

Podcast Script

(Ambient music)

My name is Emily Janzen. In mid April, 2019, I participated in something known as the Blanket exercise, an activity that simulated the history of Canadian First Nations, and explored the hardships of their past and present. I did take away a lot from this - but there was one, single word that stuck in my mind - understanding - the parting message from this activity was that the only way that our country can ever truly reconcile, is if we understand each other. But not just on a surface level - there needs to be a true understanding...

(Music fades out)

(Loading and driving away audio)

Roughly 1 month later, I am loading my bags into our school bus. We are heading out on a field study into northern British Columbia.

(Driving Audio)

Our project for this trip is based around capturing the most important thing we experience, so we can present it to others in hopes of convincing them to go experience it as well. We begin our studies with exploring British Columbia's history.

(Ambient music - just a few notes at a time - so can fade out quick)

(River Audio)

Can you hear that? I am standing on top of a suspension bridge, which hangs over precisely 138 feet of water. Those are the rushing rapids of Hell's Gate, the deepest part of the Fraser River.

(Walking sounds as the water fades away and music stops)

(Maybe bird sounds here)

I walk away from the river, and notice a plaque bolted to one of the railings, It tells of something known as the Fraser Canyon war, a conflict which occurred here in 1858 between the local Thompson First Nations and European settlers. I mean to just glance over it - but something catches my eye

(Inquiry music)

One of the bullet points states that 61 Europeans were beheaded by the Natives, seemingly unprovoked. I can't help but think that some information must have been left out here - and wonder, if this reflects a local attitude towards the First Nations people

(Music fades out)

(Driving Audio)

(Then audio of the tour)

I'm still thinking about this later in the day, as we pull up to a Victorian age settlement known as the Historic Hat Creek Ranch. Upon our arrival, we're greeted by some consumed interpreters, and there is one in particular who interests me.

(Audio of me talking to Tara)

She's a girl with long brown hair in traditional Shushwap nation clothing. I ask her for her name - it's Terra...

I'm not sure if I'll get an answer, but I also ask her if she has experienced racism - and to my surprise - she does not hesitate to answer

(Tera Interview clip)

(Ambient music - sad, distant, wild)

It's hard to hear her response. You would think that in modern times, these stereotypes could be put to rest. I guess it shows though, that even in the age of information, the cloud of ignorance still dims the light of progress. I think I've found an interesting topic.

(Music ends)

(Driving arriving audio)

The next day, I am prepared to further continue investigating this topic, but my inquiry is halted by our arrival in Barkerville.

(Casual, background guitar, pioneer sounding music)

This boom town turned heritage site was established in 1862, during the Caribou gold rush.

(Music fades into museum audio)

(Museum Audio)

Some of its notable modern attractions include countless gold mining exhibits

(Gold panning Audio)

Gold panning

(Horse audio)

And horse drawn stagecoach rides

(Music fades out slowly to tour audio - Fraser canyon war mention if possible)

In all of their attractions here at Barkerville, my mind temporarily drifts from my investigations. I sigh, taking in the rustic beauty around me.

(Bird sounds and town sounds)

But my break is interrupted by a mention of the Fraser Canyon War.

(Revealing music)

A costumed interpreter speaks of it only briefly, but I catch everything he says. Apparently the attacks were indeed provoked. They were a desperate attempt to protect against deadly plagues of small pox, which proved my hunch of missing information correct.

But it doesn't stop there. The next day, we tour Barkerville's Chinatown, and our guide speaks of an even worse form of missing information.

(Audio of saying that it was never taught in schools).

(Music hits the last note as she stops talking)

(Restaurant Audio)

That night during dinner at a Red Robin Restaurant, my mind buzzes with everything I had learned. I went through it like a checklist; Lack of knowledge from Schools, public information ... so there is lack of understanding ... it's an obstacle in reconciliation ... and people need to learn.

So it's simple then. I inform people about the modern state of First Nations communities, and they'll have the understanding needed for reconciliation, right?

Unfortunately, this can't be the entire answer. True learning only comes when one is open minded, and when there is a human connection

so the question really, is how can I convince others that learning is worth their time. What can I show them, that will create an authentic understanding?

(Mystic flute music)

Monday. It's been a few days, and we're getting farther and farther into the interior. We are also getting farther and farther away from our focus of British Columbian history

Or at least, British Columbian colonial history...

(Mystic flute music)

Today is the day, which we will be visiting the Nisga'a Nation. Similar to many of the other prominent British Columbian First Nation groups, such as Gitsan, the Kwakwaka'wakw, the Haida, and the Tsimshian, this nation has a rich and unique culture which dates back for thousands of years.

The Nisga'a however, have something that no other nation has

Independence

After a treaty was signed in the year 2000, known as the Nisga'a final agreement, this nation freed itself from the jurisdiction of the Indian Act. This gave them complete control of their Government, their land, and their economy.

We drive up a narrow, mountainside road, dotted with lakes, the occasional trail. I am not sure what to expect - are they thriving? Are they in need of help? perhaps this community is thriving under it's independence, or in grave need of help. I sit in anticipation for around an hour, until finally, we arrive in the valley...

(Music waits)

And it is nothing like I have ever seen before...

(Music builds)

Everywhere I looked, there was a mix of ancient culture, and modern civilization. It's in The houses, the community centres, the government buildings, and somehow exists on perfect balance.

When we enter the Nisga'a Lisims Government, and later the museum, an incredible array of artifacts are on display. These aren't just pictures anymore - they are right in front of me. Not to mention that each one tells a story, many originating from over a thousand years ago.

But, the most meaningful part to me, are the encounters I have with the people. In the museum, I speak with _____, a museum _____.

Although before the interview, she had mentioned some of the hardships which her people face, she comes from a place of optimism, of national pride - This is a refreshing perspective to see from.

(Music fades away)

(Just crunching gravel)

I take a seat outside of the Nisga'a Museum, and look towards to large, snow capped peaks in the distance.

(Pause) (Wind sounds)

The wind blows a little

(Wind sounds still there, but quiet)

I'm finally able to relax, because I've figured it out.

(Gentle, victorious piano music)

A month prior, during the Blanket exercise, I was spoken to about true understanding.

I feel that visiting the Nisga'a gave me this. I learned numerous stories and facts, many which are only known only within the valley

I discovered another perspective, one that doesn't just show the problems, but the solutions.

and I gained personal connections, ones that will stay with me long after the details fade.

This is what I need to convince others to experience, if I want them to understand as well. The only way that our country can ever truly reconcile, is if we understand each other. But not just on a surface level - there needs to be a true understanding - and visiting nations like the Nisga'a is how we will have this.

(Music fades out)
