

A TRIBUTE TO MARY JOHN AND TO THE SYNERGY OF BRIDGET MORAN AND MARY JOHN

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Abstract / Résumé

This paper honours Mary John, an Elder from Stoney Creek, and the synergy of Mary John and Bridget Moran which produced two important books. The paper begins with the eulogy to Mary John in the *Prince George Citizen* of 2 October 2004, describes the collaboration of Bridget Moran and Mary John, and then elaborates on the way Mary John expressed herself to students to whom she talked about thorny topics such as the implementation of the Durieu system of punishments. It is important to pay tribute to Mary John who passed away on September 30, 2004.

L'article honore Mary John, une Aînée de Stoney Creek, et la synergie de Mary John et de Bridget Moran, qui ont écrit deux livres importants. La première partie est une réimpression de l'éloge funèbre de Mary John, parue dans le *Prince George Citizen* le 2 octobre 2004. Suivent une description de la collaboration entre cette dernière et Bridget Moran et une présentation de la façon dont Mary John s'exprimait devant les étudiants auxquels elle parlait de sujets épineux tels que la mise en place du système de châtiments de l'évêque Durieu. Il est important de rendre hommage à Mary John, qui est décédée le 30 septembre 2004.

The Prince George Citizen of October 2, 2004 reported the passing of Mary John in the following words:

Stoney Creek mourns loss of Mary John. The gentle Native elder [*sic*] known as Stoney Creek Woman died quietly in St. John's hospital in Vanderhoof Thursday following a lengthy illness. Mary John was 91.

Born in 1913 in Lhedli (Prince George [Confluence of the rivers]), Mrs. John (nee Quaw) was raised in Saik'uz or Stoney Creek south of Vanderhoof.

She devoted her life to improving the lives of Aboriginal peoples, to preserving language and traditions and to building bridges between cultures. Her life story is recounted in the book *Stoney Creek Woman*, written by her long-time friend, the late Bridget Moran. One of her last public appearances in Prince George was when she came in a wheelchair in June to witness the unveiling of the Third Avenue sculpture of Bridget Moran who is holding the book. Mrs. John reached out to place her hand on the book, gazed in Moran's face and said, "It looks like her. I love it. I'll come to visit her often."

Mrs. John was one of the first people to take an interest in preserving the Native language. She worked on the creation of language materials and taught conversational courses. She was a founding member of the Yinka Dene Language Institute and her long years of service as director earned her the position of honorary chair for life. Even after she became ill, she continued to work with a linguist to document the Saik'uz dialect.

Her formal education began at age nine when she went to school in Fort St. James and moved to Lejac Residential School when it opened in 1922. She left school at 14, and two years later married Lazare John.

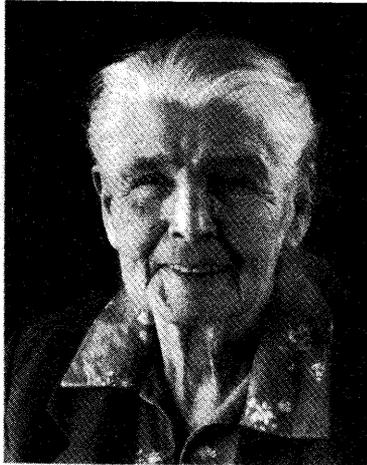
She became a major leader in her own community and in the larger Yinka Dene (Carrier) community. With Sophie Thomas and Selina John, she established the Homemakers' Society and then the Stoney Creek Elders' Society—both of which were a force for political progress and social and economic development.

She was honoured both at home and across the nation, being named the 1978 Vanderhoof Citizen of the Year, receiving an honorary doctorate from UNBC in 1996, the Pres-

tigious Order of Canada in 1997, and the Queen's Jubilee medal in 2003....

. (Prince George Citizen Staff Oct. 2 2004, 3.)

Forever In Our Hearts



Mary John Sr., CM

I was in the Elder's Room at the First Nations Center at the University of Northern British Columbia September 30 2004 when we received a phone call to tell us Mary John had just passed away. I had spoken to her in August 2004 after her son passed away from cancer to give her my condolences and she said, "When are you coming to see me? I miss you." I said, "As soon as the Johnny David book is done."² I was so sorry that the next time I saw her was at her funeral on 20 October 2004, an event attended by over a thousand people.

I have had the pleasure and blessing of knowing both Bridget Moran and Mary John in person from the time I moved to Prince George in 1994, but their fame had reached me through their book *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke, Stoney Creek Woman: The Story of Mary John* (1988) even before then. In tribute to Mary John I want to reflect on how the wonderful synergy of these two women produced two out of Bridget's four books, namely her first book *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke, Stoney Creek Woman: The Story of Mary John* (1988) and her second book *Judgment at Stoney Creek* (1990). Bridget Moran's fourth book, *Justa* (1994), tells the life story of Justa Monk, a Carrier leader who spoke at Mary John's funeral. Bridget Moran's third book, *A Little Rebellion* (1992) describes Bridget Moran's standoff with the provincial government.



Bridget Moran, Justa Monk, and Mary John.³

Sai'k'uz Ts'eke, Stoney Creek Woman, Bridget's first book, grew out of the fine friendship of these two women. They had a lot in common: both were strong, capable, compassionate women with great senses of humor. Both were mothers: Bridget had four children, and Mary twelve. Mary raised other children as well, such as her niece and nephew, and two of her half-brothers when they were orphaned. Bridget was compassionately concerned with the welfare of countless children, as was Mary. Both had been raised or impacted by the Catholic faith. Of course Mary was raised in the Dakelth spiritual tradition as well. Both had known poverty or relative poverty, and experienced the strength of women working through adversity. Both had great senses of justice and injustice. Of course they had their differences too: Mary John is part of the First Nations community; by nature she is a bit shy and retiring; the residential school experience and racial treatment of her and her people have made her even more shy in public occasions.⁴ Bridget on the other hand came from an Irish background; she was feisty and outspoken, and her natural instinct for direct onslaught made her outspoken.⁵ Mary John received six years of education at Residential schools; Bridget had graduated with a gold medal and first class honors in history, literature and philosophy at the University of Toronto and went on to begin graduate work there till the sexism of the university became manifest. For all

their similarities and differences, the synergy of these two women has produced a cornucopia of public awareness. In this brief account I want to share with you some windows onto how the remarkable synergistic dynamic worked between these two unique women.

It was a great privilege to take classes out to visit Mary John in her lovely log home at Saik'uz. These trips to visit her were always an important experience for both myself and all the students, Native and non-Native. Visiting Mary John on 28 January 2002, in the company of a wonderful group of graduate students taking First Nations Studies 602 First Nations Methodology at UNBC, Mary said of Bridget, "Bridget is so, she was so outspoken. Nothing stopped her, you know. When in our travels anybody went to greet us, she was the one who put in all the words. I just stood by and looked at her...."⁶ Students had commented to me as we drove out to visit Mary, that in public it seemed to be Bridget who would be the mouthpiece for Mary John, who often observed silently. Bridget herself has described the dynamic, or the shifting dynamic, in the New Preface to the 1997 edition of *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke, Stoney Creek Woman*.

Again, imperceptibly, over the years we developed a routine in our public appearances – I made the speeches and, for the most part, Mary answers the questions. We talk about everything: the residential school system, life on Stoney Creek, racism, the potlatch system, the Elder's Society, the Catholic Church, her work to preserve the Carrier language and culture, her health, her concerns about poverty and unemployment, her arranged marriage, and how Stoney Creek Woman was written, including her refusal to let me put any word about sex into the book. There were no areas of her life that are off limits. (Moran 1997, 9)

Bridget also commented on the shifting balance of the two presenters: During our travels together, an interesting transformation has taken place in the way we refer to Stoney Creek Woman. We began by describing it as "my book about Elder Mary John." Imperceptibly the description changed to "our book," and then, without either one of us quite knowing how or when the change occurred, it became and remains, "Mary's book." (Moran op.cit.)

During our visit of January 28, 2004 Mary commented on Bridget's strength in speaking up and on charged and controversial topics. Mary said, "[Judgment at Stoney Creek] said everything right, you know. Bridget never held back. Now she's passed on. Maybe in front of God she's telling him what to do." [We laughed.] "You better treat those Indi-

ans better!" [We laughed all the more]. "She never went back on anything," Mary said.

Of course Mary has never gone back on anything either. Together these two women were wholeheartedly engaged in addressing the injustices of the treatment of First Nations, from the social welfare department and beyond. If Bridget was often the mouthpiece for Mary John in public meetings, it was Mary John's relating of her experiences that became the substance of her most famous and widely read book *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke, Stoney Creek Woman*.

I have heard both Bridget and Mary describe the process of the creation of the book, and Bridget has also described the scene in the New Preface. The synergy came as a result of the two women meeting in 1976, "when the people of Stoney Creek joined together to force the justice system to hold an inquest into the death of Coreen Thomas.... During the time before the inquest and for months afterwards, I was often in Mary John's home, and each time I came away warmed just by having been with her" (Moran 1997, 7). Bridget goes on to explain how it was a letter written in 1976 by Mary's late beloved daughter Helen that asked Bridget to write the story of Mary John's life.

Regrettably, the letter had been lost, but I have not forgotten Helen's words. She wrote that she felt her mother's life was the story of many Aboriginal women of Mary's generation. But more than this, wrote Helen, she believed that her mother had special qualities that should be set down in a book, so that future generations of First Nations could know her mother as her family and community knew her. (Moran 1997, 8)

Mary dedicated the book *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke, Stoney Creek Woman* to her daughter, who sadly passed away from tuberculosis before it was published.⁷ But Helen lived to see the start of the genesis of the book, and observed how Bridget brought her little motor home out to Stoney Creek and parked it at Mary and Lazare John's home. For hours each day over week-ends and summer holidays Mary John sat at the window overlooking Nulki Lake and did her beading and moccasin making as Bridget knitted, "frantically," as she says, "I was trying, successfully, I might add, to quit smoking" (Moran 1997, 8). It was in this peaceful and homely context that Mary told her story. As Bridget describes it, "A cheap little tape recorder was between us on Mary's big work table, quietly spinning away, recording for all time our words, our laughter, our anger, and sometimes our tears" (op. cit.). The tape recorder quietly caught their voices, and Bridget used this material for the writing of the book. Bridget has described to me on several occasions, her home and UNBC

Elder's Room among them, how she wrote, edited and rewrote the book until it ended up in Mary's voice. "That worked best," she said.⁸

It is important to note that not only Mary and Bridget's meeting and friendship and the book *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke, Stoney Creek Woman* came about as a result of the inquest surrounding Corrine Thomas' death, but that the book *Judgment at Stoney Creek* was produced as a result of Mary John's reaction to reading the account of that incident in *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke, Stoney Creek Woman* when it first came out as a book. Therefore I'll relate the story as told by Mary John in one of the many previous and treasured times when I have taken a class of First Nations Studies students out to visit her in her home, bringing inevitably a potluck lunch. In one of the special visits Mary told how Bridget gave her a copy of *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke, Stoney Creek Woman* to read when it first came out. Mary read the completed manuscript and her response was, "I am just so damn mad." Now for those of you who know soft spoken Mary John, a woman justly called a saint, for her to use the d word is exceptional – what she was so damn mad about was what happened when Coreen Thomas was hit and killed by a vehicle driven by a local Whiteman as Coreen and a group of friends from Stoney Creek walked back from Vanderhoof towards the reserve. Mary's renewed outrage at that incident when she read the first copy of the book *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke, Stoney Creek Woman*, incited Bridget Moran to do all the work and research involved in creating the "herstory" of that piece of First Nations/settler society interaction, so people would know the nature of the "justice" system and its treatment of First Nations people regarding the deaths of Coreen Thomas and the nine month old baby she was carrying in her womb.

Bridget's books have had a large impact in educating the general public: they are used in high schools, as well as colleges and universities where they inform people about the nature of the White/First Nations relationship; they empower First Nations people who usually are left undescribed in the educational system and they inform the non-Native readers.

The popularity of the books also led Mary John and Bridget to new adventures: they traveled together to speak to communities, First Nations and other, about the book *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke, Stoney Creek Woman* and the book *Judgment at Stoney Creek*. Both Mary and Bridget have delightful stories they tell from these adventures. One of them relates to coming back Highway 16 from the West. On 28 January 2002 Mary John told the class of UNBC students and me an incident about coming back and stopping at the site of the Lejac residential school which Mary John attended for many years, from the age of 8 to 13.⁹

On the 28 January 2002 Mary said, "Yeah, in our travels we sure had a lot of laughs, we did everything so funny.... When we were going from Prince Rupert, coming back, and we stopped at Lejac. Lejac, they'd torn it down, all the bricks went down and we wanted to go to the bathroom so much, you know, so we went behind that old building and we went and when we came out, I said, 'Bridget,' I said, 'Lejac gave me a hard time. Good thing I shit on it.'" We all had a good laugh.

But if Bridget sometimes spoke first or for Mary John in public, there was the irony that when Mary John got her second and third official awards, the Honorary Degree at UNBC and then the Order of Canada, Bridget was not included in the festivities at the same time.¹⁰ I want to share with you a bit about Mary's response to these two events because they reveal her humility.

First the UNBC Honorary Degree: ironically though Bridget was very active in establishing who should be contacted to nominate Mary John for a UNBC honorary degree, the person who was asked to speak on the podium about Mary John's accomplishments was me rather than Bridget. Of course, Bridget was given an honorary degree by UNBC in 1994 the year before Mary was – a picture of Bridget receiving the degree in the academic gown, with Mary on Bridget's arm, appears in "Mary's book." Nonetheless it seemed ironic that it was me who was invited to the honorary UNBC luncheon with Mary John just before Convocation, and to the honorary dinner at the President's home after Convocation, both along with UNBC dignitaries and the other gentleman who was given an honorary award that year, not Bridget. Therefore I got to witness Mary's discomfort towards going to the luncheon and this dinner. In both those instances of receiving honorary degrees what stood out was Mary John's humility.

At the luncheon before the graduation ceremony in which Mary John was given the honorary degree at UNBC in 1996, she spoke about how difficult it was for her to receive this honor as her culture recognized that there were many Elders who had served their community equally. It was difficult for her to be singled out and given recognition when her fellow Elders also deserved to be so recognized and were not equally feted.¹¹ Bridget Moran recognized that Mary John does not stand alone. She wrote in *Stoney Creek Woman*, "In her village [of Stoney Creek] live Celena and Veronica and Sophie and Agatha and many many more women whose life stories run parallel with hers. That is why it is important that the story of Mary John should be set down" (Moran.1997, 23). Mary spoke to her discomfiture in being the only Elder so feted, but she stood proudly to receive the Honorary Doctorate of Law, which was presented by the Chancellor Iona Campagnola.

After the ceremony of UNBC's Convocation and before we went to the dinner Mary confided that again she was afraid that the White people at the dinner might hear her throat working as she swallowed her food. Her self-conscious fear that her co-workers would hear this sound, which she assumed was peculiar to her as a First Nations person, meant that she hid to eat her lunch by herself when we worked in the hospital in Vanderhoof, rather than joining the other staff as they ate together, as Bridget relates in *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke, Stoney Creek Woman*.¹²

In fact Mary practically begged to have me let her off the hook and not go to the dinner at the President's home after she received her honorary degree. I told her that the President and his kind wife were really expecting her as one of the two honored guests and that it really wouldn't be a good idea to not show up. She had been told long in advance that she could bring someone with her (this was besides me), and I had anticipated that she would have her son or adult granddaughter come. She had made no such provision at all, and in the end asked an Irish gentleman who at the time worked at the Prince George Friendship Center to accompany her, knowing that he would feel more at ease than she or most of her relatives.

Perhaps a little background on this reluctance is in order. On 28 January 2002 Mary told a story I had not heard before about the discrimination she has faced in eating with others, which surely added to her self-consciousness and discomfort in going to the honorary dinner. She said,

The things we had to go through. It's like I said, maybe I did that in the book. In town we were not served. One time we were kicked out in Smithers. We went there for a conference, a School Conference. We went there with a priest, a principal from Vanderhoof. A few of us, there was Celena and myself. We sat in that restaurant forever and they didn't serve us. And those people were with us, like the bus driver and the priest and some teachers, they were served right away and we were sitting there, sitting there, nobody came to serve you and at last we, we kind of recognized what, what was being done so we just went out without a meal.

At the President's home Mary John was definitely served. Even before we sat down, she confided that she was feeling easier: she could see that they were honoring her not dishonoring her. She ate some hors d'oeuvres and commented to me jokingly, "Nobody seemed to hear my throat working." After we sat down at the beautifully decorated table for a sumptuous dinner of many courses she became even more at ease, and became her usual lovely self and she spoke with pleasure to the

other guests. Yet she heaved a sigh of relief when it was all finished and she could go back home.

Then there was the Order of Canada: again, when Mary John was given the Order of Canada in April 1997, Bridget was excluded. Bridget Moran wanted to go to Ottawa with Mary for the presentation of that major honor, but the government did not deem it necessary or appropriate to pay for a plane ticket for her; Mary John was accompanied instead by her daughter-in-law and grand-daughter. When she returned there was a celebratory dinner at the Prince George Native Friendship Center where the First Nations communities could add their appreciation of the honor that Mary was given.

I want to share with you some of what Mary John said about receiving the Order of Canada in April 1997 on January 28, 2002 when Rheanna Caden, one of the students in the FNST 602 class asked her, "What was it like to get the Order of Canada?" (This was asked after Mary's grandson Fabian brought into the living room the ribbon and medal, beautifully framed. Usually the Order of Canada hangs high up on the wall in her entry or sewing room, near the UNBC Honorary Doctor of Laws degree.)

Mary John answered, "Oh, not very much. It didn't mean much."

One of the members of the class, Andy Robinson, Galksgaban is his Nisga'a name, said, "Hm. I liked how you said it doesn't mean much...."

Mary answered, "That's in our heads you know, Indians. If they give you some dried char or dried meat, then that's something."

Andy replied, "This is quite an honor, though, Mary."

Mary answered, "I don't know why, I was thinking about it, you know, there's a lot of people who could get it, like Archie Patrick or Eddie John. They've been smart and they contribute quite a bit too, to our people also and why I got it, do you know why? [We laughed]. No? Somebody tell me." [We all laughed].

Andy said, "Your years of accomplishment, probably...."

Mary said, "Probably...."

Andy added, "I think that's what it comes for, your distinguished service to the country and making it, making it a better place, that's what that medal is for. Probably for your story that you told to Bridget, is it not? Is it from the Stony Creek Woman?"

I added, "That's part, sure, and your having worked so hard to keep, keep your peoples' traditions strong."

Mary said, "To see the Governor General so that was quite a big step for me. I was kind of very reluctant to go but I went. I was chosen to go, and that did a lot of good for our people." Mary then went on to relate how she had gone to Ottawa previously in 1992 to receive the

Governor-General's Medal commemorating the 125th anniversary of the Confederation of Canada. Mary saw the trip as an opportunity to address the issue of where First Nations children went to school. She said, "Now they can go to any school they want. Just on account of that you know, before you go to this [residential] school and that's it, you know."

Mary John elaborated on that trip to Ottawa, which she saw as an opportunity to gain more rights to choice in education, instead of just residential school. Mary said on 28 January 2002: "Because you know we had the residential school. Then it came to a school of your choice, before we were just entitled to a residential school and after that I've been to Ottawa, for that, you know. See the Governor-General I been to Ottawa for that, and I remember my husband and my sister and Sister Paul brought me to Prince George and I was going to take the plane that night, at night time going to Ottawa for that, to see the Governor-General so that was quite a big step for me. I was kind of very reluctant to go but I went. I was chosen to go, and that did a lot of good for our people. Now they can go to any school they want. Just on account of that you know, before you go to this school and that's it. And so our people, my age group we didn't have much education on account of no freedom of choice, you know. Once you're sixteen you're kicked out. Yeah, they never paid for your tuition. No more. The things we had to go through."

Mary John, like Bridget, worked hard for changes, corrections of past unjust policies regarding not only questions of justice, but sanitary conditions, education, and ecologically sound reserve run employment. The issues were and continue to be weighty, but Bridget and Mary had a lot of fun as they worked on all these fronts, and traveled together speaking to these issues. I recall one incident in the First Nations Centre at UNBC in about 1996: Bridget said that Mary wouldn't let her put any of the parts about sex in the book *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke, Stoney Creek Woman*. Bridget said that she really wanted to write another book to bring out the juicy parts. Mary John turned to her and said, "If you do that, I'll sue you!" Everyone had a good laugh.

On 28 January 2002 when I reminded Mary John of this incident, Mary said: "'No sex, no sex,' I said. She used to get a kick out of it." Bridget had skirted around this in the introduction to the second edition of *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke: Stoney Creek Woman*. There she says, "We talk about everything, including her refusal to let me put anything about sex into the book. There are no areas of her life or of mine for that matter, which are off limits when we appear together" (Moran 1997, 9).

That day, 28 January 2002 Mary told us stories that resonated on many levels. Mary said:

Most people don't know about it [the discrimination and rac-

ism towards First Nations people, the refusal to serve them]. Just like, you know, when the first time liquor was open to our people, some of our women went on down to the bar. They wouldn't serve them because they had kerchiefs on their head. And then they would go out into the back alley with their kerchiefs, [take them] off and try and put a little rouge on their cheeks so they would be presentable, they tried that. It was very, very...I found that very humiliating for our people: 'Now you don't go in the bar till you put rouge on, makeup.' That's the way it was for us, at the beginning.

I turned the conversation to Mary's taking an oath to not touch alcohol after the death of her husband's nephew and his wife who were hit and killed by a train, leaving three children orphaned, one of whom Mary raised. Mary said of that incident, "For days I asked myself over and over again, 'Why? Why?' And something inside me answered, 'Alcohol!' At that moment I made a vow to never touch alcohol again" (Moran 1997, 133).

In "Mary's book" Mary goes on to relate,

So that other people would understand and accept that I no longer took a drink, I went to Father Dalton and in his presence I took a life pledge. He gave me a medal. I had hoped that other villagers might do the same, including some members of my own family, but I was the only one to make this solemn vow. I have never had a drink since that day in 1957 when I stood before Father Dalton and took the pledge. At banquets, I turn my glass upside down; at parties, I make myself a big pot of tea or sip a glass of water. And always I hope that my abstinence will be an example to other Natives, especially to the young people. (Moran 1997, 133)

Mary's going to the Catholic priest to take this solemn vow of abstinence is another way in which she differed from Bridget; well, it is two ways in which she differed, the abstinence and the acceptance of the positive power of the Catholic Church. Now Mary had plenty of reason to distrust the Catholic Church. Indeed the local priest had threatened Mary and Lazare with excommunication, and yet Mary has remained committed to the Catholic Church, not because she belittles the sad things that have been done in the name of the Church, but I think, because she appreciates the strength of Jesus' message of compassion. It is a message she embodies. On a previous visit to Mary John she told us why Lizette Hall, the author of *The Carrier, My People* (1992) had turned against the church. The story is poignant. Mary described the story Lizette had told her, of how Lizette's father had been made a Church

Chief. Church Chiefs were introduced by the Catholic missionaries in an effort to establish a counter system to the potlatch system of chiefs and governance, one that would endorse and enforce the Catholic Church set of rules and regulations. Father Durieu had created a system of punishments which included corporal punishment for infractions of Catholic concepts of correct behavior.

In his capacity as Church Chief Lizette's father beat Lizette's sister very hard for what the Catholic Church called sexual promiscuity Lizette's sister died as a result of the beating. Lizette in a sense holds the Catholic Church responsible for her sister's death, and is not a practicing Catholic (she married a Protestant). When I asked Mary about the Durieu system she said,

It was good. It was good because the government couldn't deal with a lot of things you know, like..ah...some people might be having problems stealing or fighting or something like. So it was up to the chief to deal with it. They would frame them [put people in stocks] you know.

When I asked Mary about Lizette's sister she said,

So I remember. I was just young when his daughter. She was...I don't know whether she lived with a Stephen guy but he wasn't with her maybe he was killed or may be [inaudible]. She had two girls. Vinny and Jillian. There were two of them. Nice looking girls and her dad was strict and she was drinking one night with John Prince and John Prince [inaudible] that was her half - half brother. And she beat up, he beat up that girl badly and she died, his daughter. You know at that time they said she died of [inaudible] so they buried her outside of graveyard fence. Even her dead body [they] had nothing to do [with it].¹³

On 28 January, 2002 Mary went on to talk about a nephew's recent visit where he told her of his 10-year sobriety. Mary then recalled the first days when her people were allowed in bars, saying "...[liquor] makes you crazy, spend your money, just like I remember, the first time bar was open it was Elders...- Elders! They start on maybe a few beer, they start digging in their wallet. I remember one Elder was doing that, counting her money, put it on the table. To me that's very sad. And then, after that, they kind of got used to it, but the first time it was such a novelty, to be served in the bar."

Bridget relates with equal compassion the tragedy of the policies of not-serving food to the Stoney Creek, Carrier, or any First Nations people in the Introduction to *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke, Stoney Creek Woman*. There she says,

Another memory of a time, thirty years ago or more.... I had been in court in Vanderhoof during the morning, giving evidence of the abuse of a reserve child we will call Theresa. The local doctor, long since gone from Vanderhoof, had made the initial complaint and that morning gave a searing description of his examination of the child – her body, he said, was covered with bruises and lacerations. Finally after a distressing three hours of sworn evidence, court was adjourned for lunch.

As a matter of course, I asked the Natives present, including Theresa's parents, to join me for soup and a sandwich. We walked together to the local café. When we got to the door, the Natives moved back.

"Come on," I said impatiently. "I'm dying for a cup of coffee!"

They shook their heads. "We can't go in there."

And then of course I remembered – this restaurant did not serve Natives.

I started to suggest that we go in, Irish and Indian together, make a kind of Custor's Last Stand against racism. Midway through my plea, I stopped; looks of horror on their faces told me a million stories of discrimination, humiliation, fear.

Back in the court that afternoon, I thought that there had to be some terrible connection between this charge of child abuse and the refusal of a second rate café to serve Indians. In court, we heard of one Native's anger allegedly turned inward against his own child. (Moran 1997, 15)

Bridget instinctively knew to share lunch with those accused of serious abuse; like Mary she knew there was much more to each individual story than meets the eye. Both knew how to be compassionate. I remember with true nostalgia the time when Bridget invited a group of us UNBC newcomers to her "high-rise" apartment to see a video made many years ago in which Sophie Thomas, Mary John, Celena and others were talking to someone from the University of Victoria's Social Work Department about how they wanted Social Services to recognize that when the parents of a child were not in a position to look after the child there was likely to be a family member, or perhaps an Elder or classificatory grandparent, who would love to take over responsibility for the child, in the home community. That way the child would not have the trauma of being displaced from everything that was familiar and comforting. It was a wonderful afternoon at Bridget's apartment in which the

video and we affirmed all the positive solutions that were/are potentially possible. Indeed some have come into effect through the strength and perseverance of the Elder's Society that Mary John as the other Elders founded to carry on these traditions of mutual care.

At the end of our 28 January 2002 visit Mary John shifted to another poignant topic: she teased us about sexy stories: "Come back again. I'll tell some funny stories." [We all laughed]. Then she added, "Sexy stories."

We said, "Sexy stories. Then we'll definitely have to come back."

Then Mary gave us a little enticement. She said, "Madeline, my niece, she didn't know about sex. One time she was in town and then there was a White boy flirting with her and then he said, he said, 'Uh, do you want to have sex?' She didn't know what it was. And then she said, 'Do you mean cow tail?' because, you know, years ago, we were poor and the butcher sometimes sent it over, saves the cows' head, you know, they skin it and they make soup out of it. She thought 'That's what he meant,' you know. 'Yes yes yes,' [she said]. [We laughed]. And then he was leading her to the alley. She thought 'What's he going there for?' That's a funny story my niece tells."

Okay, so there was that comic let down: the story wasn't about sex after all. Or it was about one non-Native man's perceptions of First Nations women and sex. It was, like so many of Mary's stories, a charged piece of the story of First Nations-to-settler-society interchange.

Mary John was 88 in 2002; I took classes out to visit her and meet her in 2003 and 2004 when she was 89 and 90 as well. When I would phone and ask if she wanted us to come, she would always say, "Yes, yes, come. I am looking forward to it." Frail in body since she suffered a stroke some years ago, she remained strong in mind and spirit, and she continued to have the wit to tease and teach us all. We didn't want to conclude our 28. January 2002 visit, or the subsequent ones, but did so in the interest of letting Mary John rest.

The synergy of Bridget and Marty John was important. There is no doubt that without Bridget Moran and her keen sense of justice and injustice, her humor and tolerance and verve, there would be a wonderful Mary John full of humor, strength and humility, but there would be no *Sai'k'uz Ts'eke*, *Stoney Creek Woman* or *Judgment at Stoney Creek* books to share the collaborative vision of Mary John and Bridget Moran with a wider audience. Therefore it seems particularly appropriate to pay tribute to both the late Bridget Moran and the late Mary John. The battles that they fought are not over, such as reduced provincial funds for social welfare; or the issues of making just treaties that address the ancient concept of *terra nullius* – the concept that the land of this an-

cient continent dubbed the “new world” was free for the taking by European newcomers.¹⁴ It is doubly appropriate to honor the symbiosis of these two wonderful women given that together Mary and Bridget represent the kind of compassionate and concerned friendship and cooperative relationship based on mutual respect that needs to characterize the future of Native and non-Native relations. Bridget Moran and Mary John have moved on. They leave to us the responsibility to work out the meaning of Fiduciary responsibility. The Glossary to the book *Expressions in Canadian Native Studies* (Laliberte et al., 2000) says,

The meaning of the term ‘fiduciary’ is embodied in the nation-to-nation treaty-making practice. It refers to a set of mutual obligations between the nations that are parties to the treaties. There is the agreement between the treaty parties to share a territory and its benefits, thereby establishing an irrevocable relationship of coexistence and partnership. The fiduciary principles serve as guides in cases where the relationship between the treaty parties becomes unbalanced and one nation becomes vulnerable to the power of the other. It is the view of Aboriginal groups in Canada that the Crown is under a fiduciary obligation to maintain a balanced relationship between itself and treaty nations. Otherwise, the Crown is compelled to implement measures to correct an imbalance in order to restore its relationship with treaty nations to a true partnership (RCAP, 1997).
(Laliberte et al, 2000, 568)

This tribute to the synergy of Bridget Moran and Mary John began with the newspaper notice of Mary John’s demise. Let us end with the newspaper account of the funeral held October 5, 2004 for Mary John, which said,

Huge crowd mourns First Nations elder [sic]. SAIK’UZ — Over and over again, Mary John’s family and friends spoke at her funeral about her gentleness, unselfishness, caring, strength and passion for justice.

The service at Holy Trinity Catholic Church and reception at the Sai’kuz Multiplex attracted more than 1,000 people on a wind swept autumn day in the community where the prominent elder resided all her life.

Native people came from Burns Lake, [Hagwilget, Hazelton,] Stellat’en, Nadleh Whut’en, Tache and Lheidli T’enneh, and also as far away as Sechelt and Haida Gwaii. Saik’uz, also known as Stoney Creek, is 100 kilometers west

of Prince George.

The tiny church was overflowing. Tents set up outside, with hundreds of additional chairs and two huge big screen TVs carrying a live broadcast of the service, were also crowded.

People remembered John, who died last Thursday at 91, as living a full life that touched many people and is an inspiration to others.

Father Andy Takach said Mary encouraged others to do the right thing – her family, her community, the municipality, the province and federal government. “She had a great hunger for right,” said Takach.

But he said one of Mary’s greatest strengths was her gentleness. “She was so approachable, so easy to talk to, to get to know, to confide in,” he said.

[The service also noted that Mary John exemplified each and every one of the Beatitudes. Communion was given to all who so desired.]

Colleen Erickson, one of Mary’s daughters-in-law, recounted some of the key moments in Mary’s life. Those included work in the 1950s to improve the conditions of her people. The Saik’uz reserve was troubled by poverty and many children were being lost to the welfare system, said Erickson. It was at this time that Mary met Bridget Moran, and they began a lifelong partnership and friendship.

“As a result of their work, a welfare committee was set up and the meetings were held in Mary’s living room –every effort was made to place children in Aboriginal foster homes,” said Erickson.

Mary also worked hard to preserve the Carrier culture and language, and helped to establish the Stoney Creek Elders Society in 1980, said Erickson, one of the eulogists.

Mary’s efforts have been recognized in many forms. She was immortalized in Moran’s book *Stoney Creek Woman*, in 1988. John was named Vanderhood citizen of the year in 1978, the first native person to receive the honour. She also received an honorary doctorate from the University of Northern B.C. in 1995, the Order of Canada in 1997 and Queen’s Jubilee medal in 2003.

Longtime north central B.C. Aboriginal leader Justa Monk, another of the eulogists, remarked that Mary had gone home and it was time to release her. But he added “Her spirit,

her footprints and her voice will always be with her family and friends. Now it's our duty to teach the children, and the grandchildren, and share the wisdom of Mary," said Monk. "It's our turn to do the things she wanted us to do."¹⁵

Mike Thompson was among the non-native people who also attended the service. A teacher in the Saik'uz community, Thompson said Mary epitomized gentleness, and also helped to bridge the gap between the native and non-native cultures. "That's why there are so many people here," he said. (Gordon Hoekstra, Prince George Citizen 3 October 2004, 1)



Jackie Hans, one of Mary John's granddaughters, singing as Mary John's grave was filled in by the pallbearers.

Since then Mary John was honored at the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council Annual General Assembly in the spring of 2005. A Headstone Potlatch was held in her honour at Saikuz / Stoney Creek on June 18, 2005.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this text was prepared and presented at a Conference which took place at the University of Northern British Columbia to honor Bridget Moran after she had passed away. The conference, called "Little Rebellions" took place March 22-24, 2002. I am grateful to Si Tranken and Dawn Hemingway of the Social Work Program for organizing this conference and inviting me to participate in it. The Proceedings are available as *Conversations with Bridget Moran, Proceedings from the Little Rebellions Conference* edited by Susan LeBlanc and Si Tranken. ISBN 1-896315-14-3. Printed by UNBC Copy Services. I have edited my paper since Mary John passed away, and on the basis of listening to the January 28, 2002 tape recording of a visit to her.
2. I was working on the copy editing of 'Hang Onto These Words': Johnny David's *Delgamuukw Evidence* (Mills, 2005) at the time, and looked forward to having that task done and going to see Mary. The book was finally sent off September 15 but in catching up on all the things that had been put on hold, to my great regret I did not get out to see Mary before she expired fifteen days later. Every single time of seeing her was a great pleasure.
3. The photograph of Mary John, Justa and Bridget, was taken at Mosquito Books at the launching of the 1997 version of *Stoney Creek Woman*, I believe, and the picture hung on the wall Mosquito Books. Bridget had a wonderful relationship with George and Bridget Sipios, the proprietors of Mosquito Books, and when out of town her voice mail would say, "Phone Mosquito Books to learn about my whereabouts and leave a message for me." The photograph was taken by the Prince George Citizen, and I gratefully acknowledge the permission granted by Dave Paulson of the Prince George Citizen to reproduce this fine image.
4. One thing that we asked Mary on January 28, 2002 was, "What has it meant to you to have the story of your life be out as the book?" Mary answered, "Oh, at first it bothered me, you know people you know read, reading my whole life story and really I was kind of mad at Bridget for suggesting it but after the book went out and I felt ok it was right about it – nothing really bad in there."
5. One of the stories that Bridget told about herself that I enjoyed so much, and one that gives a glimpse of the ways she could be not so much outspoken, but funny and personable in getting a message conveyed goes like this: "One bitterly cold winter day I went to take my car to the garage to get serviced. When I went in Hal wasn't in

the front office so I struck my head into the back part of the garage. The power had gone off, and Hal had tried everything on the fuse box. He was swearing a blue streak, cussing out that power failure with every word in defiling vocabulary. Then he looked back and saw me. Well! He turned bright red and very silent. He came out to the front office, behind the counter, his head hanging. He couldn't look me in the eye. There was a pregnant silence. Then I plunked my car keys down on the counter and said, 'Here are the fuckin' keys.' Well, he looked up at me then and burst out laughing. We had a good laugh." If Mary's use of the d word inspired Bridget to write a book, Bridget's use of the f word brought humor and good feeling back into another working relationship.

6. I am very grateful to the students of FNST 602, namely Rheanna Caden, Dawn Dunstan, Jessica Garrick, Sarah Hunt, Jeremy Pillon, Andy Robinson, and Annette Schroeter, for their work in transcribing the audiotape and videotape of what Mary John had to say on 28 January 2002. I am grateful for their permission to use their transcriptions. And of course, we are all very grateful to Mary John for allowing us to visit her, and for allowing us to record and share her words. In the earlier years, Bridget and Mary or Mary alone would come to UNBC. After Mary's health declined I was grateful to have been able to take classes to visit her in her home on a number of occasions such as 27 October 2002; 20 March 2003; 11 October 2003; 28 October 2004; and 9 March 2004. It was also a great pleasure to take two dignitaries from Japan to meet her on 7 March 2003. Dr. Toji Kamata, a Shinto priest, and Dr. Soho Machida, a Zen Buddhist priest, were sent by the Japanese government to North America to consult about the ethics of genetic engineering, and paid Mary John a visit on the day she received the Queen's Jubilee medal.
7. Mary describes in "her book" how she and her husband took in an orphan who it turned out had tuberculosis without knowing how it would impact their family; "Lazare and I thought it was a matter of simple charity to offer the dying boy a home" (Moran 1997, 110). Little did they know that two of their sons would be taken away as young boys to the tuberculosis hospital at Miller Bay. Mary adds, "I believe it was my daughter Helen and her battle with tuberculosis that nearly broke my heart" (Moran 1997, 111).
8. To my knowledge, the tapes were never formally transcribed. It was in listening to them over and over again that Bridget found out how to put the words back into Mary's mouth.
9. In fact Mary attended the Mission School at Ft. St. James from the time she was 7, in 1920, until the Lejac school was built and opened

in February 1922, replacing the Mission school. Mary said, "I did not know that three years before I went to the Mission School, the Stoney Creek Council, pressed by the mothers of the village, had sent a telegram to the government in Ottawa which said that the people wanted a school on their own reserve. 'This Indian village has ninety-five school age children...we can feed our children at home then,' said the telegram. Nor did I know that later, the Native people were forced to apologize for sending that telegram" (Moran 1997, 52). Again Mary spoke about how her people wanted their children schooled at home when they were in Lejac:

Added to that, the parents were no more supportive [of Lejac than] of the Mission School in Ft. St. James. They complained of the food, the work, the punishments. They wanted schools on their own reserves, and nothing less would satisfy them. They wanted their children at home with them.

And within the school itself, the missionaries and the nuns had to deal with one hundred and eighty Native children who were always hungry, always homesick. The boys were openly rebellious, many of them stealing or running away or getting the girls off in some corner alone with them. Unlike the boys, the female students were seldom openly rebellious. Instead they were sullen and depressed. Lejac was not a happy place. (Moran 1997, 60-61)

10. Bridget Moran herself received an Honorary Doctor of Law degree from the University of Northern British Columbia in 1995, an event that Mary John attended, and another Honorary Doctor of Law degree from the University of Victoria in 1996. Both Bridget and Mary received the Governor-General's Medal in 1992, although I do not know if they traveled together to Ottawa to accept the award.
11. Dr. Jo-Anne Fiske was aware that it was not appropriate to single out one Elder above another, and after the 1996 Honorary Doctorate was given to Mary John, was part of the large group that arranged for Sophie Thomas to be feted at Stoney Creek, as she justly deserves for all the work she has done, like Mary, to keep Carrier traditions strong, particularly regarding herbal medicines.
12. Ironically, at the luncheon in the Saik'uz Multiplex after Mary John's funeral on October 5, I was seated between a woman who worked at the hospital and had not had lunch with her in that setting, and a singer from the Louie Singers who has known Mary well for all his life. Mary was the bridge between these groups, as the Prince George Citizen notice of her death and the description of her funeral clearly state.

13. I found it bewildering to re-read in Diamond Jenness' account of the Carrier, that the Carrier woman prophet Nokskan came back to life after being dead for many days and said,

My shadow did not go to the city of the dead but to the sky-land, where it met Sa (the Sun) and Sa's son. Murder, theft, adultery, and swearing are displeasing to Sa, who bade me tie the hands of the offenders and purify them with a lash lest they go after death to an evil place. Those who led virtuous lives would go to Sa's home, 'a happy country where people neither work nor eat but idle away the days in song, or when inactivity becomes monotonous, ride around the country on horses.' (Jenness 1943, 550)

To me it is troubling that this prophet had internalized, perhaps even anticipated the Durieu system. I have since asked Mary if she had heard of this prophecy of Noksan and Mary said that she had not heard of this prophet or of what she said. Mary John does not approve of the Durieu system any more than Lizette. I had heard in one of the many previous visits to Mary, her say that the White people are Carrier come back. At the time I did not recall that Jenness reported that another Carrier woman prophet from Fraser Lake, Bopa, came to life after being dead for four days, saying that,

The dead become White men on the far side of a great sea, and that the Whites, who were then beginning to enter the country of the Carrier, were there own kinsmen returning to their old homes. (Jenness 1943, 550)

When I asked her recently, Mary said she had definitely heard about Bopa and her prophecies, although she said "She was way before my time." (Mary John October 27, 2002). Mary John has remained faithful in her practice of Catholic rites because her focus is on the positive aspects of that doctrine.

14. See Dara Culhane's 1998 book *The Pleasure of the Crown* (Burnaby, BC: Talonbooks) for a description of the concept of terra nullius, or empty land, with the implication of land being free for the taking, rather than land being that of specific First Nations. Culhane explains how that concept manifested in the Delgamuukw Land Claims court case, as in colonial thought before that epic case.
15. At the reception luncheon held at the Saik'uz Multiplex and adjacent pavilion tents set up to accommodate the huge crowd, following the service the Chief of the Sai'kuz First Nation Chief Allison Johnny, the Mayor of Vanderhoof Len Fox, Grand Chief Edward John of the Tl'azt'en Nation spoke, and Condolences were read from Iona Campagnolo, the Governor-General of B.C., who presented Mary

John her honorary doctorate at UNBC in 1995 in her capacity then as Chancellor of UNBC.

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