

Sun, Jul 20, 1997

Jody Paterson

VISIONQUEST - THE HEALING JOURNEY

Their bios list height, weight, occupation, family status - everything except why they'd want to paddle 1,600 kilometres through the rough waters off the B.C. coast. Maybe they wanted a physical challenge. Maybe they wanted a scenic tour like no other. Or maybe, like the two friends who launched VisionQuest, they saw their chance to make a difference.

Esther Shackelly: Nooaitch tribe, aerobics instructor, BC Ferries employee. John Peters: Tlingit, guitar player, student. John TooGood: RCMP member, former detox centre supervisor, father of three. Debbie Malthouse: Powell River school teacher, skier, mom. They're among more than 50 VisionQuest Journeys '97 paddlers currently enroute to Victoria, having left July 3 from Hazelton. The paddlers linked up this weekend in Port Hardy with First Nations paddlers on their annual Tribal Journey, and the flotilla will swell even more in its final days for a triumphant 50-canoe entrance into the Inner Harbor Aug. 3, the start of the North American Indigenous Games.

VisionQuest began 12 years ago with a madman. American draft dodger and suspected murderer Michael Oros had eluded RCMP for years, but police thought they finally had him surrounded in the early morning of March 19, 1985, in bush near the B.C.-Yukon border. But Oros circled back, killing Const. Mike Buday with a single shot. Const. Garry Rodgers then shot Oros dead and a 13-year pursuit was over. In the years that followed, artist and RCMP Staff Sgt. Ed Hill dreamed of doing a painting to commemorate the murder of Buday. His friend and fellow artist Roy Henry Vickers also had a dream: to build a recovery centre for people fighting addictions.

The two found their image on the shores of Teslin Lake, a decade after Buday's death. They painted the last scene Buday saw as he lay dying. Sales of the limited-edition print brought in the first \$100,000 toward building the treatment centre. The provincial RCMP became official supporters of VisionQuest a year ago, and the task of raising an estimated \$5 million began in earnest.

VisionQuest paddlers are a mix of RCMP, First Nations and regular folk. They're travelling a route traditional to both the police and First Nations elders, who know it as "The Grandfathers' Journey." They've stopped in Terrace, Prince Rupert, Kitkatla, Klemtu, Bella Bella and will now make their way down the east coast of Vancouver Island.

Canoes are paddled backward into each night's stopover as a symbol of peace, and the celebratory potlatches that follow have reportedly been more exhausting than the paddling. Ceremonial blankets have been filled with donations in every village; in

Vickers' birthplace of Kitkatla, the 800 residents donated an astounding \$20,000.

I'll be spending the next two weeks with the paddlers and writing a column daily about the people and the voyage as we make our way to Victoria. I know I've got a lot to learn from those who would give up a month to blisters, muscle ache, hard work and sea-sickness.

Both Vickers and Hill are among the paddlers, Vickers in a sleek black canoe named Many Hands. It was named for the many hands needed to pull a canoe 1,600 kilometres, and the many hands that will build a dream.

Mon, Jul 21, 1997

Jody Paterson

VISION QUEST - THE HEALING JOURNEY

FORT RUPERT

My face smells like gasoline from washing it with the soap I lent to the wife of the canoe carver. The carvers had been up all night trying to get two more canoes ready to leave with the Tribal Journey entourage Sunday morning. They'd needed something to soften the brushes with before oiling the raw cedar, and gasoline was all they could find. The carver's wife hasn't been able to get the smell off her hands.

The all-night construction vigil, the chip-chip-chip of men hollowing out a one-tonne log, hadn't gone unnoticed in the VisionQuest camp across the field.

"I had a wonderful sleep. I could hear my heartbeat all night long," declared artist Roy Henry Vickers. "Yeah? Well, my heart sounds like a belt sander," grumbled a less-rested campmate.

By 9:30 a.m., eight canoes were ready for launch from the beach a few kilometres south of Port Hardy. The three VisionQuest fibreglass canoes weigh in at a slim 450 pounds apiece, an easy carry to the low-tide mark. The chore was more onerous for paddlers lugging down the five traditional cedar Tribal Journey canoes, each a thousand pounds or more.

The day's destination was Alert Bay, 60 kilometres to the south. That's a regular day's paddle for the VisionQuest paddlers, on the water since July 3 following a route from Hazelton known as The Grandfathers' Journey. It hasn't been an easy trip to this point, sometimes 11 or 12 hours paddling in heavy seas and rain that never stops just to cover those 60 kilometres. A virus has spread among the exhausted paddlers, and everyone seems to be either recovering from or succumbing to something awful.

From here on, VisionQuest will travel with Tribal Journey, an annual sojourn from Port

Hardy to Victoria. The well-oiled VisionQuest machine will have to make some allowances for the mellower Tribal Journey: Sunday, delayed by beachside ceremonies, the canoes set out too late to catch the all-important flood tide.

Vickers has been dreaming about VisionQuest since he was 28. He's 51 now and free of the addictions that haunted him most of his life; the money raised by VisionQuest will go toward a recovery centre to help others find the peace that always eluded Vickers.

Most of the 60 VisionQuest paddlers are RCMP, native and white, picked from 160 police and civilian applicants by Insp. John Grant. He saw a chance not only to raise money for a good cause, but make historic reparations with First Nations.

"The RCMP did things in the past that may have been legal at the time, but not moral," said Grant. "We're coming into communities to apologize for what has happened in the past 124 years."

A feast awaits in Alert Bay, as it has in Port Simpson, Kitkatla, Bella Bella. These travellers are welcome here, and animosities from another era are forgotten. Fort Rupert resident Terena Hunt watched three eagles escort the VisionQuest canoes into her home harbor, and knew she was witnessing something important. "This is the first time in history [First Nations and RCMP] have gotten together to do something significant for human kind," said Hunt. VisionQuest is coming into our communities, and they're moving the people. This is big. I don't know when this will ever happen again."

Tue, Jul 22, 1997

Jody Paterson

Years of misery began in school

ALERT BAY

Cecil Johnson knows that old brick building that darkens the sky behind the dancers here to greet the canoes. It used to be a residential school back when he was 12 years old, the year his mother died.

They called it St. Michael's, although there was nothing holy going on there. Johnson learned to fight at St. Michael's, and later he learned to drink. He was an expert in both for most of the years he was married, and kept it up even after his wife committed suicide.

"And then I woke up one day and knew that was the day I wasn't going to drink anymore. I'd been drinking for four days. I had four days' growth on my face. I looked in the mirror and said, 'I'm never going to see you again, you son-of-a-bitch.'"

That was seven years ago, and everything was supposed to work out after that. But too many things had gone wrong in his family for too long. A year ago, Johnson's son committed suicide at age 17. In January, his 21-year-old daughter attempted suicide.

"I know it's a result of how I brought them up. My son was on the road to becoming an alcoholic, just like me. Instead, he hanged himself." When Johnson heard about the VisionQuest project not long after his son's suicide, he knew he had to be part of it. His son had been a paddler in the 1994 Tribal Journey, and now he too would seek solace from the ocean. He'd also been an auxiliary RCMP officer for two years, and VisionQuest is an RCMP initiative in partnership with artist Roy Henry Vickers.

Johnson joined up Sunday with the VisionQuest pullers - the name the paddlers go by - canoeing from his Fort Rupert home to the site of the residential school at Alert Bay. He'll stay with the team through Aug. 3, when they arrive in Victoria for the start of the North American Indigenous Games.

The VisionQuest dream is to raise \$5 million for an addictions recovery centre, and Johnson is a believer. "I got goosebumps and was shaking all over a couple days ago just thinking about going on this. To me, this journey is healing and spiritual. I'm going to heal a little more. I want to be able to deal better with my son's death."

He also has a daughter who he wants to survive, but her healing depends on his own. "She tried to kill herself because she missed her brother so much. I told her, 'Honey, if you'd succeeded that night, I'd have been in the grave that same night.'"

The painted brickwork of St. Michael's is peeling now, and visitors to Alert Bay stop to take photos of the eerie old place. The residential school is now band offices.

Wed, Jul 23, 1997

Jody Paterson

`Everything's OK when you're in the boat'

SAYWARD

The morning meeting doesn't always happen. The night's accommodations don't always come through. But when paddle hits the water, everything's just fine. As VisionQuest paddlers made their way down Johnstone Strait, dolphins played in the wake of the support boats and a whale spouted off in the distance.

And the 60 paddlers say the nature show was even better farther north, where a grizzly reared on to its hind legs on shore at Rivers Inlet and an eagle was lured to water level with a newly caught cod.

"It's been long days, short nights, and everyone gets tired, tired, tired. It's been wet, but

wonderful. And everything is always OK when you're in the boat," said Victoria RCMP Sgt. Garry Spence.

The VisionQuest contingent, a mix of RCMP and civilian paddlers raising money for an addictions recovery centre, left Hazelton July 3 and will arrive in Victoria Aug. 3.

The three canoes are dependent on a fleet of support boats that stick close by: Zodiacs to transfer fresh crews into the canoes, two cabin cruisers to prepare hot chocolate and soup for rain-soaked travellers, and a seine boat that has alternately been bunkhouse, baggage caddy and change room for police paddlers donning red serge for a grand community entrance. VisionQuest organizers Roy Henry Vickers and RCMP Staff Sgt. Ed Hill called in their markers to muster up a support crew, all of whom are friends of one or the other.

Blaine and Henny Hagedorn's luxurious Toucan carries "the ladies who cook," including Henny. The Hagedorns knew Hill from his time in the Gibsons RCMP detachment; Blaine, who owns a SuperValu in Gibsons, called in his own markers to come up with most of the food for the trip for free.

Greg Grant is also from Gibsons, and turned over his real-estate business to his employees for the duration while he and crewmate George McRae cater to the paddlers from aboard Therapy. Relief paddlers count it as a bonus to spend time on Therapy, where the blueberry muffins are baking and the barbecue's always on.

Seine boat captain Cecil Hill grew up with Vickers in Kitkatla. He's a lifelong friend and a VisionQuest believer, recovering from his own alcoholism. "If anyone knows about the reason for this, it's Roy and I. I told Roy that if our visits have a positive effect on just one person in each community, it's worth it," said Hill.

The message of recovery, hope and healing was particularly important to communities on B.C.'s north coast, said Hill. Many of the villages have been devastated by poverty and addiction. "I see a great need for a lot of healing. And the really great thing is they recognize it themselves in the communities. They're screaming for help," said Hill.

Few of the paddlers were prepared for the emotional welcomes they received in communities where hopelessness prevailed. Hill said the healing goes both ways.

"I said to Roy after our first two stops, I don't know if I have enough tears to make it to Victoria." Donations may be made to: VisionQuest Recovery Society, 657 West 37th Ave., Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 1K6.

Thu, Jul 24, 1997

Jody Paterson

Nobody complains about little problems

BROWNS BAY

We'd been paddling for almost seven hours. The trucks with our clothes and tents were supposed to meet us at a campsite north of Campbell River. But a security company hired by the producers of the movie *Eaters of the Dead* being shot nearby had blocked the roads passing near the set. So the trucks couldn't get through.

Nobody complained too much. Those who demand order from chaos must have been weeded out in the early organizational days of VisionQuest. The 1,600-kilometre canoe trip from Hazelton to Victoria is no place for the inflexible.

There's not a chance of keeping plans straight when 33 people are paddling in the ocean and another 33 or so are driving vans, boats and U-Hauls through remote communities to meet them. The other day in Alert Bay, a van was left behind after one guy passed the keys to another guy, who passed them to another guy, who thought the first guy was supposed to be driving.

The night before, billeting arrangements fell through and paddlers found out at midnight that they had no place to stay. I spent the night on the couch in the coffee room of the Alert Bay police station - one of the benefits of being part of the RCMP-supported VisionQuest - while fellow travellers slept in the weight room.

Victoria RCMP Sgt. Garry Spence said one of the weirder stays of the trip was at Namu. Paddlers pulled into the site of an abandoned cannery in a downpour. Desperate for an alternative to pitching a tent in the flood, they camped out on racks once used for drying fishnets. Spence said the shelves of bedrolls looked like a prisoner-of-war camp.

And in the absence of chaos, there's the unexpected. Near Kitkatla, a paddler getting out of a Zodiac support boat accidentally hit the throttle, slamming another paddler into the rocks. He had to be airlifted to hospital. Another paddler, newly pregnant, had to be sent home several days into the trip due to exhaustion. A photographer hired to document the historic trip couldn't handle the rustic living conditions and quit. One paddler's bug bite infected to the point that he required intravenous antibiotics.

But the journey carries on, and RCMP Insp. John Grant keeps his eyes on the prize: money and awareness raised through VisionQuest for an addictions recovery centre. And as one RCMP paddler noted, flexibility is one of the most essential characteristics sought in police recruits.

The trucks never did show up that night. We finally loaded on to the seiner travelling with us as a support vessel and were transported to a neighboring bay. I fell asleep on the deck. I've learned to fall asleep anywhere, even in a recreation centre with the guy next to me snoring and a couple of younger paddlers playing basketball at the far end.

On this night, I'll bunk on a bench in the Campbell River Band's bighouse, just me and

the VisionQuesters and 150 or so paddlers travelling with Tribal Journey. There's a cedar fire burning in the middle of the room, and the kids are chanting and playing drums in the corner. And I'll sleep just fine.

Sat, Jul 26, 1997

Jody Paterson

Tradition rides in cedar canoes

QUALICUM

They weigh a tonne. Really. And VisionQuest's fibreglass canoes can dance circles around them.

But there are no rivals in beauty to the traditional cedar canoe, built for warriors and travellers and powered by the songs of those who pull it through the water.

The canoes come from Fort Rupert, Alert Bay, Campbell River, Comox, leaving their home communities to make their way south to Victoria with Tribal Journeys.

The three VisionQuest canoes joined five Tribal Journeys canoes a week ago; numbers have since grown to 14 as the procession makes its way along the Island's east coast, and as many as 50 are anticipated to arrive in the Inner Harbor on Aug. 3 for the start of the Indigenous Games. "Cedar canoes are very important to our culture. We have to pick the proper tree, do the proper blessing, show respect for the tree for giving up its life to become a canoe," said Michelle Washington, Tribal Journeys co-ordinator. "Not just anyone can build and paddle a canoe."

Canoe culture was reawakened in B.C. with a paddle to Expo '86 by the Bella Bella natives. They then challenged other tribes to try their hand at long-distance paddling; the result was 1993's Qatwus gathering in Bella Bella, which attracted 24 canoes from as far away as Washington state. Tribal Journeys debuted in 1994 to mark the Commonwealth Games. For the next two years, First Nations paddlers did smaller runs in preparation for the biggest voyage of all: The 1997 North American Indigenous Games.

The Squamish canoes, joining up with Tribal Journeys in Nanaimo on Sunday, will carry a sacred bundle for the Games from the elders of Hobbema, Alta. The bundle is being carried to Vancouver from Kamloops by runners before being put on the Squamish canoe.

In each native community from Port Hardy south, VisionQuest and Tribal Journeys canoes have been greeted on the beach by a welcoming party and invited in to feast and enjoy a night in the big house. Washington said the beachside ceremony hearkens back to a time when canoes had to ask permission to come ashore on another nation's

territory.

"When a canoe asks to come ashore for a night of rest, they may be asking their traditional enemies. It's important to seek permission, because it's not just us standing here on the beach - it's all of our ancestors standing here with us, and they're seeing the canoes of their enemies coming in." Each community sends out its own canoe to greet incoming canoes, and guests are careful not to speed in ahead of it: "The host comes in first to warn the people that these canoes are coming into their territory," said Washington.

Campbell River paddler Gary Dawson-Quatell is one of 27 pullers on the Klaneekwala canoe, which joined Tribal Journeys on Thursday. He said his grandfather used to talk all the time about his canoe travels, and Dawson-Quatell wanted to try it for himself to "bring back my history." And that's the point of Tribal Journeys, said Washington. "We're doing this for the love of our culture, our people. We want to show our youth what we used to do."

Sun Jul 27, 1997

Jody Paterson

The healing journey - Surviving suicide epidemic

I was in the food lineup at the Qualicum welcoming feast when Patricia Johnson told me that she'd tried to kill herself last summer. She was 20 at the time. Her younger brother had killed himself three months before, and she just didn't know how to live without him. They had been all each other had for most of their lives, holding on from foster home to foster home and through their own mother's suicide when Patricia was nine.

That was the year Patricia started drinking, and by 12 she was already worrying that she was an alcoholic. She kept on drinking after her brother's suicide, after her own suicide attempt, even after an accident seven months ago when the boat she was on crashed in frigid waters near Oweekenow.

There's no liquor store in Oweekenow, so Patricia and some relatives had gone to stock up in another village. The boat was loaded to the gunwales with booze when it crashed on to the rocks. Patricia almost died of hypothermia, and was angry when she didn't.

Three months ago, Patricia checked into a treatment centre in Kitimat. It was hard staying sober, especially when a sister of one of the people she was going through treatment with committed suicide. Then another guy getting treatment found out his brother had killed himself.

In First Nations communities, suicide always gets someone you love sooner or later. In every community VisionQuest has visited on its canoe trip from Hazelton to Victoria, paddlers have heard the pleas from elders to help them heal the sickness in their

villages. And as they throw donations in the blanket at the bighouse toward an addiction recovery centre, they're buying hope. Roy Henry Vickers went to the RCMP with the concept of a 1,600-kilometre canoe trip to raise money for a recovery centre. The RCMP saw the chance for grassroots involvement in crime prevention and reparation for past wrongs against Indians. And VisionQuest was born.

"Recovery is recovery of our birthright: our right to be free, to have fun, to find unconditional love. We won't need to run from our emotions anymore," said Vickers. "When I was in recovery, I learned to say, 'I'm Roy Vickers, I'm an addict, and I'll stay addicted to whatever keeps me away from my emotions.'" Vickers has been sober for five years, since going to a recovery centre in Wickenburg, Arizona. His two sisters went through the same program, as did his wife Rhonda. The odds are only 4 in 100 that a Wickenburg graduate will be clean a year later, but that's still four times better than the 1 in 100 odds for those at other treatment centres.

Patricia plans to beat the odds. She saw her brother in a vision a few days after the boating accident; they hugged and laughed and he refused to say goodbye, and Patricia knew he'd be with her forever. After almost dying twice, she's wondering if maybe there's a reason she's supposed to keep on living right now.

She went back a while ago to find her old friends in Oweekenow, but everybody was still drinking like it was fun, even though hardly anyone was laughing. She's thinking of moving somewhere else.

Fri Jul 25, 1997

Peter Salmon

Songkeeper dreams of the day all can sing

Comox

The elders call him the songkeeper. And at a time when entire villages no longer have anyone who remembers their songs, William Wasden is a sought-after man. Wasden was 19 when elder Tom Willie came from Kingcome Inlet a decade ago to visit Wasden's father, who was then the band manager in Alert Bay. Willie was looking for singers. "My father took me to him, and the old man sang a song. I was really captured by his singing. I felt bad that the elders had kept these songs going, and now the art was dying," said Wasden.

Willie sang several songs to Wasden, including a rhythmically difficult one that the elder said had the hardest beat to learn. Wasden taped it and listened to it over and over at home that night. The next day, he sang it flawlessly for Willie. The teacher had found himself a pupil.

Wasden spent the next four years training under Willie almost every night. The VisionQuest paddler learned more than 200 traditional songs, some in languages 1,000 years old.

"Cannibal Dance songs, weather dances, chief songs, songs for feasting, paddling, mourning - I know songs for all occasions. At almost every big gathering, I'm asked to sing," Wasden said. An illness that hit Wasden when the paddlers reached Bella Bella kept him out of the canoe until Thursday, but not out of the festivities. When the three VisionQuest canoes pulled into Wasden's home village of Alert Bay this week, Wasden sang and danced at the feast and celebration that followed. "I was an artist before I was a singer, but what I saw was a lot of artists and nobody singing. I really enjoy being part of our culture, seeing the joy and happiness on the elders' faces when I sing for them."

Wasden taught traditional singing at the Alert Bay school for four years, and now contracts out to native villages that need to relearn their own songs. His late teacher was "the last of the master songkeepers"; Wasden figures there are probably only five or six singers on the north end of the Island who know a wide variety of songs.

His family has never shared his interest - he still remembers his disappointment at discovering that his mother was fluent in Kwakwaka'wakw but never taught her children. Native heritage is an obsession for Wasden, and he dreams of the day when tribes don't need an imported songkeeper to teach them.

Wasden continues to paint and carve as well, but art fanciers will have to see his work in the bighouse or not at all. "I keep my artwork inside my culture. Some things are sacred, and artwork is one of the most important parts of our culture. I don't think that these things that were sacred treasures of our elders should be hanging on the walls of collectors."

Wasden's own struggles with drug and alcohol addiction have led him to seek his own recovery in VisionQuest, an RCMP/First Nations initiative to raise \$5 million for an addictions recovery centre.

"I've done my partying. It's time for something else. The trip from New Hazelton to Victoria is the time for me to think what I want to do with my life. Because I am in a position to lead. I know that."

Tue, Jul 29, 1997

- Soul craft- Corey Moraes's transformed canoe

It was to be a journey of transformation, for him and for many on their own journeys of recovery from addiction. And so artist Corey Moraes transformed a canoe, changing fibreglass into art and sign paint into spirituality.

The New Westminster artist was commissioned by VisionQuest chief expeditionist Chris

Cooper to paint the canoe Cooper would use on the 1,600-kilometre trip from Hazelton to Victoria. Moraes wanted the design to suit Cooper as well as the goals of VisionQuest.

"The wolf was an animal Chris was drawn to, so I chose a sea wolf. I thought about his knowledge of excursions and guiding, so I had the sea wolf blend into a killer whale on the bow, and at the back is a human transforming into a whale," said Moraes, 27. "That represents us as human beings, gaining knowledge. This journey is like a transformation for most of us."

Moraes, a Tsimshian, consulted with a Tsimshian elder in Kitkatla to come up with a name for the finished canoe. The elder suggested Soul Entering, the closest translation for transformation in the Tsimshian language. Moraes also organized a traditional blessing for Soul Entering and the other two VisionQuest canoes - Many Hands, owned and painted by Roy Henry Vickers, and Strong Arrow, owned by the RCMP. The canoes were brushed with cedar boughs and blessed by Burrard Nation elder Bob George on Apr. 23 at Ambleside.

Like several of the VisionQuest paddlers, Moraes is in recovery. He quit drinking two years ago, transforming from alcoholic to artist. He also became a drug and alcohol counsellor, reaching out to others as they had once reached out to him.

He remembers his early days in a treatment centre, feeling instant dislike and detachment from the others in for treatment. He later realized that what he saw in them were pieces of himself.

But friendship grew, and those who'd walked the path first helped Moraes stay on track. The hardest part was watching some fall away. Moraes wants to use his art to connect to his culture, carving masks and totems and ultimately, a cedar canoe. That goal has been reinforced by his VisionQuest experience.

"When we arrive in the canoe, the people appreciate it tremendously, seeing it in the water. That's what I'm trying to achieve in my art, to touch somebody. And there is community in a canoe, because everyone has to pull as one."

Moraes wasn't sure what to expect from the month-long journey, which ends Aug. 3 when the canoes paddle into Victoria's Inner Harbor for the start of the Indigenous Games. What he has found is the beginning of something big, the "genesis of a strong movement" among First Nations.

"It has been an honor for me to witness the healing that is beginning already," said Moraes. "We will rebuild the strength that has always been there. As an elder said to me, our culture has never died. It was asleep, and now it's reawakening."

Wed Jul 30, 1997

Jody Paterson

Spiritual voyage also feeds the body

It'd be the weight-loss opportunity of a lifetime if it weren't for all the food.

Three weeks of pulling canoes through ocean waters seven or eight hours a day ought to be enough to burn off a zillion or so calories. The only problem is the zillion and a half consumed.

Morning comes early for paddlers on the VisionQuest journey from Hazelton to Victoria, and even earlier for "the ladies who cook" - Henny Hagedorn, Carol Grant, Joanne Dunn and Joy Hill. If breakfast is 6 a.m., the women are up at 5 a.m., whipping up a vat of porridge and scrambling up a chicken coop's worth of eggs.

Their afternoons are spent aboard a support boat preparing the next day's lunches for paddlers and crew: 100 sandwiches, 100 apples, 100 granola bars, tucked under the canoe seats first thing in the morning or delivered via Zodiac in the midst of the day's travels.

Chilled paddlers who pulled canoes in the rain for much of the trip always found a bowl of hot soup waiting aboard a support ship. One rainy night in Namu, the cooks ambitiously made spaghetti in an abandoned cannery, adding fistfuls of pasta to the same pot of water until everyone was fed.

The women - all either a wife, sister or friend of VisionQuest organizers - had anticipated having to cook dinner more often. But the day's big meal has largely been taken care of by Indian communities as paddlers stop for the night on their journey to raise funds for an addiction recovery centre. The communities spend days preparing a feast for the hundreds of VisionQuest and Tribal Journeys travellers. In keeping with feast tradition, organizers arrive at people's homes with a box of ingredients for a specific dish to be brought to the dinner; in small communities, almost everyone will cook something.

In Port Simpson, there was octopus, oolican, seal intestines; in Fort Rupert, there was caesar salad, chicken, garlic bread; in Alert Bay, there was sweet and sour pork, chow mein, spaghetti; in Nanoose there was corn, roast beef, curried rice. And at every dinner there is salmon, barbecued and smoked and baked and dried.

As good as the dinners get, the desserts are even better. The 70-member Qualicum band laid out so many pies that paddlers had leftovers for lunch the next day.

Communities have been generous with their food and their support, say Hagedorn and Hill. In Hartley Bay, where a heartbroken community was grieving for a 15-year-old girl

who had committed suicide, the feast went ahead regardless and every guest was given a drinking glass as a gift. In Kitkatla, women brought their best china and silver from home for the feast. In Qualicum, bandanas and water bottles were given to everyone. In Bella Bella, freshly baked bread was handed out as the canoes departed. RCMP Insp. John Grant, who organized VisionQuest with artist Roy Henry Vickers, said the real gift of the journey is watching the RCMP paddlers learn what he has known for a long time.

"I've spent a lot of time in First Nations communities and I know what they're capable of. They're rich, vibrant communities," said Grant. "But watching some of the members see this for the first time is like watching your kid opening Christmas gifts. We will not be the same people when we return."

Thu, Jul 31, 1997

Jody Paterson

Biker of the sea rides to paddlers' aid

He's the ocean's Easy Rider, cruising the high seas with the wind in his hair and a spare motor at his back. And when he hears that familiar cry, "Frank!" he knows it's time to turn that Zodiac and find the distressed paddler who needs a bottle of water, a break from pulling or a little privacy for bladder relief.

Frank Camp has been riding Zodiacs for more than 20 years. He has worn out three of them so far on trips to distant ports, including Skagway, Alaska. "I love the adventure of the Zodiac. I compare it to the person who drives a motorcycle: it's independence, power, control, and the peace of being in nature," said Camp.

Camp, former superintendent of Pacific Rim National Park, saw a poster for VisionQuest one day in Tofino. A longtime acquaintance of VisionQuest organizer Roy Henry Vickers, Camp volunteered to sign on as a support boat for the month-long canoe journey from Hazelton to Victoria.

"I stay with the canoes, keep an eye out for unforeseen water conditions, change somebody out of a canoe. In really bad water, I provide a degree of confidence. That plays quite a role in what I'm supposed to be doing." Camp was born into wilderness. His father was a trapper and park warden and his mother was Cree; Camp was born in a log cabin north of Edmonton with his grandmother as midwife. The family then moved to the wilds of Jasper, where Camp later returned as a park warden himself in the 1940s. "I've worked in every national park west of Ottawa except Prince Albert," said Camp. "My wife and I raised our kids in the mountains, carried the babies in a papoose."

Over the years, Camp has guided for Mexicans hunting Dall sheep in the Yukon, organized a packhorse trip to Jasper for a writer looking for inspiration and recounted his travels in his 1993 book *Roots in the Rockies*. Camp's West Coast roots go back to

1827, when his grandfather arrived as a seaman aboard the Cadboro, a Hudson's Bay trading vessel. "I'll see things along the coast and think, 'My granddad must have seen this.' "

Camp's wife is tending to things at their Ucluelet home while he's on the water with VisionQuest. She's no stranger to adventure - she snowshoed from their isolated home in the Rockies years ago while in labor - but picks her spots carefully for Zodiac touring. "She likes the Broken Islands," said Camp.

VisionQuest's twofold goal of raising money for an addiction recovery centre and healing the historical animosity between RCMP and First Nations appeals to Camp. He admires the 50 RCMP paddlers on the journey for trying to "open doors that have been closed for years."

Camp worked with native trainees during his years with the Parks branch and was troubled that they often didn't have the confidence to do "what I knew they were capable of." The 1,600-kilometre canoe trip down the coast will bring recovery to more than just those with addictions, he said. "There are a lot of degrees of recovery. I think of this journey as recovery of self-esteem."

But enough reflection. The radio is beckoning; somebody somewhere needs Camp's services. Camp straddles his Zodiac and is gone, a free man on the open ocean.

Fri, Aug 1, 1997

Jody Paterson

Cree Ray Tootosis answered elders' call

Ray Tootosis used to be a regular guy. He played hockey, did a little rodeo, spent time with his wife and kids.

But then the elders called him seven years ago at his home in Hobbema, Alta., and asked him to go on a mission to Wyoming. And life hasn't been the same since.

Tootosis is the keeper of the sacred bundle, which contains something sacred from every tribe participating in the North American Indigenous Games. The bundle is "life, unity, protection," said Tootosis, and very serious business.

"Through this bundle, all the elders of First Nations throughout North America are uniting," said Tootosis, a Plains Cree.

Tootosis first saw the sacred bundle in 1990 in the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming, where there is a 28-spoke medicine wheel, seven metres across, that is believed to be at least 700 years old. The site of the wheel is the most sacred spot located centrally between the U.S. and Canada.

That was the year Tootoosis was head of Team Alberta for the first Indigenous Games in Edmonton. He went to Wyoming not knowing why the elders had summoned him, and he has still never asked why he was chosen to be keeper of the bundle.

"I'm just the keeper. I work with four elders, and they tell me what to do. I was told to go to the elders and do what they said, and by the time I went from Hobbema to Wyoming, I had a bundle. I didn't know what was in store for me."

Since then, Tootoosis has taken the bundle to four international Indigenous Games and wherever else he has been told to, which has meant many a road trip. It's a lifestyle not suited to a working man, and so he depends on his wife, a tribal councillor, for financial support.

Tootoosis left home in mid-June for Wyoming to start the relay run that would bring the bundle into Victoria for the 1997 Games. Runners carried the bundle in seven-minute relay legs up through the U.S. into Alberta and then B.C.; at Vancouver, it was put into the Squamish Tribal Journeys canoe for the rest of the trip.

Tootoosis can't say what's in the bundle, nor can it be photographed, although a photographer made it through security one time and put a picture of it into a Vancouver newspaper. He suspects his bundle is the one an elder foresaw 45 years ago, the bundle that would "unite the Indian people." Only certain elders can open the bundle and add items; Tootoosis keeps additions in a blanket beside the bundle until an elder is available. Rooms must be blessed before the bundle is brought in, and women who are menstruating are supposed to wear a blanket around their waist if they're close to it.

"Women are so powerful that at their time of the month, they can cancel any medicine," said Tootoosis. "The Plains Cree hold women so high that they give light. The Creator gave them the power of childbirth, and that's the biggest power of all."

At home, Tootoosis generally stores the sacred bundle in his bedroom. But he won't see home for a while - after the Indigenous Games end Aug. 10, Tootoosis is off to another ceremony in Minnesota at the request of the elders.

He doesn't know how long the elders will want him to remain as keeper of the bundle, but presumes it's his job until he's too old to do it anymore. "It's a big honor, a really big honor. But it's got its ups and downs."

Sat, Aug 2, 1997

Jody Paterson

Mounties found tears and reconciliation
Final column in series

The Cree used to call them "the men with no legs." They didn't walk among the people. They just drove up in their police cars.

They came for people's children, or with handcuffs, or to stop the exchange of gifts that breached anti-potlatch laws. They came to carry out the wishes of the federal Indian agent, who didn't tolerate any tradition but the white man's.

The red serge of the RCMP hasn't been a welcome sight in many native communities. And while police were just doing their job as law enforcers of the day, RCMP Insp. John Grant knows that it has long been time for an apology.

The VisionQuest journey into 21 Indian communities from Hazelton to Victoria is "probably the most important trip the RCMP ever made since the march west in 1873," said Grant. With 50 RCMP members aboard the three VisionQuest canoes, the red serge is returning this time with a much different message. "I don't think the organization has stepped up before and said, 'We're sorry.' What an opportunity this has been for the RCMP to come into the communities the First Nations way," said Grant, who organized VisionQuest with artist Roy Henry Vickers.

The emotional impact of the VisionQuest journey was greatest in the isolated mainland villages, where elders wept as the canoes landed on the beach. Some hadn't seen a canoe in their village since childhood; for many, the sight was a poignant reminder of a time before residential schools, alcohol, suicide, despair.

Newlyweds Gary and Linda Manzer signed on with VisionQuest mostly for the chance at a month-long canoe trip but will end it Sunday having witnessed something much more profound than scenery.

"It's been incredibly emotional. It has meant so much to the people in the villages to have the police coming in, saying they're sorry and they want to help the people heal," said Linda Manzer.

Philip Lincoln, paddling with VisionQuest since Klemtu, said the 1,600-kilometre journey has been "a really strong start" to mending relations between First Nations and RCMP: "All the villages have been able to talk to these guys like people."

At 20, Lincoln has been through the deaths of three of his six siblings, two of them lost to drugs and alcohol. Early death runs like a plague through native communities, their culture in government-orchestrated shambles for more than a century.

I cried when I heard John Grant apologize in the Comox bighouse. It was just a moment, a single sentence, but there had been so many sad stories before it and so many still to come.

"Before we left on this journey, an elder told us - a roomful of tough Mounties - to bring

lots of Kleenex, because we were going to need it. All of us kind of shrugged it off," said RCMP Staff Sgt. Ed Hill. "But now, there's not a guy among us who hasn't cried."

The 70 RCMP and civilian paddlers will have been a month on the water when they and Tribal Journeys make the final pull Sunday into the Inner Harbor. There have been tears and arguments, miserable weather and injury, but there have also been water fights and sun on the water and the awareness that change is coming, and they are part of it.

The work for the VisionQuest Recovery Society will continue long after the canoe trip has ended - as Vickers notes, "this is good, but it's a small thing in the journey of life." There is still much to be done before there is money for an addictions recovery centre, before old hurts have healed.

For me, the journey has been to places of the heart. I met a man not so long out of prison who makes art on lifejackets; another who is seven months sober and celebrating; another whose songs will awaken nations. I met RCMP who had connected to native communities long before VisionQuest, and others who will connect from this point on.

I saw communities with little give everything, and a child with nothing give the only quarter he had. And I was a foreigner in Indian territory instead of the keeper of the colonial house, and I was welcomed. Safe journeys, VisionQuesters. My life is better for having known you.

Jody Paterson, columnist,
Times Colonist