

# Ndee distl'is bit' ahts skak tl'a habanilh yighnee ndee 'it'en hi yu dadelwkh wane Lake Babine habeh' ilhyeigh.



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## NIWH HIZSKAK SO' C'OH DIK HIBIZ NILH YIG *Teeyeigh nee ha bee 'it'en*

## RAISING OUR CHILDREN WELL *Rites of Passage for our Youth*

"And being embraced and taught that as a young child going into puberty, to embrace it as something beautiful and powerful. That needs to be taught and it's theirs. It's theirs and what they do with it, that's totally up to them. But learning that and embracing the changes of their body and not only that, but where they come from."

- Marilyn Alec



### 'Ts'et eiyl ha lhek wa ha beg hondiyl wa eets nee baleeh' Habeenee tl'a haba yisdiyl hilhtis lhegh wine zey dzeen wah eets ha degh tl'a dinee haba zu' nawes yeh' keyikh t'seygh nee hontiyh'

The transition from girlhood to womanhood is considered to be a great honor and is a joyful and sacred part of Carrier life. This transformation is marked by a girl's first menstruation, or "moon time". Traditional practices that observe a girl's moon time teach us about their important social roles in the community and their respected place in the balhats system.

A girl's moon time is celebrated with a rite of passage ceremony, marking her power in having the ability to create life. A rite of passage ceremony teaches girls specific responsibilities, which are connected to the powers and restrictions of a woman's life. At the outset of menstruation, a girl is placed into seclusion (sometimes known as a menstrual hut) for a length of time, sometimes longer than a month. Seclusion is important because a girl's moon time is so sacred and powerful that it has the potential to affect others, including men.

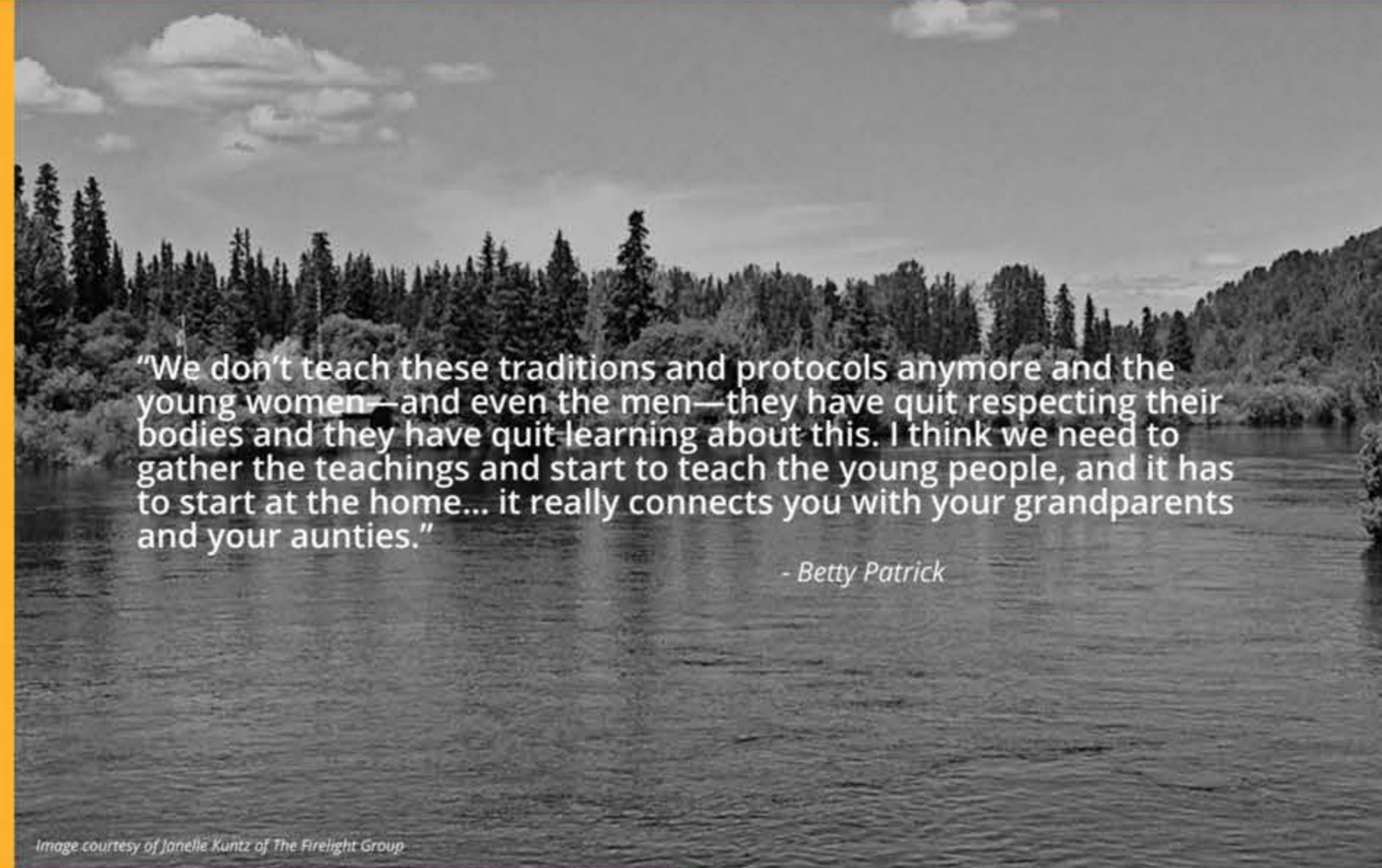
During seclusion, a series of protocols are followed to ensure everyone's safety and the girl's healthy transition into womanhood. While protocols may vary for individual families, some general rules include:

- A girl's paternal female relative is hired to support her through the rite of passage (i.e. buying her food, providing her dishes, utensils, blankets, and combing her hair);
- Seclusion is a time to learn important work and responsibilities from elders, such as beading and knitting;
- Girls should avoid looking outdoors or her eyesight may be affected;
- Girls in seclusion should not run around outside, and her head should be covered if she goes outdoors;
- Girls should avoid eating fresh meat, fish and berries, and eat only dried foods for a year following her menses;
- Girls on their moon time should not look at, or speak directly to men or sickly people, as her power may unknowingly affect them; and
- Girls on their moon time should avoid coming into contact with hunting and fishing equipment, as her power has the potential to bring bad luck to the hunter/fisher.

### Ndee meiyh hinlee 'iyh yu dilhekh tah wah Balhats 't'en weh hiyu dilkekh

At the end of a girl's rite of passage, a balhats is held to complete her transition from girlhood to womanhood. A balhats reinforces the traditional teachings of celebrating menstruation and women's highly regarded status in the community.

Another important aspect of a girl's moon time is self-care. This includes using appropriate hygiene products during menstruation, such as pads or tampons. These products can be purchased in pharmacies and grocery stores. If you need help accessing feminine hygiene products, speak with a parent, teacher or community health care worker.



"We don't teach these traditions and protocols anymore and the young women—and even the men—they have quit respecting their bodies and they have quit learning about this. I think we need to gather the teachings and start to teach the young people, and it has to start at the home... it really connects you with your grandparents and your aunts."

- Betty Patrick

Image courtesy of Janelle Kuntz of The Firelight Group



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### C'eehl 'eennee c'agh ka at'dikh 'u 'a dilekheehm nee weh hada yistiyh hiy 'e cogh lee wah bohdiilh ekh

Puberty for boys is a gradual period of transition from childhood to adulthood, which is often marked by a change in their voice. In addition to learning about hunting, fishing and survival skills, transitioning through puberty requires boys to pay close attention to self-care practices. These practices also teach traditional values about respecting their own and others' bodies. Important elements of self-care for boys during puberty includes:

- Hygiene (regular washing and cleaning);
- Healthy diet and eating habits (increased consumption of fresh foods, decreased consumption of sugar and processed foods); and
- Physical exercise (i.e. hunting, fishing, recreational sports and labour).

### T'eht ts'et meiyh halh ekh t'ah babegh wa deez tiyh yinka dinee tseen lee so' ts'ee yewh alh newh beg wa deez tiyh

It is also important for boys to have knowledge about the changes girls experience during puberty, particularly the power of menstruation and their ability to create life. A girl's moon time is sacred and is a celebrated part of Carrier life; it must be respected by the whole community, including boys and men.

"We used to sit with elders and live off their words. In today's world, we need to sit with them and talk with the kids. They will hear it from their hearts."

- Jimmy Williams

## RESOURCES

**Native Youth Sexual Health Network**  
[www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/](http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/)

**Aboriginal Sexual Health**  
[www.aboriginalsexualhealth.ca/](http://www.aboriginalsexualhealth.ca/)

**Lake Babine Health & Wellness Centre (Burns Lake, BC)**  
250-692-3558

**Options for Sexual Health Clinic (Smithers, BC)**  
250-847-6400

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research focuses on the rites of passage that build strength in young men and women as they transition from children to young adults. The aim of this brochure is to provide education and training to support and respect traditional leadership, child rearing, and care-giving roles within Lake Babine.

We acknowledge the elders, community members and education staff who shared their stories and contributed to this project.

Funding for this project was obtained through the Government of British Columbia's "Violence Free BC" strategy.



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