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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Discusses his philosophy of education.  
George: As for my future plans, I might begin by saying that there is a great deal to be done yet before we can even consider ourselves as proficient dancers or good singers. We sing, yes, we sing well. But somehow or other, we cannot capture the rhythm that our fathers had in these songs. We are a little shy to sing our songs, even at this stage. Or we are feeling that that person shouldn't be singing this song. That I should be singing this song. We still are at that stage and we must, for our own race's sake, for our own groups, our own tribe's sake, overcome that feeling and learn to recognize ability, to recognize and give credit where it is merited. And try very hard to get away from this feeling of "I, it's my right. He shouldn't be doing it." That is something that we must somehow surmount and win those otherwise very influential people in thinking that way, so that we can become a group proficient enough to appear in bigger cities; to appear professionally, if you will. And I think, at this time, we are not at that point where we can appear professionally. There is so many things that entails professionalism. We must learn how to be meek when we become professionals. We must learn how to

take the boos and what not where the paying public has a license to do. We haven't got that today. If someone booed us, for instance, I think we'd just quit there and go home, which would be absolutely against ethics of professionalism. Now that is something that we must make these other influential persons realize. And I think too that a group, any ethnic group, is as great as he thinks of himself. We became ashamed of our own culture so we died as a people. Our spirits just waned until we were a dead people. Any group, it would... (phone rings)

(Break in Tape)

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

George: First, my recollections of my earliest days in school. I don't exactly remember when or how young I was when I went to school. I was very young. In fact, I was too young... that I was told that I was put in with the girls' dormitory with my sister. I was too young to stay alone and be in with the boys. But I never, I believed that. I don't recall it but that's what my sister says --that I stayed with the girls for many weeks before I was old enough or able to sleep by myself in our own dormitory. But my first recollections is loneliness. And my feeling of complete frustration, of my complete loss of my father and the days, long weeks that followed. I remember that I had a boy older than I am who took me under his wings and he used to tell me these stories, Bob, and I remember it through these years. He used to tell it to me at bedtime and have me sleep with him in his bed and then afterwards tuck me in, I suppose. But those first early years were lonely and they were full of fright and perhaps unhappiness until I finally got used to the loneliness. And then the years went by and I began to love the days in school and my experience towards the eventual... what they called my, a changeover from my way of thinking into theirs.

I think I didn't pass as a shining example as far as the students were concerned. I was never too studious in school. And I remember distinctly that I used to draw and sketch instead of doing my work. And then naturally, of course, I'd get a licking for it or I'd have to stay in after school and do my work afterward. But those are the better and happier days of my life as I look back now. But I think that, all in all, perhaps it saved my life. I was always very weak and very, very sickly all through my growing period and perhaps I would have, I wouldn't have seen today if I hadn't been taken into the boarding school and looked after.

I remember very well and I don't think I'll ever forget the principal's wife. She was the kindest woman imaginable and I used to take her as my mother. I never saw my mother, Bob. My mother died when I was too young to realize anything and this woman is the first woman that I took or thought to be my real mother. I went there, I suppose, when I was too young to remember things and my first recollection is this wonderful,

beautiful woman. She was the principal's wife. And she was very, very kind. Where, on the other hand, the principal was at times too stern, I thought in my small mind. But I suppose it was for our good that he had to be quite stern.

But I grew up in that school. I spent eleven years in it and I think that it done me a lot of good and then again I think it repressed my feelings to a great extent. I believe that I perhaps would have been some kind of an artist in my own Indian way if I had been permitted to go on with it and cultivate what talent I may have had at the time. But at my era, Bob, they, we were perhaps of an era where the church, or the people who were in charge of the school, were so eager to show to the world how much good they are doing towards integrating my race into theirs and in teaching us their new way of culture and their new -- to us -- their new religion. We were taught, for instance, that it was very, very wicked and heathenish to even think of our own people. We were made to forget everything that was connected as my own people. In fact, I don't think there was any encouragement to love our parents. It's very hard to express it, Bob, but those are the feelings that I got and I'm sure that the rest of my people that went to the school in the same era find it pretty nearly on the same lines.

I was converted into Christianity quite young and I used to wonder why they taught me that anything concerned with my own people was heathenish, that it was best forgotten, that I

should never turn back but go forward instead. But as I grew older, I began to see the very wonderful points and traits and the culture that my people still had in my younger days. I saw, I think, the last glorious period of my people where they were perhaps dying out in their own culture. But I saw the wonderful and the great feeling they infused into you just by their, the singing of their songs and by listening to their orators stand up. Now I sense right from early childhood that these orators were in fact their teachers. When they stood up to speak, they taught the people or advised the people what not to do or what to aspire to. They perhaps lived in the past to a great extent but that was because I think they had no written history. They had to refer to the past. It amounts to the same thing, Bob. You, I've heard that anthropologists and other people say that we lived in the past too much. But as I see it today, when we read a book, Bob, of great people gone by, of great thinkers, we are in fact living in the past, aren't we? The same thing, I think, applied to the Indians except that we repeated it verbally because we had no written language. But the same thing I believe applies today. When we read of a great man's writings, his books or his thoughts in written form, as soon as we start reading it, Bob, we're living in the past. There is no difference as far as I can see. So I think it is quite... It's not important to worry about our people living in the past. They had to remind us of the great deeds that our forefathers may have accomplished and encourage us to aspire to that same goal or that same level.

Our greatest achievement, Bob, was not to acquire or amass

great wealth but, or for to keep. They did amass great wealth and great holdings in material things during a period but it was for, to give back to their people. And I think the greatest achievement an Indian of this West Coast could rise

to is how much he was able to give to his Indian... Now I'm going to make it quite clear here to you, Bob, there is no such thing as an Indian giver. You or the Europeans saw this principle or this custom being practised when he came here. He saw my people giving away all his belongings. And then there is always two sides to every story. And then he saw that other man give back. So instead of looking at it at the Indian's point of view, he looked at it in his own point of view and came to the conclusion that the Indian gave so that he could get two-fold back. It was never the case. When an Indian gave a big potlatch, he gave everything that he owned. And of course, when the next man gave the potlatch, that man who gave the previous one, gave or received a portion of that, of those gifts back. But it was never, never anywhere close to what he gave away. He only received the portion that was allotted to him. For instance now, if he gave to the equivalent of maybe two dollars per share, well, he may have given away thousands of dollars. Let's say for argument's sake that he gave away perhaps a thousand dollars worth of goods. And the allotment came to perhaps two dollars per person. Well, when the time came when the other man gave the potlatch, he did not get two thousand dollars back, which would be twice as much as he gave out, but perhaps four dollars which would be twice as much as the allotment of two dollars per person. Now, this idea of Indian giving is absolutely, is an untruth. If it were true, every Indian who gave a potlatch would have died a rich man and no Indian ever died a rich man. The history will prove that, or anyone will prove that who has been with us long enough. Now, will you ask me some questions?

Imbert: Yes, out of that there are several things that are interesting. Just to go back for a moment to the, your early

experiences. You were living, you were brought up in the Alberni district where you showed me. And then the school, where was the school? Was it far away?

George: It was across the river, Bob. Approximately two miles from where I was born and where I was raised.

Imbert: Did you get home at all in the course of that time that you were at school?

George: No, no. There were periods where we were allowed to go home on weekends and then there were periods when these special concessions was withdrawn. In my early period in school, we were allowed to go home Friday night and stay overnight. And I think it was a wonderful plan because we were in contact with our own family life more. Then there came a period when we, where our children were absolutely not allowed to even set foot in their house for even an hour, for some

reason or other. I cannot explain why. But this happened up to quite recent years.

Imbert: By a period, do you mean a period of years in which this would happen?

George: Yes, a period of years. Perhaps one group of generation would perhaps be allowed to go home for a Friday night and come back the following day. And then the next generation for some reason or other, perhaps they were experiments, I couldn't say for sure. But I know definitely that one generation, like in my generation, we were allowed to go home Friday nights. And then later on that was done away with and we weren't allowed to, or our children weren't allowed

to go home at all until the main holidays rolled around in the summer months. And I might add here, Bob, that the, those who were in charge of the school, I suppose, thought that if we forgot our language completely that we would learn that much faster. So our language was suppressed a hundred percent. If we were caught speaking in our own tongue once, we were reprimanded very severely. The second time we got what we used to call lickings, Bob. We were strapped or our pants were taken down and whipped with a big strap. And if we were caught a third time, they would take our holidays away from us. And we would be forced to stay in the school and work during the summer holidays on the farm. Now this actually happened on several occasions and there is at least two of my friends who are still alive who lost at least two or three summer holidays because they would talk in their own tongue. Perhaps say a few words and some of the teachers would hear it and those that were in sympathy with the experiment would forthwith report it to the principal.

Imbert: Was this the policy of the particular school or was this a policy in all residential Indian education at that time?

George: I think it was the policy of all residential Indian schools because in my investigations I find that the other denominational school had the same rules. And then other cases, instead of licking them, they washed their mouths with soap and water. And this I think, Bob, when you look at it in an adult light, it's very cruel to the child and it takes away from you some fighting spirit that is very hard to regain. You can, perhaps, whip me for mischief that I may get into and that an Indian child would understand. But when you whip him for speaking in his own language, or wash his mouth out, it's a

defeat that cannot be put into words. And it will take generations for us to regain the spirit that may have been wrenched from us because of that seemingly small act on the part of the powers that be. Things have changed so much within the last ten years. Now the same schools are grabbing at straws, trying to regain and recapture what we have already lost.

Imbert: They're encouraging, therefore...

George: Very much so, yeah.

Imbert: ...the painting and drawing for Indian subjects, yes...

George: Especially the painting.

Imbert: ...and the writing about it. And do they allow the Indian language now to be spoken?

George: I couldn't say that, Bob, but I'll give you this opinion. Contrary to their arguments, even to this day they say that those students who forget their language altogether are the most intelligent, but I doubt it very much. I think the more you are aware of your own person and your heritage, unless you are aware of it and to a certain extent proud of it, you'll never accomplish anything worthwhile in the sense of your own race. Certainly, if you cut yourself off entirely and reject your entire race altogether, certainly you'll go up to the top. But you will be a changed man entirely and you will be doing for sake of the other race and not for the sake of your own.

Imbert: And that's nothing to do with intelligence, as to how many languages you want to speak. On the contrary.

George: No, I think it's on the contrary. I think that the people that I have, the Indian brothers that I have met and become acquainted with, Bob, the most intelligent are those who had retained their own tongue and their own way of thinking. In fact, I interpret everything I say from my own Indian way of thinking.

Imbert: So inevitably the old schools are facing up to change. You were saying that in your area, your reserve was the first to reject the residential school's education and go to the ordinary school.

George: Yes, Bob. If we weren't the very first in B.C. we were among the very first. And we fought to get out of the boarding school quite rigorously and it wasn't easy, Bob. They just wouldn't hear us when we done it ourselves. We used to hold meetings and try to persuade the school system that we wanted to break away from the boarding school system and raise our, or slowly come to the stage where we were willing to raise our own children. It was very hard and we fought very... And opinions and feelings were sometimes not to the best. We, for instance, had to get the assistance of two or three different clubs and societies in our local town to help us get this privilege. And finally we had to call upon the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia to put in a word for us and recommend that we get our own school. Finally, anyway, we were allowed to break away from the school and they gave us our little day school on the reservation, on the reserve. But

things were run on a shoestring and ironically the boarding

school where we had broken away from was obligated to give us all the necessary equipment such as school books and pencils. And I'm ashamed to say this, Bob, but the equipment came in in such small trickles that it was absolutely pathetic. The school teacher we had had to cut the pencils, for instance, sometimes in three or four pieces in order to get it around the thirty-two or thirty-four people that were in that school. She used to have to cut the scribblers in half in order that it would go around. And they had reams and reams and reams of it in that boarding school. Anyway, the first two or three years was very, very hard for the little day school. And if it wasn't for the fighting spirit of that young teacher who pioneered in this experiment, it would have been a total failure. But she was a wonderful person and very, very proud to say that she had one or two pupils that entered the high school. Which was an achievement considering the things she had to...

Imbert: Is there still the school on the reserve?

George: No, Bob. I'm happy to say this, that the school done so well -- I think it operated for three or four years, I'm not so sure, four years at the most. And the Indian Department said, "Well, my, they're doing so well, why not put them in town?" So the little school was closed down and all our children were taken in in the town.

Imbert: In the big new school that I saw there, yes.

George: Yes, at Gill School and I think the Gill School should be commended for opening their doors and accepting and encouraging all the Indian children to attend there. And I always have a great feeling towards the Gill School

particularly because they, as far as I know, they weren't asked or... They offered their schools to the Indian children. And up until now they have done very, very well in these schools considering, Bob, that the transition was not gradual except for the four years that they had attended their own day school on the reservation. The transition was very, very severe in many ways of thinking and the experiment has worked out very well and quite a few are going to high school. Now, as far as high school pupils are concerned, I might say that in the earlier days it was a big, big accomplishment for any Indian to go into high school. Not because he didn't have the brains, but because the facilities or the chance weren't there. It was just within recent years, perhaps as I might say, as far back as '43 and '44, when the Indian Department looked to the education more, in a more generous feeling.

Imbert: It seems that there are two ways, then, it was going. That in the process of acquiring whatever the white man's education has to give there is this complete assimilation desirable on the same basis as all the children in the area.

At the same time, there must be a deepening of the cultural and social roots of the Indian himself in his own background. The two things are quite different, of course, and separate. But instead of trying to assimilate the Indian by force, he assimilates educationally like all the rest of the people, but retains this other thing. There are many other groups in Canada that do precisely that too. One thinks of various language schools where people have come over from Europe who retained their... For instance the Ukrainians, and all their background of dance and song and language and literature which they have maintained. And yet they go out and mix in another sense, become Canadians like everybody else. That, is that the

sort of thing that you would think that might happen? That there would be a two-way, a deepening and a broadening?

George: I think it's absolutely essential, Bob, that we retain or we educate our children with our own positive culture, our own positive, you might say, tenets, Bob. Or philosophy is perhaps too strong a word for this instance, but we must make the Indian child aware of her heritage. Without that, Bob, she is going to be just a, you might say, a carbon copy of what the so-called transition is trying to accomplish. She would be just repeating, as from literature, the new culture that she is assimilating today. But on the other hand, if she were aware of her own heritage, of her own culture, even if it is a past thing, she would be that much more able and much more pride in herself or in himself. In other words, she'll be able to stand before you, Bob, and carry on in a sort of conversation because in her feeling, there would be that, "I also have," instead of continually, "What are you giving?" Do you see what I'm trying to...?

Imbert: I see exactly what you mean. They are freer because you have your own base, your own identity. And then you are perfectly free to assimilate -- without any strings -- that part of the white man's culture that you wish to take on. So that it's... This seems a very natural psychological and, you say, philosophical process. I mean there's nothing, this seems to me a very normal idea. And yet one has to fight for it.

George: Yes.

Imbert: Well, I think that is about the time up till now. We have to go, don't we, Bob...

(END OF SIDE B)

(END OF TAPE)

#### INDEX

INDEX TERM	IH NUMBER	DOC NAME	DISC #	PAGE #
EDUCATION				
-accounts of	IH-BC.32	G. CLUTESI#2	172	3-5,7
EDUCATION				
-and cultural				

suppression	IH-BC.32	G. CLUTESI#2	172	7-9
EDUCATION				
-attitudes toward	IH-BC.32	G. CLUTESI#2	172	9-13
VALUES				
-sharing	IH-BC.32	G. CLUTESI#2	172	5,6