

# INVITATION TO JOEYASKA

---

SHIRLEY STERLING

**M**Y NAME IS SEEPEETZA, and I am going to tell a story about some UBC professors and their visit to my small home on the Joeyaska Indian Reserve #2 near Merritt in the Nicola Valley. The plan started with a chance meeting with Jean Barman in the hallway at Ponderosa G where I have an office. Jean said she and a group of professors were travelling together and they were going to stay overnight at the Quilchena Hotel.

Since I was going to be in the valley facilitating a band school meeting I offered to take the professors on a cultural tour. Jean said it was a great idea. They would leave Vancouver on Wednesday morning on May 16 and arrive in Merritt in time for lunch at the Coldwater Hotel (where a former mayor, the late Alan Collet, as a youth, had ridden up the steps and into the pub on his saddle horse).

I asked my brother Austin and my cousin Tim to join us. They both travel the territory regularly and move among the Nlakapamux people.

The plan was to take the professors out about ten miles to a sweat lodge first. Then we would go to a place past Brookmere, another twenty or thirty miles, to look at some culturally modified trees and dig some camas root, called wild potatoes. After that we were going to have the professors over to my place for high tea, Nlakapamux style.

Tim and I met them at the hotel and walked with them to the United Church to look at the stained glass windows. The historians would be interested in the story of William Voght Sr., my great grand father who came as a lad of sixteen years to the goldrush and married my great grandmother Theresa "*Klama*" Voght, an Nlakapamux girl

from Boston Bar. When she died around 1908 he bought the stained glass windows and had them shipped from Paris in her memory.

After that Austin joined us and we drove up to a place along the Coldwater River where Austin and Tim and friends have a sweat lodge. We hiked in on a trail in the wood, and I noticed that the men and women were starting to walk in groups to visit together and have discussions. Some had never met, yet knew each other because of their common academic interests and backgrounds. Austin showed them some plants to eat in spring; *tsaweta*, which is like a minty parsley and the peeled stems of Black-eyed Susans.

It was a cold, blustery day. Tim invited the professors to sit inside the sweat lodge to keep warm and listen to some stories. I listened to their laughter for awhile and took photographs of the river and some willow branches dancing in the water. By the time we got going it was getting close to tea-time and we had to forego the other plans for the day. We went to my house where my sister Sarah and Tim's wife, Gina, had prepared some moose pepperoni, dried salmon, smoked salmon, bannock, homemade berry jam, and other refreshments you can buy in stores.

It was delightful to see everyone visiting and talking and eating heartily. Later, my brother-in-law, Hector, fed the horses some oats in front of my house and everybody got to see the two newborn fillies; a charming little bay called Blanche, born of Brown-eye, and Irene born of Princess.

It was a good visit. Maybe the professors will come back again sometime.