

Meritorious Service Decoration Ceremony – Ian Hinksman

Thank you to the family for inviting me to share some of my memories of my amazing work with Ian Hinksman, who we are here today to acknowledge and celebrate his receipt of the Meritorious Service Award. It is an honour to be a witness to this presentation to a man whom I consider to be a special and dear friend.

Ian Hinksman is a man of integrity, compassion and determination. He has exceeded many peoples' expectations many times over. When Ian becomes determined and passionate about something, you do not challenge him. It is better to listen, learn and join in his efforts. He is a very wise man, who cared for all of his family – he had great appreciation and love for his late wife Sue and son Reid. He has demonstrated what it means to be a true leader, and he had earned the respect of First Nations leaders in BC and Nationally.

He worked very hard in his personal life and in his activism on behalf of many people who were not being seen or heard by society. He became the voice for many people, across the country.

When Butch contacted me, he laughed and said, “You know, we don't even know how you and Ian met – but you worked together for so many years!”

There are too many memories to try to share them all today, so I will just be able to give a glimpse into the world that I knew by working with Ian for many years. It wasn't always easy, it was often very difficult. But the rewards of seeing improvements for the less than fortunate made it all worthwhile.

My history with Ian began when I became involved with the Victoria Native Friendship Centre. Ian was the President of the VNFC at the time. He was also the President of the Victoria Native Housing Society, now known as M'akola Housing Society. Ian was also the President of the BC Association of Indian Friendship Centres.

At the time, I was working with the federal Unemployment Insurance Commission.

I was active on the Executive of both societies, as was Ian, and we had mutual respect of one another.

Then a job posting caught my attention, it was for a 4 month position with the BC Association of Indian Friendship Centres. I decided to take a leave of absence from my government position, to apply for the term job. Ian was quite worried about me doing this, because I was a single mother with 3 young sons to care for. He kept asking me to really think about what I was doing. My mind was made up, I went on to apply for the Provincial Coordinator job and didn't look back. Our amazing journey began.... and it truly was amazing.

Ian was a strong advocate for many First Nations people who live in the urban centres of Victoria, BC and Canada. He attended meetings with Provincial, Federal Ministers, First Nations leadership meetings with the First Nations Summit, and many local First Nations and Tribal Councils, to bring the challenge for leaders of all levels to improve the policies and programs designed to support

First Nations people. He was fearless, he had done his homework, and he learnt who was responsible and he set up the meeting to hold conversations to motivate change for the betterment of the quality of life for many.

His words that have always stuck with me were, “If you are not a part of the solution, then you are a part of the problem!” And he was right, and many could not back away from those words and the responsibilities that went with them.

There were times when I was in meetings with Ian, and the government official would become very uncomfortable with how forceful Ian may have been making his case on the topic, and they would question him with pen in hand, “who is your boss, who do you work for, what is your Supervisor’s name?” They were taken aback and shocked to learn that he was doing this on his own – and that he had no boss. It is very true, for many years Ian advocated on behalf of the less fortunate on many levels. Not for any paycheque or any fame or glory. But he saw a huge void and he saw that many people were being ignored, or being treated unfairly, that there were discriminating policies that needed to be reviewed and changed.

When I first met Ian, he was a healthy strong man, he was a foreman with Farmer Construction in Victoria.

Not too long after I met him, he became stricken with a virus called Guillain Barre Syndrome. He became paralyzed from the neck down – his entire body was immobilized. He was hospitalized in Gorge Road Hospital for many months.

He was still the President of the Victoria Native Friendship Centre. We had a discussion and agreed that if Ian couldn’t come to the meetings, we would bring

the meetings to him. We worked out an arrangement with the staff at the Gorge Road Hospital that we could hold evening meetings in the cafeteria. They would wheel Ian into the cafeteria, and we did our best to carry on business as usual. We believed that it was important to Ian's recovery that he remain involved, he still had a lot to offer and we worked around his disability.

When Ian was discharged from the Gorge Road Hospital, the real adventures began. He learnt how difficult it was to access the necessary resources for a person with a disability. He was constantly battling with service agencies to get the supports that he needed. We began setting up meetings with government offices, bringing to their attention the gaps in their programs and services.

Looking back on it now, I am amazed that his wife Sue would entrust him to my care while we went off to meetings. I learnt how to transfer him to the car, pack up his wheelchair, and off we went to try to make change.

I worked with Ian at the BC Association of Friendship Centres for 5 years after I left the federal government. Then the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was conducting hearings across the country. I was also enrolled in a program at the University of Victoria, while working full time with Ian. We decided to make a presentation to the RCAP bringing to their attention the many barriers and obstacles that urban First Nations people face, especially the people who are struggling with disabilities, many with multiple disabilities.

Upon completion of the presentation to the RCAP, the Chairman, George Erasmus invited Ian to remain so that he could talk with him further about the information that he had reported in his presentation. Ian was invited to submit a proposal to

do further research into the demographics of First Nations people living with a disability in BC.

He received a small amount of \$75K from the RCAP. We began our journey to visit as many First Nations communities in BC as we could. We developed a survey in collaboration with UBC, and we surveyed hundreds of people gathering data. In total, we reached 73 communities with this small amount of funding and developed a report that would be the reference tool for many government offices afterwards.

A decision was made to coordinate a Provincial Conference focussing on the findings of the research, bringing together First Nations people living with a disability, federal and provincial government officials, First Nations leaders. By the end of the conference there was a mandate from the people to develop a provincial society focussing on improving the quality of life for First Nations People with Disabilities. The BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society was born.

Ian and I continued to learn and advocate for people from all over BC, we met with BC Government officials, we travelled to Ottawa to meet with as many Ministers and FN Leaders as we could to tell our story to as many people as we could.

Ian was invited to make a presentation in the House of Commons, to the Standing Committee on Persons with Disabilities.

We were invited to speak at National Conferences on Mental Health, Drug & Alcohol Gatherings.

We helped whomever we were able to, with minimal resources. For years, Ian and I did the work out of our homes because we didn't have any funding to have an office.

As a result of the advocacy work that we were doing, we were able to secure a significant contract to deliver a pilot project in 3 locations in BC, the project was known as the HALO Project. This was a project which focussed on providing personalized training and support to First Nations People with Disabilities, to provide the basic skills to enable them to become active participants in the labour market. It was a huge success in all 3 areas including Port Alberni, Vancouver and Prince George. Many of the participants went on the Post Secondary after they completed our HALO program.

He deserves the honour and recognition being bestowed upon him, and there aren't enough thanks to give to demonstrate how many lives he has affected in a positive way.

Bless you Ian, and your family. You are an amazing man and an inspiration to many who will follow in your footsteps.