

The End of the World – Have We Seen It All Before?

Local First Nations offer their take.

By Dee Raffo

One way to look at the future is to look back at the past. Local First Nations have their own mythology surrounding our creation, but what of our demise? According to Chief Ian Campbell, the Squamish Nation's Negotiator and Cultural Ambassador, when it comes to the end of the world they've seen it all before...

THE BIG BANG

"When the world lay in darkness," Campbell says, "it was the Raven spirit who coerced the Seagull spirit to open the sacred daylight box; this sparked the breath of life, which spread across the world – our version of the Big Bang."

Humans were at first in harmony with creation, following the natural laws, but then, Campbell says, the human impediment got in the way and people split up into different clans and spread themselves across the world.

"Over time people became greedy, exhausting natural resources like the sea lion

population," he explains, then points out how this action has repeated itself in more modern history with the fur trade, salmon farming, forestry, and now oil, gas and mining.

THE FIRST RETRIBUTION

"Transformers were sent down from the spirit world to reward the humans who still lived in accordance to the natural laws," Campbell continues, "and to punish those who didn't. Some people they turned into animals, like the wolf and bear, and others into immortal beings such as the Tantalus Mountain Range."

"By going into a 'trance' state, people could communicate with the spirits, learning important connections to the land and how to live in harmony with it. As First Nations we look at the spiritual, emotional, and the physical wellbeing of the land. Our view is circular in that we are part of creation, and do not sit at the top of a hierarchical structure. This is what the modern Western management model fails to understand."

"As the greed progressed and the world teetered near imbalance, once again it retaliated in apocalyptic style. A great flood pushed the Squamish people high into the mountains, to the Garibaldi Range and Icecap Peak."

"When the water receded our people realized they couldn't go back to the way they were before the flood, they could only draw forward their traditional knowledge and apply it in a modern context. This is the story of humanity: in the face of adversity, after shock and trauma, we can only adapt and move forward. We are facing another imbalance today with the economic recession, global warming, and mass industrial exploitation. We have built an unsustainable world, one that will inevitably crash, and we can only hope that some will survive and learn from this."

THE WHITE MAN

In 1791 the world suffered again, this time the catalyst was white Europeans arriving to the land and carrying with them deadly smallpox.

"This represented a modern flood of our territory," Campbell explains. "To us that's not a new story, it's one that's told over and over, the story of change and transformation. Today, indigenous people from around the world are adding their voices to a joint belief that the Western World is failing. Just like everything, it has a time period, it has a heyday, and then it wanes."

"In a matter of decades we have seen the depletion of our salmon and shellfish, mountain goat, and elk. All the animals we used to have strong relationships with have been reduced, just as the Squamish Nation has. The Western management model is profit-driven with no spiritual connection to the land. No homage is paid and understanding is lost."

It was American science fiction writer Robert Heinlein who said, "A generation which ignores its history has no past and no future." Perhaps even those words have been said many times before... ■

Chief Ian Campbell. DARRYL DYCK/CANADIAN PRESS PHOTO.