Frank's Landing

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Summary: Highlights a visit to Frank's Landing in Washington and learning of the plight of the Indians as they fought for their fishing rights. Many students from local universities created a living community that taught the ways of survival living amidst their demonstrations. Maiselle Bridges' narrates the story and living situation of the educational community and the other hardships the Indian reservations are experiencing. (DDLW #900).

Frank's Landing on the Nisqually River, which empties into Puget Sound between Tacoma and Olympia in the State of Washington, is not the place it was when Robert Casey, our Northwest Coast correspondent who is a seaman working on the Alaska run, wrote about it in the December *CW*. The melting of tremendous snows in the mountains led to such a rising of the rivers that two of the six acres belonging to William Frank (for whom Frank's Landing was named) have been washed away, and the landing itself has collapsed into the river. We sat there all one Sunday afternoon – Maiselle Bridges, who is William Frank's granddaughter, Tony Casey (Bob's Japanese wife) and I – and talked about the situation of the Indians in general and of the winter just passed when as many as a hundred and fifty sympathizers with the Indians' struggle to retain their treaty-guaranteed fishing rights were students at what could be called a unique school.

William Frank is a ninety-year-old Indian who has for the last six summers performed a unique service for students of Indian life. He has put on tape, with the assistance of a Professor Metcalfe of the University of Washington, the history of the Puget Sound Indians and their language, which is Salesh, not a written language as yet, although some professors are trying to transcribe it. Although Frank has complained to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Conservation Army, he has received no compensation for his loss, on the grounds that it was not productive land, there was no truck farming or dairy operated on the land.

I had been reading of the long struggle of the Coast Indians to maintain their way of life and fishing rights against the government, ever since the days of Isaac Stevens, who made the first treaties in 1850. Stevens had tried to herd the Indians on to reservations in order to turn them into homestead farmers, "economically independent," and the government has been equally unrealistic ever since in its plans for them. ****

The story of the school is this. The struggle over the fishing rights had been going on for a long time, marked by frequent clashes with game wardens, which were becoming ever more serious. The publicity attendant on this struggle, in which Maiselle Bridges' two daughters were jailed, along with other members of the Indian community, evoked the support of students, especially after a Rock Festival was held. Many of the students, young teachers, some members of the Students for a Democratic Society, and one member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (Martin Luther King's group) who was accused of being a Black Panther by local residents, came to the aid of the Indian fishermen demonstrators and stayed for months.

At Frank's Landing they put up the framework for nine bunk houses, which they covered with heavy plastic, and there they lived from September to May. One bunk house was a tree house, built on the stumps of two gigantic cedars as a foundation, and nestling between the branches of other trees which had grown up around and in the stumps. They put stoves inside these plastic houses and used driftwood to heat them. I would not have believed that this could be done if I had not seen a similar house built as a studio by Joe O'Connell, the Minnesota artist who gave us our stone statue of St. Joseph which stands in the window at our First Street house. He worked in it all winter and kept it warm by a great pot-bellied stove. The students carried all their water for cooking and washing and used outhouses, –all a part of their education in survival living.

It was a spontaneous coeducational school which sprang up and was at first looked upon with some misgiving by the Indians themselves.

"Our neighbors," Mrs. Bridges said, "indicated that they had been willing to stand by us in our struggle until we accepted the help of hippies, Black Panthers and S.D.S. But we soon learned from these young ones, just as they learned from us.

"They participated in the almost daily demonstrations and clashes with the authorities and they were learning all the time about the Indian. Sometimes there were as many as three hundred, sometimes the numbers went down to seventy-five. It was snowy this winter, the hardest winter we ever had here on the coast. The snow lay on the ground a long time. But the kids stayed.

"To insulate the floors of the houses we put down plastic, then straw, then more plastic and rugs over that. We got rugs in every thrift shop in Olympia and Tacoma and people brought us their old rugs. The fishing every day supported the camp. Groups went to Seattle, Tacoma and Olympia with the fish and sold them for fifty cents a pound. They had deer meat (we still have some in the deep freeze) and the boys learned how to skin the deer and cut up the meat. They missed fresh vegetables and fruit, but people made contributions. Some of the students picked cucumbers later, some went to the public markets and the bakeries. One girls' father, who had a chicken ranch, sent half a dozen chickens for a stew. They gathered wood at Fort Lewis across the river for the fires. Students from Reed College, from Bellingham Western College and from the

University of Washington learned how to mend the nets, how to hunt, and skin deer, how to cut up meat and fish to be dried and smoked, how to keep the first in the smoke house going."

All the while harassment was going on. Young gangs from the neighboring suburbs of Olympia came out and slashed the plastic of the houses.

"Then one night when fog was heavy in the valley they tear gassed the place, which laid heavy on us till the morning. There were a hundred and twenty people in the camp at the time, some of them families with children. Some of the young Indians in Fort Lewis across the river said that even on the military reservation it burnt their eyes and skin."

All this struggle did bring a Federal hearing in Portland in April which affirmed the fishing rights of the Indian, but also the State's regulatory rights and stated that the present regulations were not in conformity with the treaty and must be changed to allow the Indians to catch an equitable share of the fish at their usual places of fishing. Certainly Franks' Landing would seem to be one of their accustomed places of fishing. But the Judge went on to say that he would not impose on the State a ruling as to what that equitable share was. There had been many court cases before and at this one there were four lawyers for the Indians, four for the Federal Government and 14 for individuals. Altogether there had been 67 lawyers representing six separate client groups, and there had been a multitude of recommended remedies.

We talked of many things that afternoon, Maiselle, Toni and I: of the virtues of plants as food and medicine; the lost arts of the Indian such as the carving of totem poles and canoe making (they no longer have the cedar). She showed me a basket which could hold water, made of split cedar roots and natural grass and the rattles made from deer hoof hollowed out.

She spoke of the plight of the children, who up to sixth grade were above the average and then declined in their grades. The books they study in the public schools show the Indian as a savage, so that they become ashamed of their culture. "Thank God they had a grandfather who knew the legends, the songs of the Indian people and taught them how good creation was, taught them a love for everything, and how important even a blade of grass is.

"Suicide used to be almost unheard of among the Indian people," she went on, "and now there is one hundred percent more than among other youth. These suicides are among the young ones, from nine to eighteen years old.

"This summer we will start out and visit Indian reservations all over the country on our way East to a gathering on the Seneca Reservation from August 16th to the 24th. It will be the biggest which has ever taken place. All tribes will be there, their representatives. They will come from South America, from Central America, from Canada, as well as the United States."

Salmon bakes for fund-raising are being held now, for expenses of this caravan to go cross-country. From their area there are the Muckleshoot, Puyallup and

Nisqually Indians of Puget Sound.

I talked also that afternoon to Hank Adams, an Indian brought up on the Quinault Reservation on the Pacific, whose headquarters are in Lacy, a small town nearby. There are 23 recognized Indian reservations in Washington, ranging in size from the sprawling Yakima with 1,134,830 acres to the Puyallup near Tacoma with only 33 acres. Hank is a veteran of the Korean War and has had two years at the University of Washington. He is the editor of the **Renegade,** which is published by the Survival of the American Indian Association. P.O. Box 719, Tacoma, Washington.

The subscription rate is five dollars a year and from the first issue of the paper which I received from him, I would certainly say it is worth subscribing to, and I hope many of our readers, teachers and students will take it. They need the money. They are, as also the blacks and the Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, "the insulted and injured" of our country. If you can send more, do so and help them.