

Squamish Chief interview with Sadie Baker – July 1992

Elder seeks the good in others

by Tom Berridge

Squamish Chief - July 14, 1992

Eighty-nine year old Squamish Nation elder Sadie Baker came to the district at the same time the potlatch was being revived in the tribal lore of the Howe Sound band.

Had the Squamish Nation known what a contribution the young native woman from Yellow Point on Vancouver Island would make to her people in the next 60 years, her presence would have been further cause for celebration.

Baker was born in 1902. She was 29 before she moved to Squamish.

In those days, natives lived with the barest of necessities, Sadie said. “Boxes, if you had no bureau, pots and pans, a bucket of water and an old wood stove.

“We ate fish and meat till it was either finished or spoiled”, Sadie said. “When I came we used to have to go to the creek (Stawamus River) and carry back our water”, Sadie said. It made her feel bad to see the women, some of them pregnant, carrying the family’s water day after day.

She did something about it.

Previously, in 1915 in fact, her father-in-law, Chief Joseph, had made a deal with the Pacific Great Eastern Railway to trade 41 acres of land in return for the railway’s right to land from Valleycliffe to the Mamquam Blind Channel. Chief Joseph also secured a promise from the railroad to provide the band with running water.

It wasn’t very much, Sadie said, but the Nation was small, maybe only 250 people and it was the only deal they were likely to get.

But in 1935 the Squamish Nation was still waiting on the P.G.E.’s promise.

Sadie decided to go before the Railway brass. She asked them if they would make good on their 20-year-old promise if the water pipes were supplied by the Squamish band. But the Second World War intervened and it would be another 20 years until the first tap was finally turned on.

Electricity and better housing followed.

Sadie credits Ernie Harry with coordinating the meetings that brought together the Band council and what was then the Indian Affairs Office. Those meetings resulted in seven new houses for the Squamish band. The Nation had to pay for the construction. After that, Sadie said, the Squamish band could afford additional housing with the money received from the leasing of Park Royal.

“I think back on it and I did a lot of work”, Sadie said. “It sounds sort of like blowing my own horn and I’m not used to it. I’m used to sitting in the back seat and not bragging about it.”

But Sadie Baker did do a lot of work. Friends say she’s a selfless and giving woman who, for 50 years, kept her front door open to women and children who needed a home away from home.

And it wasn’t just Squamish Nation members who counted on Baker.

In the depression years there was no road to Mt. Currie and women who had to travel to Squamish for hospital treatment could always depend on Sadie to welcome them into her home.

Many children who needed someone found Sadie was there for them too. Sadie married Sam Baker, a hereditary chief of the Squamish Nation, but they had no children.

“We filled the void by bringing in other peoples’ children”, Sadie said. “When I think back on it, I must have been a busy woman. But at the time I thought I had a lot of time. All my memories are with children and the women.”

Sadie was, in some ways, a woman out of time. She was aware of a woman’s place in the traditional way of things, but she had a strong sense of faith that drove her to seek change.

“Today education and everything has changed and women have their place”, Sadie said. But Sadie does not dwell on the problems she encountered before everything changed. She looks at others through her faith and sees only the good around her.

She is a poet too. Her verses give a picture of a warm and humble human being.

“May I be a blessing to my friends, the kind of blessing that never ends”, she wrote in her poem “Idea of Living”.