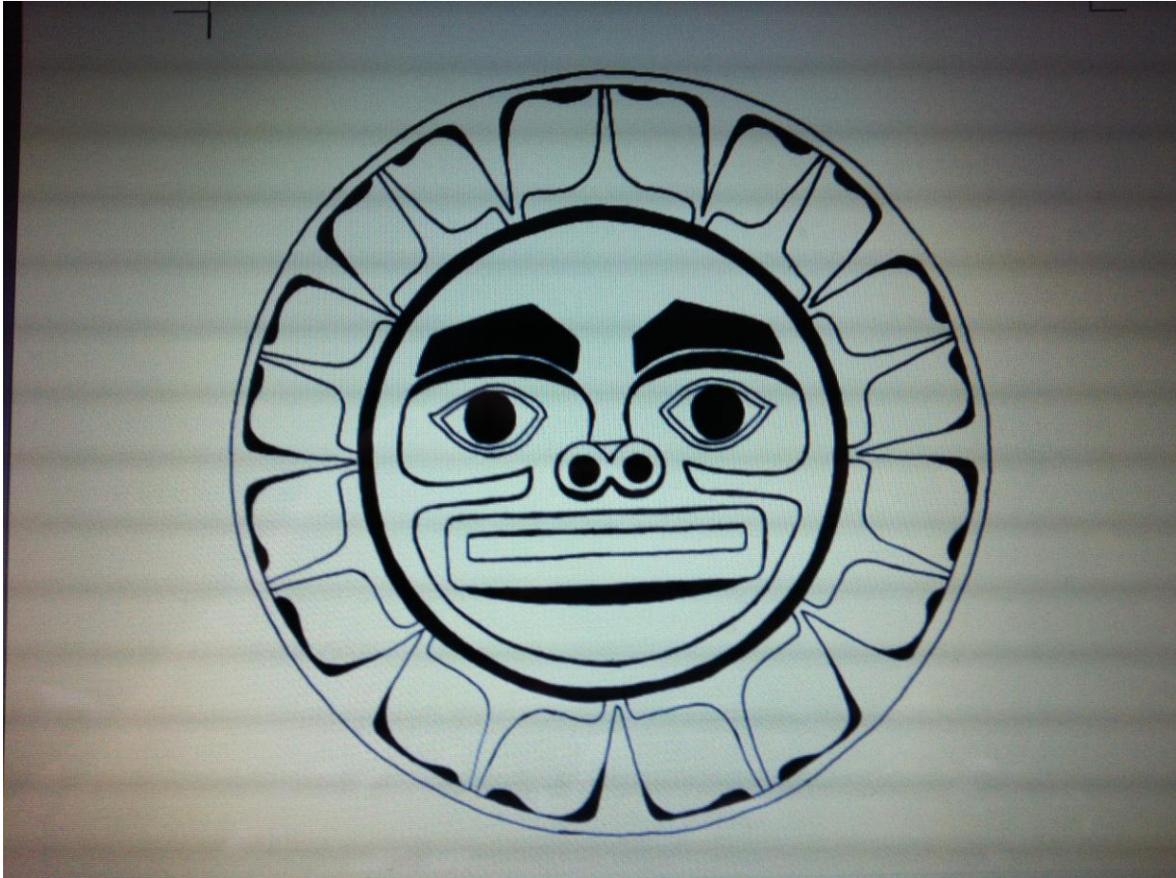


**Uaathluk:  
Taking Care of-An Ehattesaht Perspective on Traditional Adoption**



Ehattesaht Logo

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**KLECO(Thank you)**

This is a community project that was conducted with the permission of Ehattesaht First Nations and the Ehattesaht Elders. The project is titled Uaathluk: Taking Care of-An Ehattesaht Perspective on Traditional Adoption. I would like to acknowledge Ehattesaht for all of their contributions and continued support to make this a success.

It is important to acknowledge, the Coast Salish peoples for allowing me to be on their traditional lands during my academic pursuit. I would like to express my gratitude to my children and my family for their continued support. I would like to acknowledge my MSW committee Sohki Aski Esquao (Jeannine Carriere), Kianewequao (Cathy Richardson), Darlene Lariviere and Fidelia Haiyupis. Lastly I would like to acknowledge my grandmother Josephine George for her support and encouragement and for sharing my great-grandmother's Esther's teaching and words, "you always look after each other - that is what family does at the end of the day all you have is your family" (J. George, personal communication, 2010).

This project is dedicated to my great-grandmother Esther Smith, my parents Clyde and Norma Claxton and my uncle Gideon Smith; their love, teaching and strong family values are evident throughout this project.



## **Background**

It is important for me to introduce myself. My names given to me by my family are Kluthsona (beautiful person/beautiful personality) and Ay-ya-took (she speaks for many people). My roots on my late mother's side are from Ehattesaht First Nation (EFN) and Hupacasath First Nation (HFN), which are part of the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations (NCN). My roots on my late father's side are from Tsawout, which is part of the Coast Salish Nations. I am a mother of four children, a master's student at the University of Victoria, a researcher, and a film-maker. Lastly, I am also a supervisor for a child protection team for the Nuu-chah-nulth Usma Family and Child Services. In the NCN language there are several interpretations of the word USMA but overall it translates into "precious ones." It is important for me to begin this way because who I am and where I come from plays a large role in my perspectives and learning process.

After careful consideration and in consultation with my Elders and my community, I decided to do a practicum and an individual project instead of a thesis. This decision resulted in me asking the Ehattesaht band what I could do as an individual project, to give back to my community. There was a request to develop a DVD to transfer the knowledge about the traditional adoption process, from an Ehattesaht perspective. The project is titled, Uaathluk: Taking Care of: An Ehattesaht Perspective on Traditional Adoption. My grandmother Josephine George gave the project its title. In the Ehattesaht language Uaathluk translates into "taking care of." The intended audience is the community members of Ehattesaht.

In addition, the individual project is being done with the permission of the Elders and the Ehattesaht Band and Anita, the biological mother of my adopted son. It is extremely important to me that I share this because in essence, this is our story. Without her and her ability to be so open to sharing her son with me and giving me an opportunity to raise him, I would not have any

of the knowledge that I do about traditional adoption and its process. We have been on this journey together for over eight years and every time I write about our story or experience, I always ask her permission. It is equally important to share with you that Anita often states, “of course you can tell our story, I hope people learn something from it, I hope they learn the importance of family and culture” (A. Amos, personal communication, September 2006).

It is important for me to begin by raising my hands and acknowledging the following people for being part of my learning process. First and foremost, the Coast Salish peoples for allowing me to be on their traditional lands during my academic pursuit. I would also like to acknowledge Susan Strega, Jeannine Carriere, Donna Jeffery and Michael Prince for providing such a safe learning place, which permitted diversity, honesty and respect. I would also like to acknowledge Jeannine Carriere and the University of Victoria for honouring me with permission to enroll in the First Nations Adoptions Policy class. This class gave me an opportunity to see that I can make a difference in conjunction with Ehattesaht First Nation in the area of traditional adoption. I would also like to acknowledge the Elders who have been and continue to teach me, I appreciate the knowledge that is being shared with me.

It is equally important to recognize that I do have a personal connection to my research due to my lived experience and my personal involvement in the process. Furthermore, the name that was given to me in October 2006, Ay-ya-took, which translates into “She speaks for many people.” Julia Lucas explained to me, “you were given this name because of the work that you are doing in the Nuu-chah-nulth territories, the work you are doing with our families” (J. Lucas, personal communication, August 9, 2003). I feel that this is a very powerful name and I take my name and my role in the community I belong to, very seriously. I have a responsibility to my family to ensure that I uphold the honour and dignity of the names given to me.

There are several reasons that adoption is important to me and has become my passion. My late mother gave birth to a child in 1967 and she made a choice to relinquish this baby for adoption. Within days of the birth of this child, my late mother had told the doctors and nurses at the hospital that she changed her mind and was going to keep the baby. She was told that it was too late that the baby had gone to a suitable white family. At the time, my late mother didn't know that she had rights. My late mother was part of the residential school era and believed what people said, especially people who were in positions of authority.

Often people will hear me refer to my sister as being part of the sixties scoop. I say this because it is my opinion that my sister was born in a time when many people felt that Indians did not know how to care for their children and it would be better to have them raised by other people, people who would instil good Catholic values and beliefs. I saw the effects that this adoption had on my mother.

Quite ironically, in 1982 my sister Norma and I ended up meeting and going to school together. My sister was held back one year, so we ended up in several of the same classes. To make a long story short, my sister and I became best friends and we continued our friendship until 1987 when she got her status card in the mail and it named Ehattesaht as her band. My sister and I called the band office to ask if they knew who her parents were and we were told that her mother was my mother. My sister became very angry and over time, our friendship came to an end in 1988.

My sister also shared, "I felt like I belonged somewhere but I didn't know where" (N. Chipping, personal communication, February 2007). Sadly, today my sister has many different issues, such as identity and loss of identity and this has created many different issues which she deals with through addictions, resulting in many other issues.

It is unfortunate that my sister could not forgive my mother, our mother, for giving Norma up for adoption and now that our mother has passed on; there are no chances for her to build that relationship with our mother. The process of healing together, ended the day that our mother passed away. This is why as an adoptive parent I honestly feel that it is in Bryce's best interest to maintain a relationship with his immediate family and his extended family because this family is where Bryce comes from. I believe that having that relationship will only make Bryce stronger and more connected to his family roots and his community and culture.

Unfortunately, my sister's adoption really impacted my grandmother Josephine. My granny wants to ensure that her perspectives are part of the Ehattesaht traditional adoption process. My granny shared that she was not aware that my mother was giving her baby up for adoption; my granny was told by my mother that the child passed away at birth. My granny shared that if she had known about the adoption, someone in the family, extended family or community would have taken the child. Granny shared that everyone had roles and responsibilities and they knew what those roles were, they never had to be told what the right thing to do was. Granny went on to share that this way of doing things has gotten lost over the years but she feels it is important for people to remember that everyone has roles and responsibilities in taking care of children.

Taking all of this into consideration, in 2003 when my ex-husband and I were asked if we wanted to adopt my ex-husband's niece's baby, all of the factors of my sister's adoption played a role in the development of what our son Bryce's adoption would look like. I knew that I didn't want our son to have the questions of why did my mom give me up, do I look like her, do I have any siblings...etc. There were several factors that contributed to us deciding on doing a traditional adoption. Some of these factors include my sister's experience and the baby's

biological mother Anita not wanting to disclose the identity of the biological father. The legal system stated that she had to disclose who he was. As a result of these factors my ex-husband Bruce and I decided to speak with the Elders about how we could proceed in the most respectful manner to protect the child, the mother and the father. It was at this time that it was suggested to us that we should consider doing a traditional/custom adoption. In consultation with Anita, Bruce and I, we had decided that this would be the most respectful process.

Prior to us being able to proceed with a traditional adoption, Bruce and I had to learn the process for this type of adoption. On the advice of the Elders we chose one Elder to work with and this Elder was responsible for teaching us and guiding us through the process. After careful consideration, Bruce and I decided to work with Julia Lucas. After our initial meeting with Julia and Anita we took Julia's advice to proceed with the adoption and to do it in a timely manner. Anita, Bruce and I had decided to have the ceremony in August 2003.

There were several contributing factors that lead to the focus of this research project and resulted in the exploration of why traditional adoption is so important to me, to my nation and the Nuu-chah-nulth people. As mentioned previously I am NCN and I am also a supervisor at USMA NCN Family and Child Services. In the near future it is the agencies intent to take over adoption delegation which means that USMA will become responsible for adoptions of NCN children. This research project is from a NCN perspective; specifically an Ehattesht perspective and it may assist the USMA social workers in understanding their roles and responsibilities in the adoption process. In addition, it may further assist families and communities in understanding their roles and responsibilities in the adoption process.

I began the research process by exploring traditional adoption from an Ehattesht perspective. I interviewed three Ehattesht Elders and video taped their responses which have

assisted in the development of the final product which is a DVD on the perspectives of the traditional adoption process. I have also explored the ethical considerations that needed to be considered for this project. Lastly, I explored the benefits and the disadvantages of the traditional adoption process.

The research question was; Why is the preservation of traditional adoption important to Ehattesaht? The following is a description of the research project. Throughout the past few years there have been more and more families within Ehattesaht territory that have been returning to the traditional ways of caring for our own children. This means that more recently there have been several families who have had children and they are not able or willing to care for their children and decide to allow other family members to care for these children. As a result, many of these families want to go through the traditional process of taking care of our children and they do this through hosting a traditional adoption ceremony. However, there are very few Elders left who can teach us how to engage in this process. As a result, the topic that I will be exploring for my research project will be traditional adoption from an Ehattesaht perspective. The purpose of this project is to establish and document the appropriate procedures and process for traditional adoption from an Ehattesaht perspective.

The DVD is my method of data collection and it is not a film for distribution except to the community of Ehattesaht and USMA NCN Family and Child Services. The data collection is a visual and verbal transfer of knowledge from the Elders. It is my humble opinion that this project will be a form of resistance to the colonialist ideology of adoption and a form of renewal for Ehattesaht and NCN to taking back control of our traditional ways of caring for our children.



## **Ethical Considerations and Community Protocols**

Some of the ethical considerations that I needed to consider included the following issues and experiences; once the project is complete, there will be physical documentation which people could review. NCN people are an oral people and Julia often tells me, “put that pen and paper away, you are going to listen and it is your responsibility to remember what I am saying to you, we don’t write things down because we don’t want it to get into the wrong hands” (J. Lucas, personal communication, September 1998). Qwul’sih’yah’maht states,

All major events that took place in community were documented. However, “documentation” in traditional research arena seems to refer only to the written. I am suggesting that the level of complexity and sophistication in which major events were witnessed in our communities demands that these oral histories and stories be reconceptualized and viewed as primary sources. These events are our Department of Vital Statistic—they record births, marriages, and deaths, to name a few. Story telling creates space for the “Other,” in the dominant discourse. Storytelling fills the gaps in the present documentation of the lives of First Nations people.

Furthermore, my grandmother Josephine also shares stories with me and she often tells me, “it is your responsibility to remember these things, don’t write it down, remember it, and tell it to your children, so they will remember” (J. George, personal communication, March 2007). Both of these Elders have shared that the written aspect of our history has been taken and used for someone else’s benefit and it is important to always be careful who you share information with.

Originally I thought that there would be aspects of this project which included the sharing of information about sacred ceremonies that occur throughout the process of traditional

adoption. However, none of this was revealed in the interviewing process of on traditional adoption.

The ethical dilemma that I struggled with is that I didn't want it to appear that Ehattesaht is *selling out* and making such a sacred tradition into a more contemporary format such as a DVD. What I mean by this is that it is not our tradition to publicize our knowledge. The protection of sacred and cultural knowledge has always been a part of our traditions. Some of this was addressed in the interviews with the Elders and will also be shared in the DVD.

Another dilemma that as the research/film-maker, I struggled with the different family dynamics at the band level and the controversy within families; I don't want there to be a perception that I own this project. It is important that there is an understanding that the final paper and the DVD belong to the Ehattesaht First Nation. In addition the project will be made available to any Ehattesaht person who would like to use the video.

### **Literature Review**

I completed searches for traditional adoption process by searching the internet and the University of Victoria library. I have searched, "First Nations Adoptions", "Aboriginal Adoptions", "Custom Adoptions", "Nuu-chah-nulth Cultural Adoptions" and "Cultural Adoptions", I found hundreds of results and the three emerging themes that I found in these articles were:

1. Grief and loss
2. Culture and identity
3. The colonial history of adoption

There were several articles where the discussion was around grief and loss that children who are adopted out feel. As mentioned in section of Locust's (2000) article titled, "The Loss

of Family, culture heritage, language, spiritual Beliefs, Tribal Affiliation and Tribal Ceremonial Experiences”. Locust (2007) describes some of the loss as

The reciprocal possessiveness of the factors listed above (loss of family, culture, heritage, etc) indicated that Split Feathers not only felt a loss of these “possessions” because they were his or hers by birthright, but also that the individual was their “possession” of the things identified here. For example, not only did the individual mourn the loss of their families, but they also mourned their families’ loss of them as well. The loss of their biological family, extended family, clan and tribe was an unending grief for the respondents, a grief that spawned deep-seated resentment and hatred for the adoption system. (p.12)

Many adoptees grow up feeling a sense of grief and loss of their families, communities, culture and traditions. As mentioned earlier, I have a sister who was adopted out and she continued to share with us that she knew she belonged somewhere but didn’t know where. As an adult, my sister continues to struggle with her loss of family and community and unfortunately she continues to deal with her grief and loss by medicating herself with alcohol. There were parallels in all of the readings, which reflected the similarities on the impacts that adoption had on First Nations children and families. Carriere (2007) states, “This loss prevailed in profound ways throughout an adoptee’s life, eventually manifesting itself in emotional, physical, mental and spiritual areas” (54).

There were several articles written about the 60’s scoop and the effect that this had on our First Nations people. The enormous number of children who were adopted out and sadly many of these children were never able to connect back to their families or communities. Many of these children were adopted outside of Canada and the records were destroyed so many children

will never find their families. There were several articles which discussed the topic of children been adopted outside of their race, which resulted in loss of identity and culture. As mentioned by Crey and Fournier (1997), “ In the foster and adoptive care system, Aboriginal children typically vanished with scarcely a trace, the vast majority of them placed until they were adult in non-Aboriginal homes where their cultural identity, their legal Indian status, their knowledge of their own First nations and even their birth names were erased, often forever” (p.81).

As a result of the rippling effects of the 60’s scoop and the impacts of residential schools, in the early 1980’s the NCN nations decided to develop their own child welfare agency which was later named the USMA NCN Family and Children Services. The purpose of developing the agency was to allow the NCN people to control their own child welfare system, to ensure that the NCN children were been cared for in a culturally appropriate manner. The USMA NCN Family and Child Services is the longest running fully delegated child welfare program in BC. In 2010 USMA developed a three year plan which includes taking over adoption delegation from the Ministry of Children and Families Development. This research project may assist in restoring the teachings of the Elders by sharing the knowledge of the process of traditional adoption and traditional ways of caring for our children. Perhaps by taking control of the adoption process from the Ministry of Children and Family Development will also empower the NCN people to continue to move forward and assist in undoing some of the damage that has occurred to our the First Nations people, specifically the NCN.

There are also a number of articles that recognize that culturally, the processes of traditional adoption and cultural ways of caring for children has always existed. As stated by Durst (1999) in Carriere (2005) article, “First Nation people had words, ceremonies and processes for adoption long before contact. Historically, child rearing was a shared responsibility,

and children often resided with adults who were not their biological parents (Durst, 1999). This idea parallels what an Elders stated in the interviewing process when she shared, “that there is no such thing as an adoption; there was a way of caring for our children” (J. George, personal communication, April 2011). There are several First Nations communities that continue to practice the traditional way of caring for their children and there is recognition of the roles and responsibilities that family has when it comes to taking care of children.

Justice Kimmelman (1984) reports that,

The raising of children is seen as a communal responsibility with the immediate and extended family carrying the primary responsibility for a specific child. In addition to the input of grandparents, aunts, uncles and other siblings, the parents, it is understood, may select a specific person to assume a special role in the child’s life. This person will oversee the child’s development, teach necessary skills, and maintain a lifelong relationship with the child. Adoption in native communities does not only apply to children. A family may adopt a grandparent. A child may adopt an uncle or aunt. A man may adopt another brother and each will assume all the rights and responsibilities of a natural brother to each other’s wife, children and relatives (p. 163).

With respect to process, I could not find any article written from a Nuu-chah-nulth perspective and it would appear that there is not a lot of documentation on the actual process of traditional adoption. However, it would appear that the most descriptive articles are written from the view of the process used by Yellowhead Tribal Service Agency (YTSA). As mentioned in Carriere’s 2007 article on First Nations Adoption Policy; there is a brief description of the process used, when four adoptions took place in 2000 at the YTSA Open-Custom Adoption Program. Keewatin (2010) describes the process that YTSA uses and shares information about

the first adoption process and the second adoption. Keewatin gives a brief overview of the process and to summarize that process what occurred during the YTSA custom adoption process was, there was a pipe ceremony in the morning, the children were presented to their families and there was a feast and a giveaway.

As previously mentioned there is limited information on the actual process of traditional adoption. Baldassi states, “arguably, the Aboriginal right to practice adoption by custom that was recognized in the British Columbia court of Appeal involve more than just mirroring the statute, and would likely include such practice continued contact between the birth family and the adoptee”(p.91). There is a chapter in which Atkinson mentions the Nuu-chah-nulth, stating “the research also indicates that the practice served to strengthen, not undermine, the existing relationship in the child’s life” (p. 47). However, I could not find any literature on Ehattesaht custom/traditional adoption because Ehattesaht translates the culture verbally. The Elders teach and expect that the head of the family are responsible for teaching the cultural knowledge and this is done from a very young age. In NCN territory, all leadership rights and responsibilities are passed through the men, although everyone is aware that the women are the backbone of the community, publicly it is the men that are out front and are the leaders and make the decision for their family and community. The cultural teachings are transmitted to family on a daily basis, through sitting down and sharing a meal and/or attending a cultural function such as a potlatch.

Taking into consideration all of the ideas and themes that I found through the literature review, as the researcher and film maker, it was important to ensure that the ideas and knowledge of the Elders was captured in the interview process. It is important that our future children, who are going to be adopted do not suffer the impacts of grief and loss of their families and communities. We can ensure this by listening to the Elders about how we traditionally cared for

our children, ensuring they are connected to community and family, ensuring they are not disconnected from who they are and where they come from.

### **Methodology**

After careful consideration, permission and discussion with the Elders, I decided to proceed with producing a DVD as the final result of this project. Film making is a contemporary method of documenting and transferring the knowledge of the Elders. In addition, taking into consideration that most First Nations people are visual people, it was decided that the DVD was a visual tool that would be beneficial to the people of Ehattesaht. The reason the Elders want their knowledge recorded is to avoid losing any of the meaning or intent of the process. As I stated previously, the transfer of Indigenous knowledge needs to be protected to ensure that it does not fall into the wrong hands, which resulted in the decision that the intended audience will consist of the Ehattesaht people and USMA Family and Child Services.

There is less than a handful of Ehattesaht Elders left in Ehattesaht, I approached all of the Elders and respectfully requested their participation and three out of four Elders agreed to participate. I conducted an interview with the Elders, asking the following questions, why is traditional adoption so important to Ehattesaht? What is the process of traditional adoption? What are the ethical considerations for this project? What are the benefits and/or disadvantages of the traditional adoption process? Why is the preservation of custom adoption important to Ehattesaht? Throughout the interview process, I asked each Elder the same set questions and they shared their perspectives on traditional/custom adoptions, through story telling. According to Maori scholar Smith, “‘The talk’ about the colonial past is embedded in our political discourses, our humour, poetry, music, storytelling, and other common sense ways of passing on both narrative of history and an attitude about history” (p.19). After the interviews were

completed, one of the Elders asked me to go back to interview him again because he wanted to ensure he did not forget to share information with me.

After the story telling was completed, I watched each of the interviews and then began the transcribing process. The transcribing took several hours to complete the transcripts have attached them as appendix A,B, C, D, to this final paper. The Elders were given a copy of their interviews but none of them provided any revisions for the DVD. I approached my grandmother about how to proceed next and she stated that she didn't know how I should proceed but suggested that I just pray and ask for guidance. It was extremely difficult to decide what to data to use in the development of the videotape; as a result, I resorted to prayer to the ancestors. I walked alone in the forest and everything became so clear to what I needed to do, it was as though the ancestors were speaking to me and I followed what was shown to me.

The videotape data was compiled to create a DVD on the process of Ehattesaht traditional practices for caring for our children and families. As a recommendation of one of my committee members, the final DVD will be no longer than 30 minutes in length and will capture the importance and the process of a traditional adoption from an Ehattesaht perspective.

### **Analysis**

Throughout the interview process it appeared that there were themes in the knowledge that was been shared. There is a perception that the adoption process in Ehattesaht is actually not a process but a way of ensuring that children are cared for, which was a benefit to the children and families. The Elders shared that they wanted to ensure that there is an understanding that this data is an Ehattesaht perspective. In addition, the Elders wanted to ensure that the information been shared does not end up in the wrong hands, therefore the data should be

protected through copyright. There was a traditional way that Ehattesaht cared for their children and families, to ensure that people knew who they were and where they came from.

Although this project was done from an Ehattesaht perspective, it is the first project to be done in the Nuu-chah-nulth territory. I believe that it will lay the foundation for other First Nations to continue to explore traditional ways of caring for our children through the traditional adoption process.

Equally, I believe that this research project will also contribute to the child welfare system, particularly in the Nuu-chah-nulth territories because the Nuu-chah-nulth child welfare agencies is continuously exploring different way of practicing as it pertains to the CFCSA section 54.1-custom adoptions. As a supervisor at the Nuu-chah-nulth child welfare agency, it has been my experience that there are families who are interested in learning how they can practice their traditional culture and are exploring the traditional adoption process.

The following are the questions and the answers that were asked of each of the participants, which have assisted in the findings. I will provide you will a brief overview of some of the answers given in the research process. The answers were taken directly from the transcripts (appendix A, B, C, D) of the interviews with Josephine George, Fidelia Haiyupis and Earl Smith.

### **Why is traditional adoption so important to Ehattesaht?**

Josephine George stated that traditional adoption was important because, “To my point of view there was no adoption at home, people just give their children to whoever could look after them if they passed away and mom and dad looked after a lot of people to me that is traditional adoption” (J. George, personal communication, April 16, 2011).

Earl Smith stated, “it is a way of making sure the child is in good hands and is gonna be brought up properly” (E. Smith, personal communication, April 16, 2011). In addition Earl stated, “the way they call it traditional adoption is a way of life for our people because I saw my mother raise a lot of children and it wasn’t a question of can you take care of them, the question in our way is do you love them enough to take care of them, not do you have enough money, are you well off enough to take care of them? It comes from within us-that’s traditional adoption” (E. Smith, personal communication, April 16, 2011).

According to Fidelia Haiyupis, “it is important because it’s not about how much money I’m gonna get paid for looking after somebody that I see is in need of care-somebody that really needs loving care. Let them know who they are and where they come from” (F. Haiyupis, personal communication, April 16, 2011).

### **What is the process of traditional adoptions?**

Josephine stated, “well there was just an understanding is what mom said, if somebody passed away you were just expected to look after the family-whoever lost their parents” (J. George, personal communication, April 16, 2011).

Earl stated, “from what I can understand our principle of what you want to call traditional adoption was based on caring and loving and having the compassion to meet your commitments” (E. Smith, personal communication, April 16, 2011).

According to Fidelia,

I don’t know the process it’s just the feeling that people have for their family. A mother or even a father might have this feeling that my child isn’t safe here-I’m going to ask my aunt to look after just in case. They’ll know they be safe-when we get somebody to look after; when somebody’s given to you, when somebody give you a child it’s a gift. And

whoever gave you that child knows that the child will be safe because they know the family background of the adopter might be from...so that is a bit of the process I guess you could call it, that our people have an understanding of that, the child will be safe and taken care of and loved (F, Haiyupis, personal communication, April 16, 2011).

**What are the ethical considerations that need to be considered for this project?**

Josephine states, “I told you to have it copy rights so nobody else can copy it” (J. George, personal communications, April 16, 2011).

Earl states, “the most important ethic that needs to be understood is the desire from inside to do it for the benefit of the adoptee not for the benefit of the one that s adopting and to make sure the needs and desires of the adoptee are met” (E. Smith, personal communication, April 16, 2011).

According to Fidelia, “we don’t need to publicize it-it will get known. This is how its done-this is how Ehattersaht is-let’s go ask them” (F. Haiyupis, personal communication, April 16, 2011).

**What are the benefits and/or disadvantages of the traditional adoption process?**

Josephine states, “to me, the benefits were children were happy. Well to us when we were small the disadvantages was that we had to give up in order to share with the family that moved in on our parents” (J. George, personal communication, April 16, 2011).

Earl states, “there is no real disadvantages to wanting to adopt a person-if you love them and you care for them and you are willing to address what they want to do and what they want to be of the adoptee-there is no disadvantages-it’s all advantages” (E. Smith, personal communication, April 16, 2011).

Fidelia adds, “the process the real benefit is that at least the parents knew that their child will be safe but by the same token their child is told about their roots and I can’t say anything about-I’d rather think of the positive advantages” (F. Haiyupis, personal communication, April 16, 2011).

### **Why is the preservation of custom adoption important to Ehattesaht?**

Josephine states, “well it’s important to look after each other is what mom always said, you look after each other and that’s a lot of benefit if you look after each other” (J. George, personal communication, April 16, 2011).

Earl states that, “it identifies Ehattesaht as a caring people” (E. Smith, personal communication, April 16, 2011).

In addition, Fidelia states, “our way of doing this and knowing who we are has been-is a way of keeping families together and making people aware of who they are and where they come from” (F. Haiyupis, personal communication, April 16, 2011).

### **Reflections**

When I began this research project, I had preconceived ideas of what the final outcome would be and how the final project would appear. Originally I thought that the final product would be a very clear defined process of exactly how to do a traditional adoption. However, I learned very quickly that research never goes as planned. Honestly, I was quite surprised at the outcome of this research project. It was an extremely humbling experience to be a part of this process. Through the interviewing process there were several things that I learned and I will provide an overview from each of the questions which were asked of each of the participants.

Through this process, I learned that traditional adoption is important to Ehattesaht because it ensures that children and family members are taken care of by other family members.

By this I mean that when children required care, the family knew what they had to do to take care of the family. I learned that it was important for this process to occur because it ensured that our children and families knew that they were well cared for and loved. It also ensured that our children and families knew who they were and where they came from, their family history.

When I asked the Elders about the process of traditional adoption process, it was explained that it isn't an actual process of adoption. Instead there is a traditional process of caring for our children and families; which included taking care of the adults in our families and communities. What I mean by this is that it was evident through the interviewing process that Ehattesaht people are taught from a very young age the importance of family and taking care of that family.

It appeared that when a family had identified that a child needed to be cared for, each family member understood their roles and responsibilities. There was no elaborate party or feast to be held, what occurred was that a family who decided to care for a child, would hold a small dinner with family members and would announce that they were taking care of this child or children because the child needed to be cared for due to a parent inability to care for or because parents has passed away.

Once it was announced that this child was going to be cared for, it was an understanding and no one questioned it. The child became a part of that family and was accepted as a family member. This child would often be given a family name and this reaffirmed that the child was a part of the family.

It was interesting to listen to the Elders speak about the ethical consideration because there were different views. One of the most important considerations was to ensure that the information collected during this research project, should be kept for the sole purpose of the

Ehattesaht First Nation. It was explained that our Ehattesaht knowledge is ours alone and that this research project will begin a path of knowledge collection and if others are interested in learning about the traditional process of caring for children. It is believed that this process will allow people to seek out their community knowledge from their Elders; this is taking into consideration that although we are all Nuu-chah-nulth, each individual nation is unique and different in the traditional process of caring for children. Lastly, one of the Elders shared that the care of the child and ensuring they were safe and cared for was the most important consideration.

It was shared with me that some of the benefits of the traditional way of caring for children is that family knew their roles and responsibilities. It allowed family to exert their rights and responsibilities to care for their own children and families. In addition, it allowed children to grow up in their communities, with family, immersed in their culture and traditions'. It was explained that this process allowed children to know who they were and where they came from, which is important ensure that this is preserved within each individual.

Lastly, it was explained to me that the preservation of this knowledge is important to ensure that we as a younger generation ensure that we know what our roles and responsibilities are. That we know we continue to pass on the knowledge of our grandparents and great grandparents, to carry on the Ehattesaht traditional way of caring for our own. It was explained that each family has a person who is in charge of ensuring that the knowledge and process of caring is followed and that the knowledge is carried on.

As I reflect on the relevance of this research project on traditional adoption and its impacts on social work and child welfare practice; as a practitioner I have decided to look at the possibilities of utilizing the knowledge shared within the Nuu-chah-nulth child Welfare agency

and taking on the delegated authority for adoptions. I have spoken to my supervisor about my intentions and he fully supports the idea and is willing to allow me to pursue this avenue after I complete my MSW program.



It is my humble opinion that if our agency takes over this delegated authority, it will allow us the flexibility to practice our traditional ways of caring for our children. In addition, these practices will continue to take Ehattesaht children out of care of the Director and have them placed with family, extended family and community.

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## **Appendix A: Interview with Earl Smith (ES)**

ES: ... parents of children who passed away would take over and that a half of – we've seen happen and we tried and when Richard Atleo still at university of Nanaimo he agreed with us and he tried to get that in to the system and they refused.

### **KS: Why is traditional adoption so important to Ehattesaht?**

ES: traditional adoption I have a hard time grasping the concept because it was I can't believe it's an adoption when it's an obligation to your family and its important cause it force the child to stay in the community and stay connected to their roots, keeps the traditions and practices of cultural alive and keeps them connected to the community – whereas adoption outside it's – really feel sorry for April – it's just total disconnect there now and if she were home that wouldn't happen and it's a lot easier in that respect you know we don't jump thru hoops of policies and regulations and get somebody's approval. That's relevant to working with jack giving up the children – usually the adopting parents in the community – they see the children every day you see how they act – how they respond to people – where if you send them out to adoptive parents outside the community – you have to reinvent the wheel to get to understanding of how they behave and why they behave. The adopting parents coming from the community understand why they behave like that. One of the things that really comes to my mind is that its strengthens the bond in the family because choices like that if there is an indication there might be an apprehension - even if the family hasn't spoken to each other 3-4 years – around that issue hey the word apprehension per say is not bad – cause it has that reaction it pulls families together – the problem is once that fair is gone their back to square one again – that's one of the things we have to address hey –is when you make that commitment of being involved that involvement should be continual. One of the things that why grandmothers many of them I saw grandparents – take over when there is a tragedy in the family or when there's too much abuse of drugs and alcohol – the parents take

over – and – they – it - the purpose of that is to keep the family in tact – because if you remember Victoria – when we were doing back to basics – one of the strongest messages that the elders gave us – is never sever your family roots - keep intact and do everything you can to strengthen it and that's why grandmothers and grandfathers take over once the parents are gone. Everything is focused on the children – the best interest of the children and this is one of the big arguments we have – Roy and I – we sat on the board for Usma – we're not interested – we have to understand the policies – but that's not the number one issue – the number one issue is the safety of the child – the caregiver's understand why there in that situation because I see a lot of them and it happened to us when we asked a relative of one of relatives of children who were having problems here in Campbell river when we asked the child's uncle and aunt to take her in for 3 months – first question was – how much are you going to pay me and grandmas and grandpas just naturally do it. It totally shocked me when the uncle and aunt asked that you know in our traditional money wasn't the focus it was well being of the children. Traditional adoptions were never permanent and I thought about April again – that is permanent – we'd have to go thru a hell of a fight to get those children back. Our traditional way of caregiving for children wasn't permanent but it was an educational process for the parents and that was why it was so important to keep the children in the community. This is where I really admire Harry – and he said – I asked him what was your motive for adopting and he said it just came natural cause I saw my grandmother and grandfather do it I remember all those kids in that little house – me and my brothers and plus maybe 30 – 40 other kids and he – said his reasoning for doing that also was he knew we were from the same family root as that young fellow. He said I always remember that - he heard Art Nicolay and Willy Harry and Robert Peter and my father and the old Buffalo and granny say we don't talk about family trees – we talk about family roots. And he was astounded by her explanation about why we do that – I said tell him what you heard – and he said granny said roots go way, way out there –and the trees only grows so high and the branches only grow so far and that's why we talk about family roots cause it goes

further. And I take Ernie's family again – when my brother left his wife – Ernie, Danny, Carl and John moved in with us in Tsawassen and when we moved to the island in '85 they decided to go on their own – they were at their age of consent and they could do that – it appears to be a long process and the act for child protections services when they come of age – its natural with us because they have an example to follow by staying in the family.

**KS: So what is the process of traditional adoption?**

ES: I hate to call it a process when it comes naturally – it came naturally – and I often think of when our late cousin Moses Amos drowned there was no question Martha and Moses took the kids in. And you should see the little house they lived in – and raised them. I guess you could say it's a natural process with us – you don't fill out questionnaires or answer questions

VS: What would define them as being the ones that would take them as opposed to any one else in the family? What defined Moses and Martha as the ones to be responsible?

ES: family – there was big Mo and little Mo – Moses Smith and Moses Amos – that was the connection – Moses Amos was also associated with Moses Smith for a long time – that is where he learned how to fish. There was that connection – and all the Amos's lived at Queens Cove at one time and Moses was the only one that stayed. I don't even understand your question but I answered it anyway.

**KS: So the family would come together and decide who was gonna raise the children so that in essence was the process**

ES: well – it usually rested who it was a natural process who the kids associated with the kids and that's how we always had a full house – even extended family third or fourth cousins like when my mother took in that girl from Pacheedaht for the summer and she was a Jones. And when we had to do in 1976 seating Mike, Kweesta Jones stood up and thanked his cousin for taking his great- great granddaughter

from out of school. That must have been cousins – forty times removed but that recognition was there – so it was always family roots and that was – she had them in 60's so it was about 17 - 18 years before when Kweesta thanked for taking his great- granddaughter in.

**KS: So how would other know –for example – Moses and Martha – how would others know – communities know that this was what was decided? Was there a formal announcement? Was there a dinner – a potlatch?**

ES: No, no there never was just a natural process it was a family function and it was such a small a community everybody knew.

VS: You know the innateness of what happens, – when you start to articulate outside of its context I find this with the language as well – I'll ask about well what does this mean and it just like well what do you mean what does this mean? And then to ask Fidelia or Earl to explain what this means – I find cause I come from not knowing anything – and having no context to base my knowledge on so I kind of dig back makes them think the innate operation of things and that's why I asked what I asked there. There's that innate knowing that when you grow up in that environment – in that context there is things that are understood that don't even have to be talked about. Same with the language – thing with the language is – there e understood that don't even have to be explained but coming from the outside to the inside kind of to understanding – you are scratching your head.

ES: Those kind of things in the community and I saw it in the community it was total family involvement – extended family and the community.

**KS: So that's why there was no reason to do anything else?**

ES: Aha

**KS: What are the ethical considerations that need to be considered for this project?**

ES: I just want to finished with the example we talked about before – you know my sister Fidelia her ex-husband had a first cousin Marlene, and her mother, Marlene’s mother asked Victor could he take Marlene – look after her – she was just a baby – victor said I’ll have to talk to my boss so he went home and asked Fidelia. That’s what we do back home and again it’s total acceptance of Marlene by the whole family even to the point of giving her a traditional name in 1976 – my mother gave her a traditional name because that was her granddaughter – great-granddaughter – all those things is a part that he government doesn’t understand about our way of care giving and I’d rather speak about caregiving than speak about adoptions. Okay ready for the next question.

**KS: Okay – what are the ethical considerations that need to be considered for this project?**

ES: i think considerations – ethics is very much needed in adoptions but it’s not a project it’s a total commitment of the families and the children to interact between each other as a family unit even though you know there not the natural parents or the natural children of that adopting family – it isn’t a project it’s a process of life.

**KS: What I mean by this, sorry for being unclear – is this physical university project I'm working on what are some of the ethical considerations with respect to this project being produced to DVD form for Ehattesah? Can you think of any ethical considerations that we should be considering? I'll give you an n example granny had suggested that perhaps we copyright this so that nobody else can take the project to use it for their own benefit – it’s only for the benefit for Ehattesah.**

ES: You know the ethical situations we run into when we first run formed Usma – was that the ministry was domineering there was no give and take in discussions. Here it is – this is what we expect that was a real coming from a family who interacted quite a bit – that was a real ethical point for me because it wasn’t communications about what we were talking about – it was here’s the Act, here are the policies, here are the regulations – follow them. There was no give and take – there was no attempt to change

things that communities were uncomfortable with – I'm really, really glad that you're doing this because we talked about this way back – you know the ethics I think about is how healthy are ....

## **Appendix B: Interview with Fidelia Haiyupis (FH)**

**KS: Can you tell me why is traditional adoption so important to Ehattesaht?**

FH: It's like my brother said, tradition isn't really the right term- just the plain adoption in our nations is a better way of saying it. It's important because it's not about how much money I'm gonna get paid for looking after somebody that I see is in need of care - somebody that really needs loving care. Let them know who they are and where they come from. This I think is one of the reasons why adopting other people in need of care.

**KS: What is the process for traditional adoption – adoption?**

FH: I don't know the process it's just the feeling that people have for their family. A mother or even a father might have this feeling that my child isn't safe right here – I'm going to go ask my aunt to look after just in case. They'll know they be safe - when we get somebody to look after, when somebody's given to you, when somebody gives you a child it's a gift. And whoever gave you that child knows that that child will be safe because they know of the family background the adopter might be from. I've always known that – never really heard it – always known – the mamulthnii system – the mamulthnii process – when I was doing welfare courses ions ago – DIA – Vancouver Region – adoption system if the something happens drastic happens to the parents or to either parent they could legally bring that child back to child services and I said to them that's not right I said if I knew of a child that the mother knows that child is safe with me because it's the rest because it's the rest of the family that will take over looking after that child because that child is part of the family now. This happened to – Marlene was six years old when she used to stay with her dad and she used to stay with her aunt – so her dad said she was going to start school so he asked us to look after her – well he basically asked – my ex-husband to look after her so we did and she stayed with us, she became part of the family. Even when my kids went to Queens Cove- Marlene went too, mom took them – took them all. And that's how our people are – if

you know – the mother or the parent knows where they're placing a child and they know what's going to happen if a something happens to the mother. Mom gave Marlene a name even though she was from the Interior – gave her a name the name in 1976 so that's a bit of the process I guess you'd call it. Our people have an understanding that the child will be taken care of and loved.

**KS: What are the ethical considerations that need to be considered for this project?**

FH: because it's a – things get very personal – and because it's going to belong to Ehattesaht it will be – it's good that it will stay with them and not be sued for examples elsewhere. We don't need to publicize it – it will get known – this is how it's done – this is how Ehattesaht is – lets go ask them. Cause that's what they'll have to do – how did you get this. So it's good – we'll leave it up to Ehattesaht.

**KS: What are the benefits and/or disadvantages of the traditional adoption process?**

FH: The process the real benefit is that at least, the parent's know that their child will be safe but by the same token their a child is told about their other roots and I can't say anything about – I'd rather think of the positive advantages – it just hurts when once in a while Marlene – just lately – when her brother , her mother passed away – she was still really angry cause she felt she wasn't loved by her mother – it was always her brother – wally this wally that – one of the other things Marlene would ask me about years ago if a- about she wanted to look for her other siblings – but I went to social services and social services in Lillooet told me and started asking and social services told me that this is none of your business. And I said this is my business, that's my kids that you have out there somewhere – and it never went any further than that. That's the negative part of the mamulthnii process, it's no longer my business but that used to really hurt at least, Marlene knew she was alright with us.

**KS: Why does the preservation of custom adoptions important to Ehattesaht?**

FH: Our way of doing this and knowing who we are has been – is a way of keeping families together and making people aware of who they are and when they come from – back to Marlene – brother Cec was angry – he told me he went to and he said he saw this Indian lady and started talking to her h asked her where she came from and she said oh I have a sister living up that area and she said yeah I know her she is looking after my daughter. She has my daughter so the goes- I have to tell her.

### **Appendix C: Interview with Josephine George (JG)**

KS: this is Josephine George – she is my grandmother and she is the first person I am interviewing. So gran can you tell me why is traditional adoption is so important to Ehattesah

JG: To my point of view there was no adoption at home – people just give their children to whoever could look after them if they passed away and mom and dad looked after a lot of people and to me that was adoption. In our own way they looked after Able John and his whole family – I can remember that so well and Frank Savey and the whole family and I call that an adoption because we had to share everything with them nowadays we have to go thru mamuuthnii to take in kids and a lot of them get paid for it but mom and dad never did.

KS: So can you share with me gran, what was the process of traditional adoption or the process of someone taking care of somebody's children? What did they do to make that happen?

JG: Well there was just this understanding is what mom said if somebody passed away you were just expected to look after the family – whoever lost their parents.

KS: So um, what are the ethical considerations that need to be considered for this project? So you and I talked the other day – so what are some of the things that we need to be mindful of in doing this project and like ethically what do we have to be careful of? Do we remember we talked the other day – we talked about the copyright you wanted it copyrighted so that nobody else would

JG: Oh yeah – I told you to have it copyrighted so that nobody else can copy it.

KS: So can you share with me why you think that's important.

JG: Well it's important because this is from Ehattis – other people have their own way of adoptions – so what I say is what I saw.

Ks: Can you think of any benefits to us practicing the traditional adoption or the process that you are describing? What are some of the benefits?

JG: to me the benefits were the kids were happy.

KS: Were there any disadvantages?

JG: Well to us when we were small the disadvantage was that we had to give up in order to share with the family that moved in on our parents.

KS: Why do you think that it's important for to us to preserve this knowledge about traditional adoption or our way of taking care of?

JG: Well it's important that we look after each other is what mom always said you look after each other and that's a lot of benefit if you look after each other like when mom was passing away she told me look after each other –(**klaa shithl**) that's what mom said was her dying wish.

Ks: And so the word that you just used – what does that mean?

JG: please in mamuuthnii

Ks: is there anything else that you feel that I need to know that you want to share with respect to this project

Ks: so if there is anything else that maybe you want to add –like next week we're going to be interviewing your brother if there is something else you want to add is it okay if we record that with your brother?

JG: that's fine.

## Appendix D: Second interview with Earl Smith (ES)

KS: So Earl can you tell me why is traditional adoption so important to Ehattesaht?

ES: I really can't call it traditional adoption – what I say it's a way of life keeping families together because we never had in my lifetime traditional adoptions and I can site experiences in our family and one of them your cousin Ernie you know they adopted a relative from our matriarchal family the John's the John's – and to me that is traditional adoptions and it's a way of making sure the child is in good hands and is gonna be brought up properly and the other one I can site is my sisters adoption of Marlene when she was married to Victor – it was Victors family – my sister raised her and she decided to go on her own and there was another instance where she adopted another little girl a- that's our traditions from the heart. The way we were brought up – to care and understand and love a child – understanding the children's needs not the needs of policies like in the adoption of children from family care services and other organizations and I can speak to that because I have an adopted son – Vernon – but his mother did the right thing – she did it traditionally. I went to school with his mother and she said I won't be able to take care of my baby can you take him when it's born. And we had to wait a full year to go through the mamuuthnii system and they appeared to be an identity crisis with James because it was a whole year before we got him after we went through the whole process if it would have been done like his mother wanted – take the baby when its born – the identity crisis at the age of one probably wouldn't be there. So it's, the way they call it traditional adoption is a way of life for our people because I saw my mother raise a lot of children and it wasn't a question of can you take care of them the question in our way of life is do you love the child enough to take care of them not do you have enough money, are you well off enough to take care of them? It comes from the within us – that's traditional adoption. It's not you got to follow these rules – if you want to look after two children – you got to have six bedrooms – it's not that - it's from within.

KS: So can you share with me what is the process of traditional adoption? Your understanding of how do you do that?

ES: It's not really a process, it's really seeing what the child needs – not even the child's needs - the mother to get relatives that would consider adopting. They were on their way to adopt when she took in Eleanor Smith; she was about 14 I believe, 13-14. She saw the need – she needed care because her father had passed on but later on in my life I further understood that there was a written direction that if anything ever happened to your grandma's first cousin Francis Smith, the youngest daughter was to go to – he called her – his sister to be raised by your grandmother. That's the only written one that I saw and even as an adult – the needs of a person the condition of their health was paramount in our way – what people would call adoption – what my mother called it was caring for that person like Joseph Peters was born - he was an adult when my mother took him in cause he couldn't take care of himself he was so sickly after his sister drowned when he was a young boy and he always blamed himself for his mother and his sister passing cause he was steering the boat on the way to Nootka they got a hit by the Princess Maquinna on the way to the marriage of his sister to Reg David and he always blamed himself for that and he just broke out with eczema so badly – he suffered and other people tried to take Joe in like – our uncle Peter Brown tried but they couldn't do it. His first cousin, Michael Hanson and Hilda tried to take him but it was too much cause they had their own kids to look after, my mom had her own kids but we were taught to look after each other – not to look after each other but to look out for each other – there's a difference. So if a mother adopted her nephew and he was past the age of consent because she had a concern about his health – you know our – from what I can understand our principle of what you want to call traditional adoption was based on caring and loving and having the compassion to meet your commitments. Whereas in the adoption system that I had to go through with my son I had to make a report to Social Services once a month you know that's what I did for my child, how much clothing we bought him and how we fed him – you know we had to go through all those things eh.

Whereas when I saw my mother take – not adopt Eleanor but take them in to take care of them to meet their needs – my mom put the needs of her relatives. The way I see adoptions right now – what I experienced – when I adopted my son was the policies – no matter how much I loved my son I had to meet this criteria and in our way – as long as we showed love and took care of them and we were involved with them – you know we took them everywhere – we didn't hire babysitters to look after my son, we took him with us wherever we went. And introduced him to his grandparents on both sides, mother side and my side – it was spreading that knowledge of family roots and that's what it's all about is knowing your family roots. In our – I may as well stick with traditional adoptions cause that's what it's about – in our tradition it wasn't about how much we were gonna get paid for adopting somebody till they reached a certain age – the help would be cut off – our family adopted because it came from in here – we cared – we wanted to see our relatives have the same advantages we had as a family and it's all about family – how you make that individual feel that he is truly part of that family. My sister tried very hard to do that with Victor – it was cousin – tried really hard to make her feel – even to the point traditionally – when we sat our hereditary chief Mike Savey in 1976 my mother said Marlene's got to get an Indian name too – that's how far back our adoption went – it went right to the deepest part of our family roots – and it was up to Marlene to make a choice whether she was going to accept our family and I'm amazed at Marlene – she phones me and I'm only supposing that my sister taught her about family roots in her own way cause she phones and calls – and she says Uncle Earl what are we going – **inaudible** – that's traditional adoption – that's caring.

KS: Do you want to stop for a minute? What are the ethical considerations that need to be considered for this project?

ES: The ethical considerations – the people talk about that – what does – the most important ethic that needs to be understood is the desire from inside to do it for the benefit of the adoptee not for the

benefit of the one that's adopting and to make sure the needs and desires of the adoptee are met. In our culture those ethics were enforced by the larger family of uncles and aunts and other parts of the family and that's the most ethical thing that can happen that it's a family effort in traditional adoptions it's just not the people that are adopting – it's the rest of the family that keep the ethics in check . They remind them – look you promised to do this you said you were going to do this. There the conscience because they have the same interest and the same – they'll be painted with the same brush if the adopting parents don't do what the rest of the family remind them what they were going to do – it's a family effort. And she said as much when she reminded me she was the one that reminded me that your great grandma gave Marlene a name in 1976.

KS: What are the benefits and/or disadvantages of the traditional adoption process?

ES: The biggest problem I have- disadvantages is different people have different views of disadvantages – different people have different views of disadvantages – there is no real disadvantage to wanting to adopt a person – if you love them and you care for them and you are willing to address what they want to do and what they want to be of the adoptee – there is no disadvantage – it's all advantages. And the only disadvantage and I say it depends on the perspective of who is looking at it which is usually the ministry – they got a different understanding of what the adoptive parent is doing or what the family is doing – they see it differently because they got a different mindset and many, many of the social services that I work with them in the office in Campbell river – my first question used to be do you have children and they said well, we're the ones asking questions here and I'd say well you can leave the office because I got to understand where you're coming from – you got no children then you got no understanding.

KS: Why is the preservation of custom of adoption important to Ehattesaht?

ES: It does two things, first it identifies Ehattesaht as caring people and my sister and my nephew Harry are prime examples of adopting people kids, that are in need and other examples are our relatives late Agnes John and Florence. They have a real desire to keep families together – a real desire. Right now my relative Florence has ten children from two of her nieces living with her and she does it and she's doing a good job and when her sister Sarah went overboard in drinking Florence didn't wait for anybody to say yes you can adopt him – she just took Clifford and Kyle and Everley in and Rosalie and raised them till they were ready to move on and it was truly a family effort with our relative Agnes Martin and other extended families like the Mack's in Ahousaht it just wasn't the community it was family roots that helped those two ladies keep their sanity with all the children that they raised in the past that's why it's important to us.