

Module #1: Kwes' Kwestin Introduction

*ʔa: si:yém siyéyeʔ, ʔəy tə nə šx^wq^weləwən
k^wəns ʔi k^wəcnalə. ʔe:nθə k^wəsk^westən, kin
jawge tsun ta na sk^wix James Kew.*

*Noble Born and kin, it is a wonderful feeling
to see you here, I am Kwes' Kwestin, in King
George's language my name is James Kew.*



Along with Nolan Charles and Terrance Sparrow I am a member of Musqueam Nation. We were introduced to [Southwest Contracting \(SWC\)](#) through mutual friends, and this friendship led us to enter into a joint venture (JV) with SWC to form [siyeye Contracting](#). This JV prompted our shared contribution, from the Musqueam partners and Southwest Contracting to the British Columbia Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan; the [siyeye Contracting Reconciliation Action Plan \(RAP\)](#).

Guiding our RAP are the following documents: [The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), the Indian Residential School [Truth and Reconciliation Commission \(TRC\) Calls to Action](#), Business and Reconciliation Call to Action # 92, the British Columbia [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#), the [BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan](#), and the [Canadian Parliament's United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#). We also considered the Indigenous Peoples Economic and Trade Cooperation Agreement – recently signed this year by Canada, and the example of Reconciliation Australia's Reconciliation Action Plan. Call to Action 92 iii of the Indian Residential School Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action asks responsible corporate citizens to:

“Provide education for management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations....”

This is the first of twelve modules developed to educate management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of [residential schools](#), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations. It is our sincere belief that Reconciliation is not achieved through government legislation; but, instead is achieved through the thoughts and actions of each individual. Through sharing my understanding of reconciliation I hope to create a bond of trust between our peoples.

It is an ancient Musqueam protocol that when we introduce ourselves, we do so through our family tree. The context of a family tree provides a history to my identity, which may

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provide you with a personal connection to my family, or to a cultural archetype you recognize. This is appropriate as Reconciliation is a personal journey. My father was a white settler, and my mother was the daughter of a Shaman. My father became a professor of Anthropology, Head of the UBC Department of Anthropology and Sociology, and Head of the UBC Museum of Anthropology. My mother carried ancient Musqueam laws. My grandfather decreed that I should carry one of his ancestral names, with the obligation to be a bridge between my parents' worlds. My uncles chose me to carry our law.



MY FATHER

My father was [John Edward Michael Kew](#), he was born in [Quesnel](#), a town in the Cariboo district of British Columbia, to James Edward and Sarah Beatrice Kew. My Grandfather James was born into a United Empire Loyalist family who fled the rebellious colonies of the American Revolution to take up farming at [Beamsville](#), Ontario, in the Niagara peninsula. At 14 he lied about his age and joined the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles, which in 1915 became the 8th Canadian Rifles. His unit received battle honours for 17 different engagements: most

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notably the [Somme](#) 1916, [Vimy](#) Ridge 1917 and the battle of [Passchendaele](#) (Third Battle of Ypres) 1917. The unit started out with 577 enlisted men and 28 officers, 605 men in all; only 32 of these original men returned to Canada.

My Grandmother Sarah was born to a Norwegian father and an English mother in Quesnel. My Great-grandfather Johan had been destined for the priesthood. At the age of 16 he was sent from Ulsteinvik Norway to join a monastery in Oslo. He carried the fee his parents were to pay the monastery in cash. When Johan got to Oslo, he immediately used the Monastery's fee to buy a one-way ticket on a steamboat to Canada instead and wrote a farewell letter to his parents. In Canada he established a fur trading post in the Arctic, built steamboats on the Fraser River that plied between Prince George and Quesnel, developed a placer mine, and finally settled down to build and run the Cariboo Hotel in Quesnel, where he married Mary Barlow.

My Grandfather Kew was a taciturn man, reclusive and grim. Today we would say he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. After the war he went to the Cariboo to placer mine for gold, his first home there was a cabin in [Barkerville](#). After he married he became a fisheries officer, a job that allowed him to work in and enjoy the solitude of the mountain forests.

With my grandfathers' prolonged absences in the bush, to work or hunt, my Great-grandfather became a mentor and role model to my father. The old man kept fur trading as a side hustle and worked out of a small shed for his furs and odds and ends. When Dad's uncle joined the merchant marine as a teenager he put his childhood toys in a box in the shed, soccer ball, baseball, skates, etc. Somewhere along the way the old man tossed a nickel plated 45 caliber revolver into the box and forgot. One day Dad was bored and bugging his grandpa, who got rid of him by saying "Why don't you pick a toy from your uncles' box and go play outside". Of course, as any bold ten-year-old would, Dad took the handgun and tiptoed away. He managed to keep this a secret from everyone for a year by playing far from home, before trading the gun to another kid for something or other. Eventually his father began to take him bear hunting and was amazed at how well Dad could break down and reassemble a gun.

Dad remembered a time when his parents were away one Dominion Day, and he was left in the care of his mothers' widowed cousin. At that time there were bare knuckle boxing matches on festive occasions, and Dad remembered watching the fights, and then throwing change into the ring after each bout, which was how the boxers were paid. After a morning watching the fights his aunt took him to the track for the afternoon. Grampa built a cabin on Bowron Lake, and Dad's summers were spent canoeing, fishing, and chopping wood. He grew up in a Tom Sawyer/Huck Finn world.

When he came of age and it was time to leave the one room schoolhouse he had attended all his life, he got a job, saved up, and went to UBC. He told me that at the time, you could become anything you wanted with a "C" average. When he went to UBC at first he thought he would become a biologist. That notion changed when he met my mother, who was working in the UBC library. In 2021 he passed way at the age of eighty-nine.

MY MOTHER

Watstenaat, Dellavina Francis Charles, was born at Musqueam to Andrew and Christine Charles. My Grandfather Andrew also carried two Indigenous names: Swalaampthet and Kwes' Kwestin, my grandmother carried the name   l  l  mat. Grandpa was born into a noble family from the ruling class, who are known in our language as siem.

His Father and Grandfather and so on before him ad infinitum were Shaman and Warriors. His Great-great-great grandfather was qiy  plen  x^w, ancestor to [Musqueam](#), [Squamish](#) and [Tseil-Wututh](#) peoples. The name qiy  plen  x^w comes from Nanoose Bay on Vancouver Island and was brought to Musqueam through marriage, and he was our last great law giver.

My great-grandmother on Grandpas' side, Watstenaat, came from [Quamichan](#) on Vancouver Island. For a while my Great-grandparents lived at Quamichan. While they were there, before they moved back to Musqueam, my grandfather was given the name Kwes' Kwestin, so that even though he came from a ruling Musqueam family he would always remember his mothers' noble family and ancestors. Later in life my grandfather achieved great renown as a Shaman, and consequently was given the prestigious ancestral name Swalaampthet, which he carried as his senior name.

My grandmother   l  l  mat came from a Musqueam mother Mary, and a Scottish ship captain, Andrew Drysdale. When the ship captain disappeared to return to Scotland Mary married   mcewiyet  n, James James a Musqueam man, who raised my grandmother.   mcewiyet  n made what was at the time a considerable income by log salvage on the Fraser River. He would use a rowboat to assemble a large raft of logs, build a tent frame on the logs where his family would live, and using the tide he would row the logs up to the mill at New Westminster.

That was how my grandmother grew up. As a young teenager she had a crush on grandpa. She remembered seeing him at a ceremony on Vancouver Island when he was a teenager just a couple of years older than her, joking with and being honoured as an equal by noblemen of high birth. It was a love match, he noticed how smitten she was, and a few years later they married.

My mother was the fifth of nine children, five of whom reached adulthood. As required by the Indian Act, and without her parents' consent, my mother was taken and placed in [residential school at Port Alberni](#) when she was six years old. In the summer the children would be reunited with their families, and the whole family would join a fleet of small fishing boats that travelled up and down the coast. Those summer days were the happiest of her childhood memories.

In residential school she was not allowed to speak with her brothers at the same school. She made lifelong friends amongst the girls. Yet overall, it was a time of psychological and physical torment. She spoke of the pedophile priests who would tiptoe through the girls' dormitory at night to select their victims. She persisted in speaking her language, and openly vowed revenge against the school. She was deemed incorrigible and sent to the [Coqualeetza Indian Experimental Hospital](#) where she was placed in a control group for bio-

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medical experiments. All the children in the control group were the children of hereditary Chiefs and Shaman.

After leaving Residential School she took a job as a librarian at UBC. She met Dad when he was checking out textbooks. After he met her he began checking out poetry books. They married within a year of meeting one another.

During her lifetime she was an accomplished person in both her Canadian and Indigenous life. She became a journalist and an author. She is still remembered today for preserving sacred songs and rituals of our ancestors. She passed away from the effects of the medical experiments at fifty-two.

KWES' KWESTIN

I was born in [Victoria](#) BC in 1957 when my father was working at the [Royal British Columbia Museum](#). I have an older brother, Nathan, who carries the name Swalaampthet. From Victoria we moved to [Cumberland House Saskatchewan](#), founded in 1774 by the Hudson Bay Company, where Dad worked for the provincial government. There were no roads in at that time, you came in by boat if the river wasn't frozen, or by a bombardier snow bus in the winter. From there we moved to Saskatoon as Dad continued to save for university. We moved to Seattle where he completed his PHD in Anthropology, and then in 1967 we moved back to Vancouver, which I thought of as Musqueam.

While we were living in Seattle my Musqueam grandfather became sick and passed away. Before he died he decreed that my brother and I would carry his names, as my mother was the child who most diligently followed our Musqueam law. After he passed away it took the family a while to prepare for the naming, and when I was six years old the family held a ceremony where I received his name Kwes' Kwestin. I received obligations with this name; to remember our Oral Histories and to be a bridge between my parents' worlds.

Although I grew up off reserve, I lived in my Musqueam culture. My father had no problem with this. He had been raised in the northern forests, where learning the signs of nature was an expected and reasonable philosophy. When we lived in Cumberland House my father would go on winter hunts with our Cree neighbours, traveling miles through the Northern boreal forests by dogsled. One day he returned with stories of the Spirit Lights that followed their expedition. They would follow at a distance, and when they set camp for the night, so would the Spirit Lights. Nobody mentioned them until he asked one of his friends what was happening, and he was told, 'They are the spirits of our ancestors who travel with us watching over us'.

When we lived in Seattle we were always driving up to Musqueam, to visit and for ceremonies. I remember as a youngster marveling at the bird song at Musqueam. My mother began to teach me how to interpret the meaning of their songs. She had learned from her mother how to use bird songs as indicators of environmental health, and how to use avian behaviour as an environmental "set point" that could be used to evaluate human health, and she began to teach me this family tradition; however, when grandpa decreed that I was to be a bridge between the worlds of my parents, she stopped the lessons that

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would draw me into Musqueam culture past the point of no return, and made sure that I lived in a place where I could access both the worlds.

In the Musqueam language there is no word for cousin. I call my cousins my brothers and sisters. My parents' cousins are my aunts and uncles. My grandparents' cousins are my grandparents. In elementary school one of my little Anglo friends asked me how many times my parents had been divorced, as I had a seemingly endless supply of grandparents.

As I grew up, and as Dad's career progressed, I would sometimes sit in on his lectures. With the questioning nature of teenage years, I found it difficult to reconcile the cultural gap between Indigenous and industrial life philosophies. I asked my mother how she made sense of the world married to an Anthropologist while being the daughter of a Shaman. She laughed with joy and replied, "They are different words for the same thing. If your grandfather had been a whiteman they would have said that he was a psychologist."

By the time my mother passed away I had saved enough money for several years of post-secondary education. Yet university became more and more alien to me. I dropped out.

Interestingly enough, it was after I had rejected University, the colonial metric for identity, that our uncles came to Nolan and I and said, "You have come to your senses, we think you might be able to carry our law, do you want to try?" They explained that in the old days there was no age of majority. Turning 19 didn't entitle you to anything. Now we carry our extended family law.

It was coming to your senses that would earn you a place in the councils of your family. Coming to your senses means that you understood the balance of the world, natural and human. Not everyone comes to their senses. With the maturation of reasoning and intellect when one comes to their senses there also come obligations to protect and lead those who are dependants, those who never come to their senses, children, and our revered Elders.

In this journey of spiritual growth my uncles had blessed me with I assumed sacred obligation, many of which I may not share with you, as the cultural genocide practiced by Canada has left a lasting prohibition on sharing some of our most sacred laws. I can say that the sacred laws and rituals that became a part of my life are the direct continuation of our ancestral law from the deep past, carried in an unbroken family chain for many thousands of years.

As a child I had learned that we are reincarnated endlessly, and that our Oral histories are how we remember our past lives. Some of these Oral Histories will be shared with you in coming Cultural Modules. We share these Oral Histories to explain who we are, not to tell you how to live. We hope that our cultural values will connect with yours, and that we may together understand in a better way that cultures can share values expressed by "different words for the same thing."

My wife Marion and I have been together for more than half our lives. We were never blessed with children; but, with the Musqueam extended family system, we have many

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nieces, nephews, and grandchildren. We live on the reserve a hundred feet from the beach where I learned to duck hunt.

I have worked as warehouse clerk, an archaeologist, a janitor, maintenance man, an independent artist, and as a studio artist, an employment counselor, job coach, Band housing manager for both rental and new construction, and Protocol Officer.

I have owned several companies and have several current corporate business interests. I have been chairman and president of band owned companies. I have represented Musqueam in international business. I have been elected to two terms on [Musqueam Indian Band Council](#), and in 2018 I was appointed by the British Columbia Ministry of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation to the Indigenous Business and Investment Council, which advises the Minister on select issues.

As a speaker and as an elder representing Musqueam I have addressed The Canadian National Institute on Governance, the Canadian Judicial Institute, Continuing Legal Education BC, the Crown Prosecutors of British Columbia, and the UBC Peter A. Allard School of Law. Although I am not a lawyer I have had a speech published in the Advocate, the Vancouver Bar Association Journal. Over a period of more than twenty years I have represented Musqueam at hundreds of speaking engagements. Along with Nolan Charles I was a Band Councilor when we entered negotiations under the British Columbia Treaty Process almost thirty years ago.

In our language Nolan Charles is my older brother. His father was an elected chief of Musqueam, and older brother to my mother. He asked me to join him in the siyeye venture. Our kinsman Terry Sparrow, our nephew in our language, he joined us when we asked him to join us. Terry's Great-grandfather was a teacher to Nolan and I in our youth.

We thank you for your interest in our culture, language, family, and nation.

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RESOURCES

[Southwest Contracting \(SWC\)](#)

[siyeye Contracting](#)

[siyeye Contracting Reconciliation Action Plan \(RAP\)](#)

[The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)

[Truth and Reconciliation Commission \(TRC\) Calls to Action](#)

[BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#)

[BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan](#)

[Canadian Parliament's United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#)

[Residential Schools](#)

[John Edward Michael Kew](#)

[Musqueam](#)

[Squamish](#)

[Tsleil-Wututh](#)

[Quamichan](#)

[Royal British Columbia Museum](#)

[Musqueam Indian Band Council](#)