- Discusses the suppression of potlatches.

Imbert: ...and your early life. A little bit what you were telling me but this time, and Bob hasn't heard it, but where did you come from and...?

Agnes: Fort Rupert.

Imbert: Tell me about Fort Rupert as you remember. Did you grow up there? Were you there some time?

Agnes: Yes.

Imbert: Was there quite a village there as you remember it or...?

Agnes: Oh, yes. It was a big village one time.

Imbert: It was one of the most important villages there.

Agnes: Yes. And I'm one of those... My family lived in a big house with just dirt floor. Of course, we have a little room at the back where we sleep. In the daytime, right in that
big house, and with the open fire, and my mother used to cook right in the open fire and we eat right there, you know. And my uncle had an uncle, just him and his wife in a... Just two families live in that big house. I think I was about seven when my dad decided to build a house like this down the beach -- which is very nice and clean. Yeah, that house was, well, you call it a house anyway. Just two room house, the kitchen and the bedroom. Yes.

Imbert: That was quite a change, though, from...

Agnes: Oh, quite a change. And my father was invite these people from all over. I think that's one of the important things happened while we lived in that big community house. And his grandmother and... Of course, we have one of these big poles in front of our house. It's quite a big pole and while they ready to put this big pole and his grandmother, (Indian), got this big copper, you know. And they carried from the Fort to the, through the village and they sing, you know, a northern song as they explain when he reached to where they going to put this copper. And this copper take place where I come from, where I come from in Clincket(?). She was from Clincket(?), you know, this (Indian) married to this Hunt, you know. As they ready to put this copper down to the bottom of this, the pole was ready to put up, you know. And this (Indian) explained to these people that this copper is take place, the slaves, they used to take a, maybe ten or twenty slaves and put it right where they going to stand this big pole, you know. But they got the copper this time. It was still there. A good many times my people want to dig it up and I says, "Don't you ever touch that. It's finished. Leave it there." (laughs) See, and...

Imbert: Was this in front of the big house or in front of the new house?

Agnes: Yes, in front of our old big house, yeah.

Imbert: And did the house, the big house, have any carvings inside?

Agnes: No.

Imbert: Just plain.

Agnes: Just plain.

Imbert: All one level floor?

Agnes: Just dirt floor.

Imbert: Yes, all level.

Agnes: Yes.

Imbert: And what did you cook with over the big open fire in
those days?

Agnes: Well, my mother used to have those big pots, you know, and put it right into the big fire. And of course we always have plenty to eat. My father was a hunter, you know. We never go hungry. Always have lots to eat and invite people outside of the family, you know.

Imbert: What was your father's name?

Agnes: David Hunt.

Imbert: What was his Indian name?

Agnes: Nimoquis. Yeah.

Imbert: Does that have any meaning or...?

Agnes: That was his everyday name is Nimoquis. Yeah. But they have different name when he invite the people, you know.

Imbert: And his main occupation was hunting, was it?

Agnes: Hunting and fisherman.

Imbert: Did he hunt and fish for the other people too?

Agnes: Oh yes.

Imbert: What did he hunt, what sort of things?

Agnes: Oh, seal and deer and, oh, anything that they... They used to go out nearly every day, you know.

Imbert: What can you tell me about the hunter in the tribe? He had a very important position and very often he was a very special kind of person. This is something that I have understood and I just wondered if his relationship to the other people as a hunter was something special?

Agnes: Well...

Imbert: Did you get that impression?

Agnes: Yes.

Imbert: Because they were the people who supplied other people with their livelihood.

Agnes: Oh yes.

Imbert: I have heard it on other occasions... I mean, before they went hunting, they had to be, to purify themselves in ways and things like that. That is something that I find is very interesting and sort of fine too. I wonder if you remember
anything about that.

Agnes: Well, like, I know what you mean. It's more the West Coast people, like what you were saying, you know. They don't do this and you don't do this. They have to be really nice and pure before they go out hunting, you know.

Imbert: They make a prayer or offering to whatever they're hunting.

Agnes: Oh, they worship these mountains, you know, what they call (Indian), you know. I used to hear the old people, I used to go out with an old lady to go and dig clams and anything like that, to get seaweed, and they used to... They know very well there's a God somewhere in those days, you know. And they always say, "Guide us, look up," you know. But they know very well there's a protection somewhere, yeah.

Imbert: And a guidance somewhere.

Agnes: Yes.

Imbert: How would they seek this guidance? How would they look for it?

Agnes: Well, they used to worship these mountains and some different places, like the Nimpkish River there. You got to say, "Oh, guide us, protect us." Well, there used to be a big monster there. It comes up once in a while and disappears. Certain time of the year they come up, you know. And, but there is all kinds of stories like that. If you can get somebody, if you go to a right person to tell you all about this. Yeah.

Imbert: Where was the monster? In the river or was he...?

Agnes: The mouth of the river. That's why they call it (Indian). That's the name of that monster. (Indian) Yeah.

Imbert: What kind of a monster was it? What did it look like?

Agnes: I couldn't tell you. (laughs)

Imbert: As it was described to you. You don't remember now?

Agnes: There's one old fellow here, he's still living. He's really, real (Indian), you know. He's come from a real Nimpkish clan, you know. And when he used to dance in the wintertime, they have a real big monster, like those masks, you know, with great big teeth, you know. And that's the (Indian). That's a monster.

Imbert: Did you know of this monster when you grew up at Fort Rupert? Was he, did the Fort Rupert people know of it or was
it just the Nimpkish?
Adnes: Just the Nimpkish, not (Indian).
Imbert: (Indian)
Adnes: Yes, (Indian). There's no monster at Fort Rupert, no.

Imbert: How did Fort Rupert start? Was it a village there before the fort came or did the village go up around the fort? How do you remember it starting?
Adnes: Well, I believe there was a native people there before that fort. Yeah, my great-grandmother was in that fort, married to the Englishman.

Imbert: What was his name?
Adnes: My great-grandmother?
Imbert: Yes, what was her name and what was his name?
Adnes: (Indian). Yeah.

Imbert: That was at Fort Rupert?
Adnes: Yes.

Imbert: And the fort is where the old chimney is?
Adnes: Yes.

Imbert: That's the only part that's left?
Adnes: Yeah, that's the only part that's left, that old chimney.

Imbert: Do you remember any fort, seeing the fort at all?
Adnes: Yes.

Imbert: What did it look like?
Adnes: It was a great big building. You know, I've been, I think...

(Indaudible)

Imbert: Tell me, could you describe the fort as you remember it? Did it have a pallisade around it at all in your days?

Adnes: Well, they already moved to that other building as I really know, you know. When I was just a small girl and they moved to that other building, you know, that old building there next to the old store, at Fort Rupert. You've been there?
Yeah.

Imbert: That was part of the fort then? The old store, was that the old Hudson's Bay store?

Agnes: Yes.

Imbert: Oh, I see, that's still there.

Agnes: It's still there.

Imbert: It looked like it. Well, then there had been no... were there any of the old log buildings there?

Agnes: No.

Imbert: Just the chimney standing there.

Agnes: Just the chimney, yes.

Imbert: No pallisade or anything?

Agnes: No.

Imbert: So there would be... the original fort would be quite different?

Agnes: Yes.

Imbert: But it was still called Fort Rupert. That was the fort, that was the trading post.

Agnes: Yes, trading post.

Imbert: Well, there used to be coal near there, a coal mine.

Agnes: Coal mines? No. It's further this way, between Port McNeil and Fort Rupert. There was a coal mine there.

Imbert: Oh, I see. Was it used at all in your day?

Agnes: No.

Imbert: Just the old mine. Because they had it there before Nanaimo actually. It's older than Nanaimo.

Agnes: Yes.

Imbert: Well, was there a factor or a trader or something in charge of the fort in your day, when you grew up?

Agnes: No, I was still too young to know yet. I remember when there was, when there used to be a potlatch up at Fort Rupert. They used to go in the store with something like blanket, you know, like they used in the olden days, those
white blankets. I used to see thousands and thousands of blankets, all white, you know. Well, whoever is going to give a potlatch, they go to this owner of this store to buy these blankets. Whoever is going to give a potlatch, they put their money in there and get all the blankets. That's what they used to do.

Imbert: You saw them. Did you ever attend a potlatch yourself?

Agnes: Oh yes, yes.

Imbert: Because they were forbidden.

Agnes: Yes, it was really. (laughs)

Imbert: Did they have to hold them in secret then?

Agnes: Yes. Not too long ago.

Imbert: They had to when, without... The white people weren't around when they did this. How did they have it in secret? How would you describe the people in secret and what sort of place would they have it?

Agnes: Well, like they always have somebody to watch for the gas boat, you know. If there's a gas boat from here to Fort Rupert, they have to disappear, you know. The people, even if they are all in the big house, if there's a gas boat... There was an old gas boat from the Indian Agent, you know, which they go and sneak around, you know, to see if there's one potlatch up there. (laughs) All over the place, like Village Island and all these other places. Which is very bad, you know. I think it was really bad. One time my husband, with his first wife, give a big potlatch, a great big one. And you know what they did to that people? They sent them down, some of them go down for six months in Okalla(?), that take part in that potlatch. Which is very bad, it was really... They say it was disgrace and all the sin to go to that big potlatch. People come in and get their share in that potlatch. That's the one that pick up to go sent down, yeah. And it was just really bad.

Imbert: I heard about that happening around there. It was a very bad thing that these potlatches were stopped, in a way, because they didn't get at the right thing. I mean, it stopped a lot of the songs and the dances and the cultural things that went along with it. The potlatch, of course, was forbidden. But it was done too ruthlessly, without understanding what it meant. I think it was a very bad thing.

Agnes: Yes.

Imbert: And the Indian Agent that time was Halliday, I suppose.
Agnes: Halliday, yes.

Imbert: I know I didn't like him very much.

Agnes: (laughs) Yeah.

Imbert: I was talking to somebody from Kinkhamin(?) and she certainly told me what... (laughs)

Agnes: Yes. And recently, when I came to this village and... They used to be a potlatch here. They have to sneak around. If you would give something away, you got to be happy, you know, before you give your things away. But in this, those times, you know, that time you have to just, maybe three or four people in that one house, they have to just rush in and give their share and run out again and go to the next... They have to watch for the people that's really -- some of our people were really against it. Still today, see, like we're doing now, now we really enjoy dancing in that big house today. I never see anything wrong with that. I really enjoy myself, go into that big house and dance. I think it was nice and clean fun, you know. And some of our people, they really look down on that. They think it's a great sin to go back to your old ways but good many times I explain it to the young people and they... I go through these potlatch myself, you know. I think I got right to say something about it and explain it's not bad at all. Like today, people afford to do this, afford to give something away. It's all right. You don't have to go around and borrow this and that to give away. People just take their own things and give it away.

Imbert: These kind of potlatches today.

Agnes: This new potlatch today. They even take my husband's belongings. Like, like those blankets, masks, and everything. They had nothing, you know, when they make a big trouble for him. His potlatches.

Imbert: Who took these things away?

Agnes: It's all in Ottawa somewhere.

Imbert: I understand they took them away saying that, "These are wicked, you shouldn't have them. We're going to destroy them."

Agnes: That's right.

Imbert: And instead of destroying them...

Agnes: I understand they loaned it to the other cities.

Imbert: I heard this.
Agnes: Yes.

Imbert: Yeah, that was very, very bad.

Agnes: It was really bad. And after that happened to my husband, you know, oh, he was, he didn't know what to do, you know. It's the biggest potlatch that there ever was, you know, that one he give. Even those chiefs from those other villages, sent to Okalla(?) for six months. And a lot of them have heart trouble, you know, through that. Yeah, it was really sad. And my husband, when... And he part with his first wife because he want to have family, you know. And he part with his first wife and he want to have his own, have own family, you know, and now that oldest one is forty years old, my son, (Indian). I've got nine family. And he's been dead for eight years last tenth of June. And we still hang onto this potlatch, you know, which is very nice. Yeah.

Imbert: Yes, it's different now. But it was a very difficult time. They took away all these things, these cultural things, songs... And did you or any people you know go to the school, the mission school?

Agnes: Well, my husband was one of that first one into that school here. That, see that picture up there?

Imbert: Oh yes.

Agnes: Yeah.

Imbert: Well, did the school forbid them to speak their own language?

Agnes: Yes.

Imbert: Tell me about that. Do you remember that at all?

Agnes: Oh, they used to have terrible time, you know. But we can, we concede in two ways, you know. Of course in the olden days it was different, you know. You never hear people speak English in those days. In his time, and like today, my grandchildren start speak English as soon as they start learn how to talk, you know. Which I think it's easy when they start, go to this kindergarten, nursery school and...

Imbert: Are the children here also keeping onto their own language as well?

Agnes: No. Very few.

Imbert: I noticed that people speak to the children in their own language but I suppose the children understand it but they don't speak it.

Agnes: Yeah, very few. Well, a good many times they think Gloria is so wonderful to still remember her own language, you
know. Every time she comes up and she goes up and visit their people, you know, she speak our language, you know. And even the children around here, if I talk our language, you know, "I don't understand you." They always say that. Which I think it's a shame. Yeah.

Imbert: Now, in Fort Rupert what can you remember about how the life seemed to you growing up? Did you have brothers and sisters and so on?

Agnes: Yes. You know, there was just the five of us in our family, yeah.

Imbert: Did it seem a happy life, looking back at it?

Agnes: Oh yes. Yeah.

Imbert: How did you amuse yourself, you know, as a little child, during the day? What sort of things would you do?

Agnes: Oh, play down the beach. (laughs) Oh, Fort Rupert is a really nice place, nice and clean, you know. You can just go all over the place without getting dirty, you know. Yeah.

Imbert: Anything happen down there that would be interesting to talk about, any event or...?

Agnes: No. No, just the wintertime, we just, they start the potlatch in the winter. That's why they call it winter dance, you know. There's nothing much to do in the summertime because they are all working, you know.

Imbert: Lots of time.

Agnes: Lots of time, yes.

Imbert: And that would be the Hamatsa then?

Agnes: Hamatsa. And they also have these, they call it a play potlatch, you know. It's just like a game, you know. If you go to a gathering, they call it a play potlatch. We call it (Indian). And you have different name, not a real name. If you have, if you go in the store and buy penny candies and you pass it around, maybe. Those little suckers cost one cent and you have a big name for it, you know. They call you your new name, you know. It happened in this big house last winter. All these business men down the point, you know, they all attend to that. They all have Indian names. (laughs)

Imbert: They give them an Indian name.

Agnes: Yes.

Imbert: And they give them that...?

Agnes: They have little penny candies in little bags, you know. Just something to do, you know. (laughs)
Imbert: Do they have a ceremony with it?

Agnes: Oh yes, talk like if they were great big chiefs, you know. (laughs) Yeah, it's really fun.

Imbert: That's a nice community sort of thing.

Agnes: Yes.

Imbert: The idea of carrying things...?

Agnes: It's really, this place is really mixed with these white and, you know, yeah. You should see those police officers. They have button blankets on, dancing away. (laughs)

Imbert: Do any of them make their own songs and dances?

Agnes: No. Well, I still remember some songs when I was a small girl.

Imbert: I bet, though... Do any of the white people come in and do their little bit... round dances?

Agnes: Jimmy Seaweed and Henry Speck, you know, help these people, you know, with... Oh, everybody just dying laughing, you know. They try to dance. The nurses and all these people down this white end, they all come to that big house.

Imbert: I suppose Fort Rupert today is much smaller than it was.

Agnes: Oh yes, really small. Well, I was up there yesterday and...

Imbert: Why did it decline? Why did it stop being the big village that it used to be?

Agnes: Well, the people mostly... There's a lot of them transfer here.

Imbert: Is that what happened to Alert Bay, they gathered up there from all over?

Agnes: Oh yes, that's right. I still remember when there was just the chiefs, you know. My husband was one of them. And Chief Harris and Chief Alfred and Chief Marnock, there was four. And they used to have meetings before, these councillors, you know. And like those, those girls have babies without husband, you know. And they were really against this to come and members of this Nimpkish tribe, you know. It's different today. They just take everybody, you know. I think there was just one hundred and thirty when I first moved over here. And now it's over seven hundred now.
Imbert: Seven hundred people.

Agnes: Yeah.

Imbert: I would think there were a lot more but they're all in a small space, I guess.

Agnes: Well, it's over seven hundred. Well, there's some people from Fort Rupert, people from Village Island, people from Turner Island and people from all over the place, you know. They all amalgamate.

Imbert: Seven hundred Indian people.

Agnes: Yeah.

Imbert: We better hold it there for a second. (break in tape) What was it?

Agnes: You know, we have a house down at the beach, you know. There was a river over here and this, that's where we live. We're right in between the sea and this river. I think it was really terrible you know, in the wintertime. We just feel like we're on a boat all the time when it's rough and the wind and all that. Oh. My father used to say, call me my Indian name, we would just about get to Campbell River or things like that. (laughs)

Imbert: Does the sea seem a mysterious thing or was it just the (inaudible)?

Agnes: Yes, you get used to that. And some people go visit there from the other village. It never failed, they always do something, like fall when they try to get off the boat, you know. Yeah, just terrible.

Imbert: Was it, does the sea seem cold? Could you swim in it or was it too cold for that?

Agnes: It's too cold in the wintertime.

Imbert: But in the summertime?

Agnes: The summertime is all right.

Imbert: Even then it's pretty cold.

Agnes: But this time of the year it's very, very nice and warm.

Imbert: The fishermen would go out from there, I suppose.

Agnes: Yes.

Imbert: Was there anything at Port Hardy in those days?

Agnes: No, I have an uncle that used to go farming over
where those new village now, those new London Harbor people. They have their new village there. They used to stay there in the wintertime. In the summertime they're farming, you know. Plant potatoes and all that.

Imbert: Yeah, so there was nothing there much then.

Agnes: No.

Imbert: Fort Rupert was the place.

Agnes: Yes, I remember. The people were invited by these Quatsino people. I think the road was about that wide, you know. They have to walk through the trail to Coal Harbor. And I was quite young. My mother says, "Don't you even want to come with us? It's a long walk." I says, "I could walk." So when we start off, you know, there was a bunch of people from here, from Alert Bay and from Fort Rupert, they all...

(END OF SIDE A)

(END OF TAPE)