

SACRED LAND AND COMING BACK: HOW GITXSAN AND WITSUWIT'EN REINCARNATION STRETCHES WESTERN BOUNDARIES

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Abstract / Résumé

This paper describes how the Gitksan and Witsuwit'en experience of their connection to the land goes back lifetime before lifetime, reincarnation before reincarnation; this adds to their sense of connection to the land, and motivates their resistance through the Delgamuukw case and in their continuing struggles for jurisdiction or at least co-management of their traditional territories. Reincarnation is a concept that carries little weight in Western academic constructs, but carries a depth of meaning to the Gitksan and Witsuwit'en. Illustrations from some of the features of the cases the Gitksan and Witsuwit'en report show how it relates to very different concepts of time, identity and personage; concepts that help propel the Gitksan and Witsuwit'en in challenging Western concepts of legal, spatial, spiritual and temporal boundaries.

L'auteure présente comment l'expérience du lien à la terre des Gitksan et Witsuwit'en se transmet de génération en génération et comment il demeure toujours vivant grâce à la réincarnation. Un tel point de vue renforce le sens du lien à la terre des Gitksan et Witsuwit'en et sous-tend leur résistance dans la cause Delgamuukw et dans leurs luttes continues pour obtenir la gestion complète ou, au minimum, la cogestion de leurs territoires traditionnels. La réincarnation est un concept qui occupe peu de place dans les théories philosophiques occidentales, mais elle joue un rôle important dans la pensée des Gitksan et Witsuwit'en. Des exemples tirés des rapports des diverses causes qui impliquent les Gitksan et Witsuwit'en illustrent les concepts du temps, de l'identité et de la personne de ces derniers, qui les poussent à s'opposer aux limites légales, spatiales, spirituelles et temporelles de la pensée occidentale.

Somehow I got myself into a situation from May 11-18, 2000, of working with a very professional Discovery Channel film crew of four who are making a documentary of "The Scientific Investigation on Reincarnation." The Gitksan and the Witsuwit'en Offices of the Hereditary Chiefs had agreed to this, as had I, and Beverly Clifton Percival and her family had agreed to have them start with a filming of Olive Ryan's headstone feast in Kitsegukla on May 12, 2000. During the following week the Discovery Channel film crew and I went to a number of Gitksan and Witsuwit'en villages interviewing people about rebirth. We managed to get at least preliminary information on 18 new cases, as well as re-interview (for me) and further document some examples of come-backs that I have been following or have published before (Mills, 1988a, 1988b, 1994c, 1994f; Mills and Champion, 1997).

Getting a whole series of new rebirth accounts is typical in working with these peoples, if one but asks. I first began to learn of the Native concepts of reincarnation in 1964, some thirty-six years ago, when the Beaver Indians or Dunne-za introduced me to the perception that who and what a child is is based on who and what that child has been before.¹ It took me twenty years before I began to ask about examples of someone come back. Since then I have concentrated a fair amount of my time and research on documenting belief and specific cases of reincarnation, following the example of Ian Stevenson's case specific approach (Stevenson, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1980, 1983a, 1983b, 1984) to rebirth (Mills, 1988a, 1988b, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1994f), besides working on issues of land claims (Mills, 2000, 1994e, 1995, 1996b, 1998a). Indeed the initial Judge in the Delgamuukw court case (*Delgamuukw vs A.G.*) dismissed my testimony as of someone who had gone Native, and cared more about reincarnation than about the people. Little did he know that I continue to be stretched as I learn more about the forms and shapes and the depth of the concepts of rebirth in First Nations societies.²

The experience of working with this professional crew brought out poignantly some of the differences between Western and Gitksan and Witsuwit'en concepts of rebirth. What the Discovery Channel was looking for were strong cases of reincarnation that would be persuasive to a skeptical Western audience, rather than examples of belief.³ What we got were 18 new examples of come-backs, some not very convincing to a skeptical audience, some more difficult to dismiss. Like the examples of come-backs that I have documented since 1984, these new examples demonstrate the Persistence and Reinvention through Reincarnation of the Gitksan and Witsuwit'en and show the depth of how embedded rebirth is in Gitksan and Witsuwit'en tradition and territory.

Let me see if I can portray some of the way these cases are embedded in the land by citing features of three of the instances that I met for the first time this time with the Discovery Channel crew. Then I will move on to a new example of a child who is the opposite gender from the person she is identified as being before. This coming back as the opposite gender—or not—is one of the features that varies between cultures, even between the neighboring Gitksan and Witsuwit'en. Finally I will introduce you to some of the features of the seven simultaneous come backs of one cherished Gitksan Elder, one of which the film crew and I re-investigated. Multiple rebirth is a feature of the Gitksan experience, and not of Witsuwit'en.⁴ In the end we will ponder what all this means.

Examples of How People Know Who Has Come Back

The means the Gitksan and Witsuwit'en, as other First Nations, (and peoples in other continents) use to discern rebirth are also the criteria that are used by Ian Stevenson, a psychiatrist and the originator of the scientific investigation of cases of reported reincarnation. These means are: 1) predictions of coming back 2) announcing dreams 3) statements made by the child from the point of view of the deceased (Stevenson refers to these as verbal memories) 4) behavior that is appropriate to the previous personality and not expected from the child (Stevenson calls these behavioral memories or special skills), and 5) birthmarks or birth defects that are related to wounds (often fatal) or scars on the previous person. The Gitksan and Witsuwit'en also validate "feelings" and have people who know about who has come back, and consider physical resemblance as related to rebirth.

Feeling or Sensing Rebirth

Many of the people we filmed including two Head Chiefs of Gitksan Houses, said "We believe in reincarnation." One young man whose Pierced-Ear Birthmarks are photographed in *Amerindian Rebirth* (Mills, 1994c) is now the father of two little girls who are said to be come-backs (Mills and Champion, 1997 describes one of these cases). He said, "I believe in reincarnation. I am glad to have my case in a book to help people to know."⁵ That belief and or "feeling" are often predicates for noting children as particular person "come back". One mother said "When I held my baby in my arms, I just felt it was my grandfather come back."⁶ Another example of having a feeling a baby is a relative come back is described below in the section on Gender Change.

In the past Elders or Halait or Shamans often held babies in their arms and saw who the baby was and could understand the language of babies

(cf. Mills, 1988a and 1994f for examples of this). People continue to have this sense today. Usually this happens when a baby is small, but one Gitxsan woman Chief (whose one case of rebirth is described in Mills, 1994f) said, "There are some times when I can see people, and we were in a meeting and I looked down the table and I saw my brother John as Abraham [her father's father]. Abraham Malcolm died when I was 2 or 3 so I was puzzled ... I asked Katie Mosser who John was and she said 'Abe Malcolm.' ... I feel we are born knowing these things."⁷ This Chief also related how her granddaughter Dorothy, who is noted as a come-back even though no one is exactly sure of whom, saw a spirit being that her mother and grandmother could not see, the morning of the child's great-grandmother's headstone feast. The seven-year-old pointed out a small dark man in a blanket but her mother and grandmother could not see him. Dorothy saw him disappear into the shed through the wall. She was not afraid, nor were her relatives, "We expect the spirit people to be here when there is a feast."⁸

Physical Resemblance

In 2 of the 18 new examples, physical resemblance was cited as one or the main ways that the parents came to feel their child was a particular relative come back. One grandmother said: "Sammy's baby picture and my Dad's baby picture were identical." Again I saw the Discovery Channel viewers waging their heads, saying "Not surprising. After all they are genetically related." How to communicate to that audience that these people mean that genetics is related to the choice of coming back to particular parents. One mother (Nlepkepmcw or Thompson married to a Gitxsan) said, "I felt my son was my grandfather come back," in looking at her newborn, in part because of the baby's dark complexion and large size (the baby was 10 pounds at birth and enormous at one month), which matched the grandfather. But she meant that the genetics was impacted by the grandfather coming back.⁹ The marked variety of hues of siblings are often explained not only on the basis of genetics but by who those various siblings were in previous lives.¹⁰ Now I will give you some examples of other ways people know who has come back by citing some new found examples. The first two are in the House of Delgamuukw.

Alex As the Come Back of Albert Tait, Chief Delgamuukw

I had heard that a youth was being groomed to be a future Chief Delgamuukw and when we checked this out it turned out to be a case of

rebirth that included predictions of returning. Lucille, the mother of this 13 year old, and her mother Sadie Mowatt, explained that Albert Tait, Chief Delgamuukw at the time the court case that bears his chiefly title was launched, had repeatedly told them both that he was going to return to Lucille. He said this particularly as he was getting older. Alex was born about ten months after Albert Tait passed away. In this instance an announcing dream, and similarities of behaviour and manner confirmed the prediction.

Announcing Dreams in Alex's Case

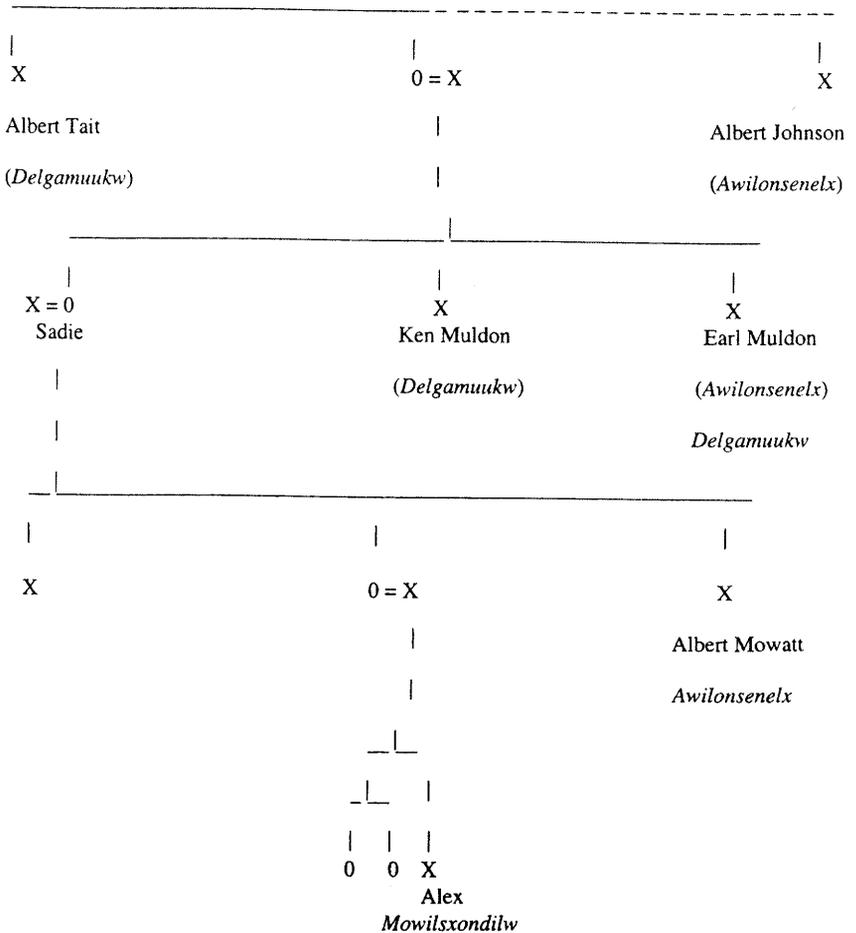
Lucille's mother, Sadie Mowatt, who is the niece (sister's daughter) of the late Albert Tait, dreamed that he was coming back just before the baby boy, Alex, was born. There were many other instances of announcing dreams in the new narratives, some of which are related in endnotes. (See Chart 1 for a simplified genealogical chart of the relationship of Alex to Albert Tait, and his uncle Albert Mowatt to Albert Johnson.)

Similarities of Behavior in Alex's Case

When Alex was a little baby his mother and grandmother noted that he would hold up his hands and look at his fingers. Albert Tait had lost some of the digits of his fingers, they explained, and the baby would look and look in delight at his fingers, revealing in their being whole. Lucille and her mother noted that babies often take pleasure in holding up their hands and looking at them, but they felt that Alex did this more and with more enthusiasm than other babies.¹¹ They pointed out that Albert Tait sometimes held his hands so as to hide the missing digits, although he revealed them for one photo taken for a calendar to raise funds for the Delgamuukw court case.

In this case there are other similarities: Alex's mother also said, "Albert Tait had a special way of walking. We saw that in Alex." She went on to say, "Alex is at home in the feast hall and knows about that—Albert Tait was very knowledgeable about the feast system, could seat people and know their names, and he sang very well."¹² All these qualities Alex's mother and grandmother see in Alex. In addition Alex's mother said, "His teachers comment on how polite he is, how well-behaved and respectful. These were certainly traits of Albert Tait. He had that manner. I was surprised to hear this because at home he is not always like that." (At home Alex has two 17 year old twin sisters who are active in a girls basketball team to contend with; and sometimes a little nephew, the son of his eldest sister, who is often present.)

**Chart 1: Two Come-Backs in Delgamuukw's Matriline
(Simplified Genealogy)**



Key: Hereditary titles are given in italics. (Parentheses) mean it has been passed on.)

Case 1. Alex (current feast name *Mowilxondilx*) noted as Albert Tait, former Chief *Delgamuukw* come back is in training to become a future Chief *Delgamuukw*, now held by his great uncle Earl Muldon, and before that by Earl's Elder brother Ken Muldon, and before that by Albert Tait.

Case 2. Albert Mowatt (feast name *Awilonsenelx*) is noted as Albert Johnson come back

The Context of Talking about Rebirth (Around a Possible Future Delgamuukw)

Alex listened attentively as Earl Muldoe, his great uncle, the current Chief Delgamuukw, related some of the stories of the Wolf clan totem poles of Kispiox. Earl Muldoe knew that the Discovery Channel was making a documentary about reincarnation; and joined the picnic at Ksan they had set up. He gave the Chief's name that Alex now holds (*Mowilxsondilx*) and went on to tell some of the adaox, telling details I had not heard before, of the three totem poles of his Wolf clan at Kispiox.¹³ He told about a woman escaping with her baby from Haida Gwaii to which Alex's feast name relates. Hence he summarized the story, taking his opportunity to reimpress this history on his great-nephew, a future Delgamuukw, who is the great-great nephew of the late Albert Tait, by telling some of the history of the House and of Alex's chiefly name. Reincarnation, he was saying, is about titles and titles to land told in totem poles.¹⁴

Earl Muldoe and his sister went on to relate another case of reincarnation in their House. This one was recognized by similarity of behavior and special recognition on the land.

Similarities of Behavior and Special Recognitions in the Case of Albert Mowatt

Delgamuukw's sister Sadie Mowatt began by saying that her youngest son Alfred was her mother's brother—Albert Johnson—come back. Albert Johnson was a "brother" of Albert Tait. She told the Chiefly name that her son holds now, which was held by Earl Muldoe previously, by his late brother Ken Muldoe before he took Delgamuukw, and by her uncle Albert before his death.¹⁵ Sadie went on to say, "When we go out to eat when he was just a young fellow, a little kid, the waiter would ask him 'What would you like to drink little boy?' and he would say 'Whiskey.' He would hold up one finger and say, 'Whiskey.' We saw a lot of the late Alfred Johnson in my youngest son, Albert. The ways he acts, he is a drinking person, he likes to go to the bars. This is reminiscent of Albert Johnson."

Earl Muldoe, Chief Delgamuukw, then went on to relate a striking recognition that his nephew Alfred had made. "My sister's youngest son Alfred when I built a modern house for my parents out on the territory, Alfred was about 11 years old at the time and he said, 'I know where the traps and cache are up on the hill.' He led us right up there to the cache. We didn't know where they were. We had heard from Albert Tait that they were somewhere, but we did not know where. He led us right to them." This kind of detailed knowledge of the land is part of the Gitksan and Witsuwit'en rebirth cases.

Birthmarks

Huson was another child I sought to meet for the first time because I thought he might have a birthmark. Birthmarks are one of the ways by which come-backs are recognized especially when they relate to wounds often fatal on the person who is noted as returned. (Birthmarks that are not genetically related and have such a strong correspondence are noted as one of the most convincing kind of evidence that cannot be explained by cultural expectation.) Of the 18 new examples only three had birthmarks. In the first instance the birthmark, a oval area of darker brown pigmentation on the child's neck below the ear, was not thought to relate to being her mother's fathers's mother come back. The little girl's mother said it was a chocolate mark from eating chocolate when pregnant.¹⁶

The other case of birthmark was yet another example of a pierced ear mark on the back of the right ear of three-year-old Huson. I have already published three such cases (Mills, 1994c) and have since found five other instances of pierced ear birthmarks (Mills, 1996a). Pierced ear birthmarks are particularly noteworthy in the Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en culture because children who were recognized as in line to become Head of high Chiefs (often on the basis of being Head Chiefs reborn) typically had their ears ritually pierced in a series of potlatches, to "earmark" them as potential head chiefs.¹⁷

I sought out Huson because I had heard that he was the come-back of a particular young man who had died in a car accident that severed his right arm from his body. I wondered if the child would have a birthmark that corresponded to the loss of the arm. There are indeed numerous examples where a child is born with a birthmark that does correspond to a fatal wound (Mills, 1988a describes such a case). In this instance the child's arm bore no sign, according to the mother. It was his ear that has a pierced mark. Huson's grandmother and his great-great aunt (who is both the Head Chief of her House and the mother of the young man come-back in this three year old), see the pierced-ear mark as related to the ancestor that her son was, not necessarily in his past life (he was recognized as his mother's brother come-back), but in a life anterior to that. Reincarnation goes back in time for a very long time, and colidescopes the history recorded in the oral traditions with the contemporary (and future) scene.

Huson's birth was preceded by four announcing dreams, and a special anomalous occurrence; since his birth he has made recognitions and preferences related in endnotes.¹⁸ Here note that he is ear-marked as a possible future Chief on the basis of a pierced-ear mark that relates to anterior lives. The Head Chief of his House still mourns the premature death

of her son, but has a picture of Huson, her son come back, on the wall at her office in the Health Center.

Changing Gender

One highly educated mother from the Nepkepmcw Nation, Mandy Na'zinek Jimmie, said, "When I first saw my daughter when she was born, I had a feeling it was my father come back...The incident happened when my daughter was only a week old. There was something about the way she looked at me when I was holding her or nursing her." I was all the more impressed because that daughter was one of a pair of twins, and the mother felt that her daughter was her father when the other twin was a boy. When I commented on this she asked me about how that works in other First Nations.¹⁹ I explained that gender change is expected and common among the Inuit and the Dene or Athapaskan speaking Nations, but is not or seldom expected in the Northern Northwest Coast. It sometimes happens there, but it is seen as the exception rather than the rule. I will give you one brief example of a cross-gender come-back from the Witsuwit'en, who like other Dene speaking peoples, expect it more readily than the Gitksan and other Northern Northwest Coast peoples.

In interviewing a Witsuwit'en Head Chief with Allen Abel, the journalist who wrote a piece on my reincarnation research for *Saturday Night* (Abel 1998), Chief Knedebeas, a very tiny and feminine woman, revealed that she was the reincarnation of her grandmother's brother, who also held the position of being head Chief of the House. I had heard Sarah Layton, Chief Knedebeas, tell many wonderful stories of her knowledge of the land, and how that knowledge came back to her in waves and dreams when she was back out on the land, but never before had I learned that she was a great-uncle come back. On several occasions Sarah had told a wonderful account of how her grandmother fooled the game warden into thinking that a cow moose that had been shot and was hanging up in strips of dry meat was actually a bull moose. It was after she had explained that she was her great uncle come back that she revealed that the cow moose was in fact shot by her when she was 13.²⁰ Cross-gender reincarnation generally surprises the Gitksan, not so their neighbors to the north and west and southeast.

Multiple Simultaneous Come backs

While some cultures don't expect cross-gender come-backs, some do; another area in which the examples vary is whether or not a person is expected to be able to come back simultaneously as or in more than one baby. The Witsuwit'en, like other Dene, don't expect that to happen; the

Gitxsan and other northern Northwest Coast people (who don't expect gender change between lives) recount a small number of instances where a cherished Elder is noted as coming back two, three or as many as seven times. At first I wondered if these examples happened because there was a strong desire, almost a competition to find someone come back in one's own matrilineal House of family (cf. Mills, 1988a, 1988b). As the years roll by, however, I learn of more and more come-backs of Jean Slade, a greatly admired Gitxsan Elder who told me in 1984 that "a good person comes back seven times." She laughed and said, "I am going to come back eleven times." Since she passed away in 1986 there have been seven little girls that are identified as Jean Slade come back. I will not recount all of the details of all of these instances here as I have written up the case of Jean Slade come back several times before (Mills, 1998b, 1998c) and will be including it in the book I am working on called *That's My Chair: Rebirth Narratives of the Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en*. Here I would simply like to summarize some of the information, so that you can appreciate the complexity it adds to the question of what an "individual" is, and what comes back and why (see Chart 2).

Of these seven cases, one (Cindy) seems to be based on hope and expectation, but is quietly disputed by the mother, who remarks that her daughter resembles another deceased woman much more closely. One of the come-backs (Beth) herself passed away tragically in an auto accident when she was a toddler. In some of the other instances, I have not yet had the opportunity to meet the child or hear all the particulars. However, at least two of the little girls (Kimberly and Marna) have made many striking recognitions and exhibited similar concern for the family as Jean Slade. But at the same time these examples are replete with instances where Jean Slade is not only acting in or through these little girls, but being experienced as a spirit Elder who is looking after them and appearing to them particularly in their hour of need. For example, Stan, the pseudonym of the father of Huson, the little boy I mentioned above with the pierced-ear mark experienced Jean Slade, who was his great grandmother, comforting him and telling him he was going to survive after he was hit by a pick-up and sustained near fatal injuries. His near-death-experience included not only bright and beautiful light, but also the presence of Jean Slade as a soul comforter, assuring him that he was going to be okay. He also described how Tracey, (one of the little girls noted as being Jean Slade come back) before she could walk crawled over to him when he was in rehab near Vancouver, and began massaging and massaging his legs. When this little girl was a little older the first time she saw the young man who was driving

the pickup that struck Stan, she went up to him and started punching him and punching him, this from a toddler that usually had a sunny disposition.

And yet at the same time there is another little girl, Kimberly, whose behavior is also strikingly reminiscent of Jean Slade. Three Elders dreaming of Jean Slade coming back heralded her birth, two of whom apparently did not know her mother was expecting. Kimberly is addressed as *Naah* or Granny by many of the family members. They are convinced she is Jean come back by many of her ways, which include when three years old staying up until 3:00 am, ever vigilant on Christmas night, until all family members of all ages were safely asleep. This same little girl recognized an unacknowledged family member that resulted from such late night revelries, adding to the conviction that this child knows more than meets the eye.

I saw again (with the Discovery Channel crew) another little girl noted as Jean Slade come back, Ruby, now five years old. Afterwards I was wondering if a linguist could tell from listening to her if she was speaking English with Gitksan phonemes: it seemed to me that she spoke English with an accent that reminded me of how Jean Slade spoke English. Both her parents speak English without any trace of an accent. Allen Abel, well named, said, "Stick to birthmarks."

Conclusion

What do all these instances of someone noted as a come back mean? And what does this have to do with the land as sacred? That term "sacred land" came from the Witsuwit'en. They wanted me to help them find in the testimony of their Chiefs and Elders for the Delgamuukw case (many of whom have since passed away), where they talked about the land as sacred. It was that aspect that they were finding they were having the most difficulty conveying to the Ministry of Forests. What they meant is also conveyed by the term "The spirit in the land" which is the title of the opening statement of Chief Delgamuukw and Chief Gisday Wa, Alfred Joseph (1987). That spirit in the land the Gitksan and Witsuwit'en experience in many ways, including through the contact with deceased ancestors both in a spirit realm and reborn in children who are appreciated as one Chief said as "born knowing." The kinship ties are strong within and between lives, and the kinship is also with the land. Alfred Mowatt's knowing where the cache that held the traps is about this intimate knowledge of the land (cf. Mills, 1994e for a Witsuwit'en example of being on the land prompting past-life memories). The titles that relate to rights to the territory keep on being passed on, as at the Headstone Feast of May 12, 2000, so that these people can continue to take care of the land. Sometimes an Elder comes back not just once but several apparently so as to better take care of a large

extended family. What the rebirth cases signify are that there are many ways of knowing and many ways of learning.²¹ Learning from the instances of people recognized as come back is one window or perhaps I should say hundreds of windows into an appreciation of the interconnection of lives, land and spirit. The more I learn of these come-backs the more I stand humbled by all there is to know.

Notes

1. That first summer of research with the Dunne-za a three-year-old girl sang in the Dunne-za tradition to heal an elderly medicine man, probably in his late eighties, to make him well. This respected Elder rallied, although he later passed away that same summer (see Ridington 1988:5-61 for an account of events later that summer when this Elder passed away). The three-year-old girl who sang was the daughter of this failing Medicine Man; her mother was generations younger than her father. How a child so young could have such a presence and power was a mystery to me, and I hardly knew how to ask about what was happening. Slowly the Dunne-za tried to instruct me so that I could comprehend that she could be a conduit of healing because of who she was not only in this life but also from the past. Her spirit was receptive to the helpers in the spirit world because she was so freshly back, and because of who she had been before. I was not to think of the word reincarnation in association with this event for some years because reincarnation was not really in my mental vocabulary. The example, however, shows how embedded what I now, for want of a better term, call reincarnation is with a whole First Nations experience of spirituality that includes contact with a spirit realm on many levels. The deceased are for the Dunne-za, the Witsuwit'en, the Gitksan and many first Nations or Aboriginal or Indigenous or Native people (I will use the terms interchangeably throughout this paper) both acting on a spirit realm as well as reborn in new bodies back on earth. This appreciation of children as spiritual adepts was something my courses in child development and North American Indian ethnography had not prepared me for. The experience of the worldview that includes reincarnation was new to me.
2. By the time I wrote my Ph.D. dissertation I wanted to see how prevalent a number of what I thought might be core First Nations philosophical concepts were to a range of First Nations; reincarnation was one of those concepts (Mills, 1982; 1984). The more complete presentation of the range of rebirth belief is found in Matlock and Mills (1994) and Mills (1994a and 1994b).
3. They wanted to interview Elders, and film me talking to the parents of new strong or convincing examples of someone come back. They and

I hoped to find birthmarks that corresponded to something on the person the baby is come back from. We hoped to document cases where the child said things from the point of view of the deceased, and made recognitions of places and people and objects from that perspective. We hoped to find children that had special talents that related to that deceased person. They were looking forward to going to Sri Lanka, India, Thailand and Burma and Lebanon to study cases with other investigators because sometimes in those countries a child talks about being someone who is not known to the child's parents, controlling to some extent for the phenomena of cultural expectation.

4. At the end of the sometimes difficult and trying time with this film crew I asked them how the experience had matched with their expectations. What the producer said was, "The feast was less showy than I expected," and then she said something like "... I can see that in this country these people are very strong in their culture and that they are not going to give it up." I am not sure that Discovery Channel wanted to know how these cultures are honeycombed with cases, linking families and "individuals" back and forth generation after generation, or reincarnation after reincarnation. "Isn't that unusual?" the Discovery Channel director asked me after we returned from an interview with one grandmother of a come-back, himself recognized as his uncle come back, who told us she knew who all four of her children are. "No, among the Gitksan and Witsuwit'en that is not all that rare," I said, "Remember the BBC documentary that showed four brothers and sisters playing cards, and they all were known as come-backs?" (Back from the Dead BBC, 1991). I really alarmed them when I reported that one highly respected Witsuwit'en Chief answered, when I asked her if she had heard of new cases, by saying, "No not recently but So-n-so had quite a ghost experience lately." "We don't want ghost stories here," the Discovery Channel director said. They were looking for what Westerners would call "strong" cases; and out of the 18 all were flawed from the skeptics point of view, but were convincing cases from the Witsuwit'en or Gitksan point of view, even in the case where no one is sure *who* Dorothy is, even though they are sure she was a Gitksan who lived around the turn of the century.
5. Ruby's dad Ed Taylor said he remembered people wanting to look at his ears. He remembered saying or at least hearing that he said he was going after the new husband of his former-life wife. Just recently when they were in town and went into a café for something to eat, he said, "I sat down next to Sophie." She was his former-life wife. People teased him about this.
6. Two of the new examples of come-backs are from another First Nation, the Thompson or Nlepkepmcw. In the example where the mother said,

"I had a feeling after my son [just a month old when filmed by the Discovery Channel] was born that he was my grandfather come back," the mother, Shelley Jackson, has married into the Gitxsan nation. So in this instance the link between these nations is not only through marriage, but also through rebirth. This baby boy who is noted as someone from another nation is being raised on Gitxsan land. I asked myself, "would it help or hinder the Discovery Channel audience to know that Shelley did not know her grandfather herself in this life, that he had passed away before she was born?" the fact that her grandmother who doubtless had lots of stories of her husband raised her might not convince a skeptical audience. The mother's feeling is based not only on this however, but on a feeling, like the feeling of the Halait. I have no knowledge to date of whether she recognized one of her two year old twins as her mother come back. Shelley's husband and his brother, their mother told me, are also come-backs, and among the 18 cases newly identified. It was in talking on the phone to another Nlepkepmcw person and mentioning Shelley's newborn that Mandy Na'zinek Jimmie recounted her feeling that her daughter is her father come back, recounted in the section on gender change.

7. This woman Chief was recognized as being the head Chief of her House in her previous life. Her concerns about the land and politics of her Nation are not seen as related to only this life, but to a succession of lives. I am using pseudonyms here. Often the people involved would prefer to use their real names, but since some of the interlocking cases the people choose anonymity, until further notice I am using pseudonyms except for Albert Tait, the late Chief Delgamuukw. I am using the real names because the Discovery Channel secured permission to use real names and air the footage shot.
8. Dorothy was recognized as someone come back first by her saying repeatedly that there used to be a building behind her grandmother's house at Kitsegukla. She was concerned about what had happened to it. She also made recognitions of Prince Rupert. Her Aunt also noted her recognition of John Smith's grave and her recognition of his house at Gitanmaax. This would place her as being (that is in English, as having been) someone around the turn of the century. At the time she was born she and her parents and siblings lived in Ontario. Perhaps it was because her birth was not on Gitxsan territory that no one had a dream about who was coming back. Since there was no dream, no one is sure who she was/is. Her manner, her statement to her mother, when about three years old, "Do you remember when I held you?" meant that she is thought to be someone returned, even if no one can say with assurance who. She is being groomed to be a future Head

Chief of her House, and played an active part in the Headstone Feast of May 12, 2000.

9. Resemblance when the child and the person they are said to be are NOT genetically related is a feature that occurs in cases in India and Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma and other cultures where the population is large and the cases are not confined to the kin group (Stevenson, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1983a). When there is no genetic connection Stevenson considers this telling. For North American First Nations or Aboriginal or Native peoples, by far the majority of the cases the child (or adult) who is said to be a come-back is from the same extended family. Then the Western understanding of genetic relationship can explain the resemblance, but note that the First Nations explanation includes this in the reincarnation paradigm, in such a way that it explains the variation in siblings on the basis of rebirth prototypes as well as genetics. Genetics is thereby seen as an element of choice. "You choose the parents you want to come back to," one Head Chief of a Gitxsan House said to the Discovery Film team. In Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en understanding, that choice includes and controls genetics.
10. Sometimes skin tone and hair color are also said to relate to expressed wishes of the person coming back. A number of children are noted as blond because the person they were before wanted to be blond. See Mills (1988a) for examples of this.
11. In cases where behavior is general to all babies, Stevenson would not consider this behavior of a baby enough to qualify as a criteria for being admitted to his computer sample of rebirth cases from around the world. A case must have at least two of the criteria for admission to Stevenson's database. The Gitxsan and Witsuwit'en evaluate criteria differently.

Note that one might have expected Alex to be born with some digits of both of his hands missing. If this had been so, and they matched the missing digits on Albert Tait's hands, it would qualify as a strong case of birth defect replicating a non-genetic feature of the person identified as the predecessor. Stevenson has examined many birthmarks and published his finds (Stevenson, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c). He notes that non-fatal injuries are less likely to be manifest as birthmarks or birth defects, and not all fatal marks on what he calls the previous personality manifest on the child recognized as that person returned as birthmarks or birth defects. However, some do.

12. I had first heard about Alex from a Witsuwit'en activist who told me that Alex was being groomed to be a future Chief Delgamuukw. Alex himself did not have much to say about himself as Albert Tait come back. When asked what he felt about this he said, "I just smile". His

behaviour during the interview—a catered picnic at Ksan on Mother's Day, compliments of Discovery Channel, was certainly consistent with being Albert Tait come back. Lucille and Sadie Mowatt recommended the video *On Indian Land* which portrays Albert Tait, Chief Delgamuukw at a feast where a deceased Elder's name was passed on to her daughter. (The name being passed on at that feast belonged to the late "Jean Slade," who is noted as coming back seven times, in this paper as in several others [cf Mills, 1998b, 1998c].)

13. A House is the matrilineal kin that has rights to territory and passes out the related chiefly titles. Versions of this oral tradition are recounted in MacDonald (1984).
14. With regards to whether Alex would eventually take the name Delgamuukw, Earl Muldoe, the current Delgamuukw agreed that it would be up to more than he to say; the whole House would decide he said. The current Delgamuukw related what it meant to him to take the name—"It was hard but I already knew I had to do a lot of homework. It has been a big responsibility to take the name. I have had to give up my art work; it is a sacrifice." He has been able to carve the totem pole that Chief Hannamuuxw and her mother, the late Chief Gwaans erected, but his responsibilities as Delgamuukw have impacted majorly on his time to continue his career as a master carver (and totem pole carver) and artist. The oral traditions or adaaux are part of the responsibility of being a Head Chief.
15. She went on to relay the name that her uncle, Albert Johnson, held, initially went to her eldest son at Dan Slade's death, "even though he was only 14." She explained, "So I stood behind him, helped him until he came of age." The name has apparently now been passed to her youngest son, who is noted as her uncle come back. This relating of the succession of names and the succession of reincarnations is typical of Gitksan and Witsuwit'en rebirth narratives (cf. Guedon, Halpin, Halpin and Anderson, Mills, 1994f).
16. The one-month-old baby boy who the mother felt was her grandfather returned had three birth marks. I have yet to learn if they are thought to relate to the baby's mother's mother's father, who the mother feels he is.
17. Pierced-ear bithmarks also occur among Cree and other First Nations (Mills, 1994c, 1996a).
18. **Four announcing dreams:** Huson's grandmother said, "I knew William was coming because he came in a dream to me before she was pregnant; then he came again when my daughter was denying she was pregnant; then he came again in a dream." Huson's mother Jennifer said that just before she went into the hospital to deliver, her

grandmother came with her and said it was going to be a boy. Jennifer's grandmother said she had had a dream a couple of days before and William said he was coming back.

Anomalous Experience: When pregnant Huson's mother walked past the home of the late William and his parents (at the end of his life he was living with them). The stereo turned itself on and started blaring out music. William's mother came out and noticed Huson's mother, whose pregnancy was showing, walking past. The music stopped when she was no longer in front of the house. (This was the first thing I heard about Huson as William come back, from Huson's Dad.)

Birthmark: After Huson was born, Huson's great-grandmother noticed the pierced-ear mark.

Recognitions: When Huson was eleven months old, his grandmother said, "He saw my Auntie and her husband [parent's of William] and he went running after them screaming, and then he stopped himself confused. They just went on walking because of what was happening at the house next door.

Huson's grandmother notes that "He has been asking for William's son excessively; he is always monitoring Chelsie (his—that is—William's wife) and wanting to go to her house.

Special Skills Huson is noted as being very into sports "he would be kicking the ball before he could walk." William was a star soccer player and captain of his team. Huson also shows a preference for older kids: "in the day care he talks to the caretakers, rather than the children." Soccer is big in Gitxsan territory—the Discovery Channel crew filmed part of a game at Kispiox. Ruby's dad, Ed Taylor, is also a major soccer player (although not a part of the life of the person is identified as having been before). Soccer skills are noted in another case of young boy born with a pierced-ear mark. In this case his relatives are still watching him and debating about who he is come back from.

19. Mandy Na'zinek Jimmie noted that her father was also a twin; his twin brother died when he was a baby. Mandy's father died March 25, 1979 and her twins were born March 4, 1981. Mandy said that she only mentioned it to close friends and associates, and regrets that she did not mention it to her daughter.
20. A young woman 13 years old might well have shot a moose if they were a woman in her past lives, or not recognized as someone come back. Note that when this happens it occasions a ceremonial distribution of meat that is more typical of a boy's coming of age ceremony for a large game animal, which is typically preceded by first kill distribu-

tions of smaller game like grouse and rabbit which the child gets when younger. In Chief Kneadebeas' case, she tells a wonderful story of how she accidentally burned down her families smoke house out on their territory. Her Elders shoed her away when she sought to make dry meat with them, so she set up her own play dry meat rack just outside the smoke house or long house, and brought some fire out to make a little fire to dry and smoke her meat. This fire caught the big smoke house on fire and burned it and its contents completely. Three-year-old Sarah went running off into the mountains when this happened. She hid, but was eventually found. The following winter, back in Hagwilget, she was placed on the table in the center of the feast hall. Her House chiefs explained that she had burned all of the food they were drying to give away at the feast hall, and that therefore they would have to wait for another year before being able to conduct their business. Sarah tells many good stories such as this, which add to the poignancy of her shooting the cow moose when she was 13; and hence being a provider for her family.

21. Howard Gardner has begun to express this diversity for Western psychology. Western psychology will eventually come in embrace non-Western ways of knowing as well. The book *Varieties of Anomalous Experience* (Cardena, Lynn and Krippner, 1999) published by the conservative American Psychological Association, which contains a chapter by me and a "hard psychologist" on Past-Life Experience, (Mills and Lynn, 1999) is one partial expression of the move to embrace and comprehend intuitive reality. This has been tabooed in recent Western academic culture. The impact of Indians on Western culture has been both subtle and direct in instigating recognition of the need to have respect for all people and all life forms. That is the promise if not yet the product of land claims.

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