'uw' sht'es kws quxs ni' sla'thut syaays 'u kws 'uw' 'ul' m'is
wi'wul' tthu stseelhtun.

It was a season of a lot of work, when the salmon came.

- (7) yath 'uw' siilukw' swaw'lus kws wulh wi'wul' tthu stseelhtun, kws tseelhtuns tse'.
The fishing season was an exciting period for the young men.
- (8) qwuliil'qwul' 'eelhtun tthuw'ne'ullh swaw'lus tthu ni' sht'es kws tsetsul'ulhtun' 'i' kwthu ni' 'up'nuhwus thi stseelhtun.
They told stories about experiences, about the big one that got away.
- (9) ni' tsun 'uw' hekw' 'u kwthunu shushiyulh nu swaw'lus kwus sq'uq'ip thuythut, they'tus tthu ha'kwushus kwus 'uw' 'ulh stseelhtun tse',
I remember seeing my brothers and other young men of the neighborhood, sitting on the porch ways sharpening their rods getting their canoes and nets ready for the river.
- (10) kwus they'ulsum 'u tthu swultuns susuw' tsetsul'ulhtun' kwuw'kwuy'li'lum' kwus tsetsul'ulhtun'.
My brothers used to set nets and spear fish all night.
- (11) tthunu ts'lhhwulmuhw kwus qwul'iil'qwul'tul' 'i' ni' ts'unum 'u tthu ni' hay 'ul' 'uy' ni' shni's kwus tsetsul'ulhtun'.
In my family, I heard talk about favorite fishing areas.
- (12) kw'eshtus kwthu ni' sht'es kwthu ni' shun'tsus 'u tthu stseelhtun 'u tthu nuts'a' snet.
They would count how salmon that had been caught the night before.
- (13) ni' wulh tus 'u tthu sht'es thuythut-s 'a'luxut' kwthu stseelhtun ni' kwthu ni' sul'uthut-s kwus hul'ushus they'tus 'u kwthu nuts'a' sil'anum.
It was a season for families to prepare to preserve salmon in many different ways.
- (14) yath tsun 'uw' he'kw' 'u tthu niilh sht'es thunu ten kwus hwqxa'wuth kwus nuts'tul tthu sxlhas 'u kwsus thuytus.
I also remember how creative mother was at making different meals from the different kinds of salmon.

- (15) 'i' hay 'ul' 'uy' stseelhtun s'ulhtun.
And the meals of salmon were very delicious.
- (16) ni' tst hwi' shemut, nuw'ush 'u tthu q'uxq'ux ni' tthu tl'lhemtut.
We smoked it and canned what we salted.
- (17) nan sulh 'uw' qux 'iyus sul'uthut tst.
Oh, we had a good time doing that.
- (18) st'e 'uw' niis 'uw' 'uwu 'ul' syaays sus thunu ten 'i' thu ts'lhhwulmuhws,
tthu slhunlheni' shhwuw'weli tst.
It seems as though it was not work for my mother and her neighbors, the ladies of our family.
- (19) hay 'ul' siil'ukw 'u tthu ni' 'aluxutum 'u tthu steelhtun.
They seemed to be very happy during the salmon harvest season.
- (20) lhhwelu tthu qw'uqw'i'tul' swaaw'lus hay 'ul' stsuw'et kws tseelhtuns.
I had three brothers who were all good fisherman.
- (21) ni' 'uw' shtatul'st-hwus lhunu shtun'ni'ulh kws hays 'ul' qux syaays 'u
tthu stseelhtun.
So, my late mother knew she would have a lot of work preparing the salmon.
- (22) nilh ni' shni's kws xwi'xwi'em's lhunu tenulh.
It's not unusual to hear my late mom tell stories during this time.
- (23) xwi'am'ustal'hwus thunu ten 'u tthu qw'uqw'i'tul' swaw'lus yathulh nem'
'uw' tse'tsul'ulhtun' sq'uq'ip.
My mother told us a story about brothers who use to all go out fishing together.
- (24) 'i' na'nuts'a' tthu 'uwu kws nem's yu suw'e' 'u tthu shushiyulhs.
And this one particular person never would go out with his older brothers.

(25) nilh sus 'uw' 'usup' tthu snet 'i' nilh sus 'uw' mukw' 'uw' t'a'lukw', ni'
skwuyul kwus 'i'tut.
*They would all come home after a long, long night of fishing exhausted and
slept during the day.*

(26) kwus wulh hwuy 'i' ni' q'apthut xwi'am'ustul' 'u tthu ni' sht'es 'uw'
kw'inus tthu shun'tsus.
*When they awoke, they would share stories about how many fish they had
caught.*

(27) tthey' sa'suqwt swiw'lus nem' tseelhtun 'i' nuw' yu hay 'ul'.
This particular young brother would go fishing alone.

(28) m'i hun'umut 'i' ni' 'uw' qwiil'qwul' kws quxs stseelhtun ni' shun'tsus,
xut'u kwus kwunnuhwus tthu thi stseelhtun.
*He would come home and say he caught a lot of salmon, saying it was a very
big salmon.*

(29) tthey' sa'suqwt swiw'lus st'e 'uw' niis 'uwu 'ul' thu'itus tthu ni'
sqwiil'qwul' kwus tsetsul'ulhtun'.
The youngest brother's stories did not seem real at times, his fishing stories.

(30) nuts'a' sqwul'qwul's kwus xut'u kws yus-thut-s sxuy'us ni' thuqtus 'i'
'uwu niis st'e tthu tsetsul'ulhtun'.
*Like one story about spearing the salmon in the head, but that's not how the
fishermen do it.*

(31) mukw' tthu tsetsul'ulhtun' suw'wuy'qe' ha' ni' ts'unum 'i' 'uwu kws nilhs
tthu sxuy'us m'i sma'mi'st-hwus.
Every fisherman knows that you don't catch a fish by aiming at its head.

(32) skw'ey kws ha' s'unum tthu ha'kwushuhw.
That's impossible if you are using a spear.

(33) nilh ni' yuw'en'stuhw tthun' s'unum kwun's ni' wensh, 'uwu ch niihw nilh tthu sxuy'us niin' xwte'stuhw.

Your spear goes in front of it when you throw it, but it doesn't land in its head.

(34) 'uwu stsekwul'us kwun's nilh tthu sxuy'us mami'utuhw 'u kwun's s'unum tthu ha'kwushuhw.

You cannot just go and spear a fish in the head every time when you are using a spear.

(35) tl'lim' ch 'uw' sxuxitsstuhw tthu ni' 'un' sht'e kwun's tskwunnuhw tthu stseelhtun.

You really have to do a lot of calculations in order to catch salmon.

(36) mukw' tthu seen'tl'e' shushiyulhs tthuw'nilh swiw'lus nuw' shtatul'st-hwus tthu ni' sht'es 'ul' tl'i' ni' sxuxitsstuhw ch tthu niin' yu sht'e kwun's ni' hakwush kwthun' s'unum kwthu ni' sht'es kwun's ni' wensh sht'es kwus xwoom tthu qa'.

The older brothers knew how many calculations you do when you are using a spear in order to throw it with the water current in mind.

(37) nilh sht'es tthu tsetsul'ulhtun' shtatul'st-hwus.

That's part of the knowledge of being a fisherman.

(38) tus 'u tthu nuts'a' snet susuw' hwthtiwun tthu seen'tl'e' kws nem's tseeltus tthu sqe'uqs 'u kwus 'uwu te' statul'stuhws kwus nem' yu tsukwul'etum'.

One night they decided to follow their brother without his knowledge.

(39) huye' tthey' sa'suqwt 'aalh 'u tthu snuhwulh sht'e 'uw' nem'us tseelhtun yu pune'tus tthu s'unum.

This youngest brother got on a canoe to look as though he was going spear fishing.

- (40) ni' wulh tul'num 'uwu niis nutsim' 'u shus 'aalh 'u tthey' snuhwulh.
They were wondering why he went on a canoe.
- (41) ni' 'aalh yelh sus 'uw' nem' 'uw' nem' 'u tthu swultun.
He went on the canoe and went to the net.
- (42) 'uwu ni'us s'unum kw'u ha'kwushus kwus tsetsul'ulhtun'.
He wasn't using a spear to fish.
- (43) kwunutus tthu nuts'a' stseelhtun, thi stseelhtun.
He took one big salmon.
- (44) susuw' thq'utus ni' 'u tthu sxuy'usth.
And he speared it in the head.
- (45) nilh kwu'elh 'u shus neetum 'u tthu shushiyulhs netum 'ukw' "qwuni".
This is how the youngest brother earned his nickname "qwuni".
- (46) ni' 'uw' qen'tus 'ul' tthu stseelhtun.
He was just stealing salmon.
- (47) nan 'uw' tl'ist-hwus tthunu ts'lhhwulmuhw tthu stseelhtun, s'ulhtuns.
Salmon was a very important source of food for my family.
- (48) kwus wulh m'i wi'wul' tthu tseelhtun 'i' mukw' tst 'uw' yaays 'u tthu
 ts'its'uw'atul' 'u tthu syaays kwus 'i ye'luw' 'u tthu stseelhtun.
*When the salmon were running, all of us had to work very hard during
 salmon season.*