

Know Who You Are and Know Where You Come

by Debra Sparrow

For my grandfather, ShWienum (Edward Sparrow) born in 1898 in a Musqueam village at the mouth of the Fraser River. He died in 1998 at the age of 99 and one half years.

Driving along the shoreline
of what is now called the City of Vancouver,
my grandfather, ShWienum beside me,
and one or more of my three children
in the back seat, listening to him
 tell us the histories
of our great lands,
 the same histories
his grandparents told him
as they drove along
in horse and buggy,
 and the same histories
their grandparents told them,
walking along these shores
or in canoe.

300 years of stories
are still being passed on.
ShWienum can rest, knowing
as I have, as he did
what we share
as people of this land.

Blessed to have this time with him,
I will take with me into the future
the success and integrity
of our people.

I know who I am,
I know my history,
and I know where I come from.
My roots are planted firmly in the very soil
that my ancestors are buried in.

I am connected,
my children are connected,
and my grandchildren will be connected.

We will be here
another millennium
as we have been
for nine millennia past.

When asked of the First Nations people:
“Who said this land belonged to you?
There are no signs on a mountaintop.
It is not written anywhere.”

Anywhere you open the earth,
the evidence is there.
 It is written
 in the earth.

From *A Hurricane in the Basement and Other Vancouver Experiences* (Portrait V2K, The City of Vancouver Millenium Project, Vancouver, 2000.)