

# Richard Lee's contributions to anthropological understanding of the really 'Real' western Subarctic *Dineh* culture in the 20th century

---

and

## The 'Real' Richard Lee and me

### Norman Alexander Easton

Yukon College, Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada  
northeaston@gmail.com

### Keywords

Northern Athapaskan, contemporary hunter-gatherer society, Yukon Alaska borderland

### Abstract

This paper presents a personal appreciation of the contribution that Richard Lee has made to my understanding of western Subarctic *Dineh* societies. It will range from understanding the introduction of locks to village communities and the real existence of a 'real world' regardless of the post-modern unreal sensibility of consumer capitalism, to the importance of community engagement and the moral positioning of the anthropologist. It will also consider the continuing existence of hunting-gathering lives in the western Subarctic, regardless of the 'other's' opinion of what they might think they are because young people dance to hip-hop music, on which it will also comment.

Richard Lee has influenced every stage of my anthropological career, from my first year anthropology course in college (who of my generation was not weaned on his accounts of living with the San people and the 'Man the Hunter Symposium?') through to my confident self-identity as an anthropologist today. In this essay I want to share some of that influence and discuss the work that he has inspired me to engage in.

Most readers will not associate Richard Borshay Lee (RBL) with the Subarctic, but as one who has worked for over twenty years now in the western Subarctic of Yukon and Alaska with the *Dineh*, I can tell you that he has indeed made a significant contribution to our anthropological understanding of these humans of the boreal forest. 'How so?' you may ask. This is the story of Richard's contribution to my understanding of the really 'real' western subarctic *Dineh* in the twenty-first century and the really 'real' Richard Lee and me. On the occasion of his retirement, I want to celebrate and situate his work within my own, so this essay is purposefully elliptical; I begin by recalling several critical instances of Richard Lee's influence on my own intellectual development,

then draw my focus tighter on life among the *Dineh* of the Yukon-Alaska borderlands in order to demonstrate the continuing vitality of *Dineh* hunter-gatherer culture in this region.

Besides the required Holt-Rhinehart text on the San (Lee 1979), I suppose it was Richard's essay, *Is there a Foraging Mode of Production?* (Lee 1981) which most heavily influenced me as an undergraduate; it later became one of the central paradigms for organising my Master's thesis data (Easton 1985a). As a result Richard invited me to present a *praesis* of my thesis to a symposium on primitive communism held at the University of Toronto in 1985 (Easton 1985b).

My recollection is that the symposium was held in what was once an anatomy hall – in any event it was round, and for my part, as I looked to the seated luminaries of the day gathered about me as I prepared to offer my paltry ideas for their critical reaction, I certainly felt like a corpse about to be disembowelled. 'What am I doing here?', I thought. 'What could I possibly have to say to these assembled august individuals that could hold their attention or interest their intellect?'

I managed to stumble out the no-longer provocative title of my paper, and then to mangle another few sentences before I lost my voice to a dry panicked throat as parched as the Kalahari Desert in summer. I wanted to die, or at least return to the womb and live my life over again without this moment of hubris.

In the midst of these paralysing thoughts, a hand came to my shoulder, shocking me back to the real. I followed the hand down the arm to the face of Richard Lee, a not mocking, but certainly impish smile on his face, a glass of ice water in his other hand which he handed me, along with the whispered words, 'Drink this, breathe deep, read your paper. It is a good paper and people will like it.'

And I did. And they did. And I learned something very important that day about the character of Richard Borshay Lee and becoming an anthropologist.

The next year I moved to Canada's Yukon Territory, just to the right of Alaska, geographically, though not politically. A place which visitors often comment is 'a long way from anywhere', they are surprised to find the vibrant little Yukon College community there, 'right in the middle of nowhere'. Of course, parochial residents such as I and others, prefer to see us as being

in the middle of somewhere, but it is admittedly a somewhere very different from the multiple anywheres most academics seem to inhabit during their teaching year. Indeed, I am told that this occupation of multiple anywheres is a hallmark feature of modernity, a fact clearly documented in paper after paper in our professional journals, so I have no reason to doubt its reality. Of interest to note in this regard however, is that in the north I live in we divide the world between our place and your place – 'north of 60' and 'outside', as in 'next week I am going "outside" to the CASCA (Canadian Anthropology Society) conference'. This may well reflect a naiveté uninformed by critical theory, but if it is a delusion, it is a pleasantly shared one here.

My anthropological work in Yukon has been in a variety of locations; Whitehorse, Selkirk, Pelly Crossing, Ross River, Dawson, but most of my work over the past 15 years has been in a series of communities occupied by speakers of several Athapaskan languages, the Upper Tanana language being the principal one, but including Northern Tutchone, Ahtna, Han Gwichin, as well as some English, French, and German, all of whom live along the Alaska highway on



**Figure 1** Clan members performing their 'blessing song' over the gifts they are about to distribute at a memorial potlatch. About 50 rifles, 600 blankets, and some 500 other gifts (beaded mocassins and gloves, cooking sets, buckets, fabrics, and scarves) were distributed at this potlatch, held at Tanacross, Alaska, July 2007. (Photo: NA Easton)



**Figure 2** Mrs Ada Galen splitting spruce root to make twine for the construction of birch-bark baskets; a completed bundle lies at her side. August, 2005. (Photo: NA Easton)

either side of the Yukon–Alaska border. It has included archaeological, ethno-historic, linguistic, geographical, palaeontological, and contemporary ethnographic documentation, generating mostly small reports distributed locally, of little interest to the ‘outside’, and bearing ‘no significant theoretical import’, as a response to a paper I recently submitted for publication noted gently in its rejection letter. I suppose this makes me an adherent of the Boasian four-field tradition in anthropology, I have even measured a few skeletons and living skulls in my day, which makes me something of an anachronism ‘outside’, but an extremely useful white man here.

In his critique of the ‘cult’ of Franz Boas, Leslie White (1966) maintained that Boasian anthropology was a-theoretical at best, and anti-theoretical at worst, a ‘mere’ documentary exercise of vanishing life-ways. Now I am an admirer of White’s development of the ecological and the reintroduction of Marxist theory in anthropology, but his critique of Boas’ apparent a-theoretical stance seems to me akin to suggesting that anti-matter doesn’t matter, or that there is yin but no yang, or that there can be successful dominance without submission – to put it plainly, I believe that to eschew theory IS a theoretical position and I stand proudly today at least, ostensibly a-theoretical.

This brings me to a second important lesson I have derived from Richard and his work, not that he is anti-theory, but in his insistence that there is a ‘real’ world which is amenable to empirical description and that this basic description lies beyond theory. It is data which may inform theory, but fundamentally it is a representation of our human perceptions at a particular point in time, representing a particular view that we hold on such events. This was most forcefully articulated in *Art, Science, or Politics: The Crisis in Hunter Gatherer Studies* (Lee 1992), an argument perhaps best summed up as ‘Crisis? What crisis?’. Engaging in empirical descriptions of social circumstances as we witness them as best we can is unarguably the bedrock of anthropology. What we make of that data, how we interpret those experiences, is indeed another matter, but surely we can agree that there is a real external world which we occupy, witness with all our frail senses, and can testify to? Certain things certainly happened – Andy Frank died, Robert Johnny killed a moose, Norman Easton was in Beaver Creek, and Levi-Strauss played the violin; now what we make of those empirical events is another matter entirely, but surely we can agree in our world at least, that these events occurred not in dreams but in fact.

Like many they knew, Richard and Harriet often put me up in their attic over the years as I passed briefly through Toronto in the 1980s and 1990s. Up there, in that cosy room, lay the observations and measurements of RBL’s fieldwork over the course of 40 odd years, much of it typed out on a typewriter in Africa at the end of the day or at other odd moments during fieldwork, mostly in triplicate or more using carbon paper, and cross-filed by subjects. (There was a time, young readers, when you could only eat a black-berry and laptops disappeared when you stood up!)

As a young anthropologist in the late 1980s and early 1990s, surrounded by this mass of observation, it was impossible not to be struck by the singular fact that if Richard Lee had dropped dead that night (God forbid), he had amassed a documentary archive of the REAL at a REAL moment in a REAL HISTORY, which he had REALLY lived. And though it was written down, I knew he remembered much because he spoke of it often, and perhaps in his telling he embellished this and forgot that, as we all do in the telling of our tales, but in this sense he was continuing a tradition of humanity which stretches back to the beginnings of communication in our species; the compul-



sion to tell the generation which follows what has happened before them, as best they can.

And I learned something else about Richard Borshay Lee and becoming an anthropologist at that moment. Richard's insistence that anthropology be a discipline of engagement with the world goes much beyond mere empirical description.

There are two places where humans can focus their thoughts: internally upon themselves, or externally upon the world about them. Indeed, this capacity may be as good a definition of what it means to be human as any. But there are important differences between self-reflection and self-indulgence, between self-understanding and selfishness, differences that my *Dineh* companions seem quite clear about, and equally perplexed at how often *Nooglee* (White People) seem to mix them up. This is not the case for Richard Lee, which makes him in the vernacular of my *Dineh* companions, 'a most unusual whiteman'.

*Nooglee*, in *Dineh* experience are all unusual. They seem to be human beings, they have language, a social order of some sort, and can make babies with the *Dineh*, but they so often behave like ill-brought up children, smug and self-centred, mean-spirited, often cruel, disrespectful of the generosity of a world which tries so hard to love them, and incapable of fulfilling the most basic of reciprocal obligations to their environment. Many *Dineh* read and respect the Christian Bible, but remain perplexed at the distance between the spiritual teachings of *Nooglee* and their behaviour. 'Indian people don't tell whites how to believe in God, how to pray,' Mrs Bessie John once lamented to me in her smokehouse. 'You guys shouldn't tell us that either. I respect Jesus, Mary, and the Ghost. Why can't whites respect us, our way?' It was a rhetorical question, for she shared with many others in the region a theory of explanation that I have heard numerous times over the years for *Nooglee* behaviour.

It is because *Nooglee* are not fully formed spiritually, due to a flaw in our history. 'Ts'awusha, you know him?', one lady asked me, invoking the name of their Culture Hero. 'He was the same guy as your Jesus, the same person. My great people say when he finished here, he kept going all 'round the world, fixing things up in Russia, India, and then there in Israel. That's where you guys killed him. You never let him fix your world there, you just killed him. That's why white men are so different and so sad.'

This epistemological position of the Upper Tanana



**Figure 3** Mrs Darlene Northway collecting berries, August 2005. Note the rifle she carries; like many female *Dineh* of the 20th century, Mrs Northway is a very competent hunter of moose, caribou, and small game. (Photo: NA Easton)

*Dineh* reveals one aspect of their continuing status as a hunter-gatherer culture. Richard's Osaka CHAGS address, *Hunter-Gatherer Studies and the Millenium: A Look Forward (And Back)* (Lee 1999), - itself derived from the introduction to *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Hunters and Gatherers* (Lee & Daly 1999), articulates that the continued existence of hunter-gatherers in the contemporary world is evident to us in a nexus of cultural beliefs and practices. They are people who hunt and who hold a complementary set of cultural beliefs which set them apart from, even while they are inextricably linked to, other cultural systems. He points out several distinctive attributes by which we can recognise a hunter-gatherer when we meet one, regardless of other material expressions of their articulation with the contemporary non-hunting-gathering cultures of the world.

In brief, these are:

- a subsistence preference towards hunting and gathering
- a social organisation characterised by band-sized populations
- egalitarian politics
- a mobile demographic
- a common-property regime
- an ethos dominated by the moral foundation of generalised reciprocity within a giving environment occupied by animated spirits which, generally, and genuinely, love us
- a spiritual / medico practice of shamanism in which humans are not merely at the hands of fate, but can play an active role in their destiny
- a belief in a higher deity, which anthropology calls the Trickster, who while divine is also 'deeply flawed and very human'.



**Figure 4** Mrs Darlene Northway instructing student interns in the correct way to prepare whitefish for smoking at They Guut fishcamp, August 2005. During the processing of the remaining fish, Mrs Northway will instruct them further in the names of fish parts, the proper way to respect these 'other than human persons', and specific 'women's' knowledge. Whitefish remain a staple of Upper Tanana subsistence. (Photo: NA Easton)

The distillation of these critical distinguishing characteristics of hunter-gatherer culture and society leads me to the conclusion that the *Dineh* in the far northwest of America that I have come to know, remain resolutely and consciously what they are; hunter-gatherers, despite their adaptations to the brave new neoliberal world at the end of history that so many of us seem to believe we all now occupy.

I have not enough space here to provide readers with extensive evidence to support this claim, and I can only ask that you trust me when I say that what I say is true. However, I will briefly provide support to my contention. If you wish you are welcome to visit us here and discover the truth of the matter for yourself.

Quantifiably and qualitatively, the subsistence question is easily put to rest. Hunting, and to the extent possible in this Subarctic environment gathering, provides the primary caloric input to most borderland *Dineh*'s lives today as it has in the past (Friend et al 2007)<sup>1</sup> although it is hunting of a different sort than that practised by non-*Dineh* along many different vectors. Let me note a few.

One is the social relationship between the hunted and the hunter, well documented by Subarctic ethnographers such as Harvey Feit (1978); Robert Brightman (1993); Paul Nadasdy (2007); Easton (in press), and others, which includes a deeply spiritual component expressed in dreams, prayers, and magic. To the extent that they are willing, *Dineh* elders can articulate this best to a *Nooglee* such as myself, but even adolescents today, as you read this, are receiving instructions from their maternal relations incul-

cating them to the *Dineh* way of killing animals.

Another is the clarity of their actions, they kill animals in order to live, and animals love *Dineh* so much that they allow themselves to be killed so that *Dineh* can live. As Nadasdy (in press) has noted,

Yukon First Nation people, like hunting peoples elsewhere, are often quite explicit in their rejection of the agricultural metaphors of wildlife management. At a wildlife management meeting I attended in 1995, for example, one member of *Kluane* First Nation objected to the use of the term harvest. *Kluane* people, she maintained, are hunters, not farmers: 'We don't 'harvest' animals; we kill them'.<sup>2</sup>

As I have argued elsewhere (Easton, in press), this has profound moral implications, a responsibility of reciprocity that distinguishes *Dineh* hunters from the most sensitive Anglo hunter or the most devout Christian seeking to fulfil their moral obligation of dominion over the beasts of the earth. They do not participate in sustained harvest, exploitation of renewable resources, or recreational trophy hunting, they are enmeshed in a web of responsibility and recompense. Hunting for the *Dineh* is not a way of life, it is life itself (see also Nadasdy 2003:63-119).

In 1994 I drove in from the bush camp I was living in to the village of Beaver Creek to visit my *Naa*, Mrs Bessie John, who had adopted me as my Upper *Tanana Naa* – mother (see Easton 2001a). I told her that I saw a porcupine waddling by the road on my way in. 'Did you kill it?' she asked eagerly. No, I admitted, it hadn't occurred to me to do so. Everyone had food, there was no need. She severely admonished me, asking 'Why you think that porcupine was waiting for you there?'. I have not since failed to kill porcupine when I see it and bring to my elders, even though it is the one country food that I personally wish never to eat again.

There is a saying up here: 'When I eat my own meat, it tastes funny, like rags, but when I eat someone else's, boy, that's good'. And it's not just the old men who say this, but the young men (and women, for both sexes hunt here) as well, and those who do not share are subject to intense public shame (Easton 2002b); in my years here I have seen no younger person hoard meat more than once.

Every year I bring some new *Nooglee* into this *Dineh* world, students mostly, and every year they are welcomed with a generosity of spirit that defies past *Dineh* experience of *Nooglee*. They are adopted by aunts, taught by uncles, told stories by grandpar-

ents, and everyone gives them food; whitefish, salmon, moosemeat, berries, tea, bannock, and time to feed their souls, and not one of them leaves this land unchanged for the better having discovered a new capacity to sharing.

When I lived here in the winter of 1997 I went into Whitehorse to pick up some lumber in order to build a few shelves in my modest cabin on the outskirts of Beaver Creek. When I returned I went to my cabin's cache to get some tools to set up my new shelves. Much to my annoyance I could not find my drill. I looked in my cabin, my truck, and odd places about the cabin but failed to find it. A day or so later, 'Rabbit' came by, as was his habit several times a week to sit with me, drink tea, and talk. I mentioned to him the loss of my drill 'Oh that,' he said, 'I have it in my truck'. 'What is it doing there?' I asked and, moreover, why hadn't he returned it. Completely nonplussed he replied, 'Well, what did you think happened to your drill? Of course someone took it for something. A drill doesn't walk off by itself. If you wanted it, you should have asked us for it'. Which, to my mind, is perhaps as good an example of contemporary levelling mechanism of riches as any.

Preparing to leave graduate school in Toronto to return to my borderlands field studies, Richard and I met to discuss methodology. As we reviewed interview outlines and survey profiles he noted that I should 'pay attention to locks'. Locks (let alone doors), it seems, did not exist in San-land when he started his own fieldwork in the 1960s, but began to appear in the 1980s. Richard suggested that their appearance within hunter-gatherer communities was a good proxy indicator of the breakdown of generalised reciprocity. So, on my return to Beaver Creek, I dutifully surveyed the village houses and found that while almost every house door had built-in locks as a matter of manufacturing design, without exception no-one used them, and a dozen or more of the villages' houses no longer had keys. In the summer of 2007 with the exception of the band administration office, the situation remained pretty much the same. The only instances that I have personally seen the use of house-door locks has been when they have been locked from the inside by house occupants for the purpose of ensuring privacy during sexual activity, otherwise relatives and friends are perfectly welcome to enter.

I will not display here the network of kinship which I have documented that ties *Dineh* from the Bering Sea to Great Slave Lake, suffice for me to say that it

exists, and for those that doubt I only ask you to come here, gain the trust required to be privy to this information and you will see for yourselves. Otherwise, I will not speak too openly of this thing here, since it necessitates speaking the names of the dead, which is offensive to *Dineh* sensibilities. When pressed however, such as by the State to demonstrate a stream of land occupancy or as 'eligible' to be recognised as a 'Canadian' Indian person under the Federal Indian Act, it is done, and even the State has been forced to recognise that *Dineh* living in Alaska and the Northwest Territories have not-so-deep kin ties in the Yukon. This mobile demographic persists today, as demonstrated by contemporary marriages of Beaver Creek residents to people in Burwash, Champagne, Ross River, and Dawson City, Yukon, and Northway, Tetlin, Tanacross, Mentasta, Copper City, and Fairbanks, Alaska. When *Dineh* meet socially for the first time invariably they seek to discover how they are related by together tracing their genealogies and residences until they discover their common ancestors.

Paradoxically, the building of the Alaska Highway, which brought considerable difficulties to all native communities along its path (see Cruikshank 1985; Easton 2005a:207-241) also provided a vector by which the regional identity of borderland *Dineh* was strengthened. There is not a day that goes by in which a family, or two or three, will not drive up or down the highway to visit with relatives on either side of the border. Along the way they will invariably stop at any number of places to walk with their children into the bush 'just to look around,' a practice during which adults share with children cultural knowledge and values of the bush, as well as maintain their own knowledge of the landscape and the comings and goings of its 'other-than-human' persons.

In my archaeological work I often employ younger *Dineh* men and women to work with me as surveyors and excavators. It is remarkable to note the ease and confidence most display in the bush. Doing survey work in particular, in which we will hike the native trails to camps and hunting lookouts, infuses them with a genuine and expansive happiness that they can hardly contain. This attitude is shared with their older relatives. When *Dineh* gather in the bush at fish camp, everyone's spirit is lifted, laughter abounds, historical tales are recounted, native language is spoken, and troubled souls salvaged. Individuals will regularly leave the village, sometimes in the middle of the night, in order to sleep in the bush where 'I just feel good



and get a real rest'. Such comfort derived from spending time in the bush reflects the *Dineh* perception of the bush as something that is 'giving' and 'loving' (Bird-David 1990).

Let me be clear here. *Dineh* are aware that there are many potential dangers in the bush and that the unaware or untrained can quickly succumb to accident or even death, but such misfortune is generally thought to result from the unwise action or inaction of the individual, not the vagaries of a hostile or chaotic environment. As my proxy *shee'eh* (mother's brother) instructs, 'Look around you. Everything you need is right there. It's a gift to you, put right there for you. A gift'. The gifts of the land from Crow await those who live a good life. A good life is one lived with respect for oneself, respect for others, honesty, and generosity.

We got everything. We got house here. Nature has got everything out here, but people don't know how to use it. You can build a house here, make fish net, fish trap. You can make everything here. Nature has made it - people just don't know how to use it, don't know how to go about it. Native people lived here thousands of years; they didn't need help.

As for shamanistic beliefs and the Trickster, well like they say, you need to have been there. Both McClellan (1956, 1975) and Guedon (1994) have addressed the continued influence of the native 'spiritual - medico practice of shamanism', and my experience has proved similar. The *Dineh* of the borderland continue to use a wide variety of plants as medicine (see Easton 2005b), and the importance of communications between individuals and others through dreams, visions, and animal-people talk remains a daily concern for many.

Everything is speaking to you. Bird. Animal. People. You gotta listen to them, you gotta respect them. They try to help you. Tell you things. What they want. What they know. You gotta help them and they will help you.

Mrs Bessie John in Easton (2002a:207)

Contemporary western medical practice is used extensively, of course, but it remains in conjunction with, not in replacement of a range of more traditional aboriginal techniques of healing and wellness.

What anthropology has called the hunting band, and the generalised reciprocity and other shared values of the *Dineh* Way that binds it, persists in this north-western corner of the world. The interior Athapaskan potlatch (see Simeone 1995) remains the most intense public expression of 'living the *Dineh* Way'. Held on a variety of occasions, but most for-

mally at deaths and subsequent memorials (which might be held as much as seven or more years later), this ritual belies any notion that these communities are mired in a 'culture of poverty'. Rather, they demonstrate that everyone is enmeshed in a community of riches. Even the poorest of potlatches requires the resources to host several hundred people over three to five days, counting their coming and going, and at minimum 10 to 20 thousand dollars of material goods. Particularly extravagant potlatches, held for highly respected people, can see 400-500 visitors to the village of Tanacross (2000 US Census population of 140, with a per capita income of US\$9,429), and material giveaways of \$30,000 in value).

Culture of poverty indeed.

But let me be clear. this wealth emerges incrementally, from a plethora of people, in \$20, \$50, \$200, \$2000, from all over the *Dineh* landscape: fish from the Bering Sea, money from an Anchorage lawyer and a cousin working the north slope oilfields, stored blankets from uncles in Beaver Creek, beaded mooseskin articles from aunties in Nenana, ducks from Northway, salmon from Mentasta, moose from Tetlin, berries from freezers... the list goes on, and on, and on. As a locally popular T-shirt slogan reads: 'It's All Indian Country'.

And, as it turns out, it is still full of hunter-gatherers.

The enormous changes in the material conditions of *Dineh* life can easily deceive the uninformed onlooker. Arriving at my first Tanacross potlatch in 1996 I spent the afternoon walking about the village meeting people and trying to get a feel for the place. One image stands sharply recalled, that of a group of about a dozen young men, teenagers we would call them, milling about outside the community hall, a 'boom-box' beating rap music, the kids dressed in drooping pants revealing the bands of their underwear, logo-infested baseball caps sitting askew upon their heads, for all the world looking like any other group of alienated youth at an urban mall. Three hours later, as the drums began to call out to the community that it was time, these same young men entered the hall as a line of *Dineh* dancers, wearing richly embroidered mooseskin vests and moccasins, proudly holding aloft the 'talking stick', singing with certainty the song vocals. They still had logo-infested baseball caps sitting askew their heads but it was powerfully clear that these were not the same young people we would find at an urban mall.

They are not remnant Pleistocene analogues (although they do continue to inspire our archaeological imaginations); they are not pristine conservative cultures without knowledge of the wider global networks they are enmeshed in (although they are concerned with the conservation of their culture in contact with these other worlds); nor are they post-colonial marginalised serfs with no other choice (although they do live at our perceived geographic margins); and while they certainly do exist in my imagination, enriching my understanding of both myself and my worlds, they are not imaginary, but really 'Real'. They are *Dineh*.

Life on the borderlands is not a Shangri-la. In particular, the trauma of residential school attendance and the racism that has accompanied the sustained efforts at cultural genocide in the twentieth century has marked every adult *Dineh*. While their personal reaction to this experience has varied, nearly everyone has been subjected to periods of some form of physical or psychic abuse. What is remarkable is that the majority of adult people today have come to some accommodation of their life experience with the State and western capitalism through a conscious renewal of their identity as members of a *Dineh* community in a *Dineh* world.

It is time for me to end – which I take as good evidence as any that Fukuyama (1992) and others are wrong in their assertion that we are at the 'End of History' – it seems to be marching on right here before your eyes as you read this.

All good stories always end at the beginning, so let me share with you one last anecdote that speaks to Richard's character as a person. Last December, about a month after my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, Richard contacted me and, among other gifts he offered, asked if I would come to speak at his CASCA *festschrift*, and my heart swelled. Although I had not spoken to him for many years, this gentle man, this human being whom my *Dineh* relations would immediately recognise as such, had neither mislaid nor forgotten me. He had allowed me to find my way towards my own future, 'whatever that might be' on my own terms, and retained his interested care

and observation of my life because he has never confused his intellect with his heart, at least not in my world.

That day I learned another important facet of Richard Borshay Lee's character and becoming an anthropologist – for becoming an anthropologist in our shared view is certainly, if nothing else, attempting to discover our capacity for humanity and acting upon it.

And so, in the spirit of *festschrift*, which is above all a celebration of another's life, I offer you these words.

They are yours now. Do with them what you may: hold on to them, discard them, repeat them – that is up to you. But, as Thomas King (2005) likes to say, 'Don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now'.

### Acknowledgements

This paper is a revised and expanded version of a similarly titled paper presented as an invited contribution to the Canadian Anthropological Society Symposium 'Hunters and Gatherers: A Symposium in Honour of Richard B. Lee,' presented 12 May 2007 in Toronto, Canada, and based on over twenty years of fieldwork with *Dineh* of Yukon and Alaska. During this time I have had many teachers who have strived to bring me to an understanding of the *Dineh* Way, and I am grateful to all of them, but I would like to particularly note the contributions of Mrs Bessie John, Mr Joseph Tommy Johnny, Mrs Darlene Northway, Mr David Johnny, Mrs Ruth Johnny, and Mr Jerry Isaac. *Ts'inni Cho*. I would also like to thank the symposium organisers, Robert Hitchcock and Megan Biesle, for inviting my participation, Paul Nadasdy and John Ritter for their sharing of both data and understanding, and the various funding agencies: The Northern Research Institute at Yukon College, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies, and the Canada - United States Fulbright Foundation - which have supported my fieldwork. Finally, both my intellectual and personal debt to Richard Lee cannot be overstated, and I thank him for his long history of support and friendship.

### Endnotes

- 1 This extensive three year survey of the upper Tanana River native communities of Tanacross, Tetlin, and Northway, Alaska, and Beaver Creek, Yukon documents country food consumption.
- 2 Paul is an ethnographer who works primarily with the Kluane First Nation people of Burwash landing, a community of predominantly Southern Tutchone speaking *Dineh* whose principal contemporary village

lies some 180 kilometres south of the village of Beaver Creek. Burwash and Beaver Creek native residents share close kinship and residential ties; indeed, through the 1960s to 1990s they were classified by the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs as the same Indian Band (see Nadasdy 2004 and Easton 2004). Because of this proximity and kinship we frequently share our experiences and there have been few instances when they have not been complimentary.



## References

- Bird-David, N 1990. The Giving Environment: Another Perspective on the Economic System of Gatherer-Hunters. *Current Anthropology* 33:25-47.
- Brightman, R 1993. *Grateful Prey: Rock Cree Human – Animal Relationships*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cruikshank, J 1985. The Gravel Magnet: Some Social Impacts of the Alaska Highway on Yukon Indians. In Coates, K (ed) *The Alaska Highway*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press:172-187.
- Easton, NA 1985a. *The Underwater Archaeology of Straits Salish Reefnetting*. Masters Thesis. Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria.
- Easton, NA 1985a. *Straits Salish Reef-netting: A transitional economic formation on the Northwest Coast?* Symposium on Primitive Communism. Canadian Ethnology Conference, University of Toronto, 12 May.
- Easton, NA 2001a. Remembering Nelnah - Bessie John. *The Northern Review*. 23 (Summer, 2001): 205-211.
- Easton, NA 2001b. Intergenerational Differences in Ethnic Identification in an Athapaskan Community. *The American Review of Canadian Studies*. (Spring/Summer 2001): 105-119.
- Easton, NA 2004. *A World Without Bounds Meets a World of Boundaries: Reflections on the Role of Anthropology in Redefining Aboriginal Relations Across Space and Time*. Paper delivered at the 31st Annual Meetings of the Alaska Anthropological Association, Whitehorse, Yukon, 8 April.
- Easton, NA 2005a *An Ethnohistory of the Chisana River Basin*. Whitehorse: Northern Research Institute.
- Easton, NA 2005b. *Upper Tanana Plant Names and Cultural Use*. Whitehorse: Northern Research Institute.
- Easton, NA in press. 'It's Hard Enough to Control Yourself; It's Ridiculous to Think You Can Control Animals': Competing Views on the Bush in Contemporary Yukon.' *The Northern Review*.
- Feit, HA 1978. *Waswanipi Realities and Adaptations: Resource Management and Cognitive Structure*. PhD Dissertation. McGill University.
- Friend, C, Holton, G, Brown, C, Easton, NA & Koskey M. 2007. *Upper Tanana Subsistence Fisheries Traditional Ecological Knowledge Study, Final Report No. FIS 04-253*. US Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Subsistence Management, Fisheries Resource Management Program, Fairbanks, Alaska.
- Fukuyama, F 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.
- Guedon, MF 1994. Dene Ways and the Ethnographer's Culture. In Young, DE & Goulet, J-G (eds) *Being Changed By Cross-Cultural Encounters: The anthropology of extraordinary experience*. Peterborough: Broadview Press:39-70.
- King, T 2005. *The Truth About Stories*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lee, R 1979. *The Kung San*. New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston.
- Lee, R 1981. Is there a Foraging Mode of Production? *Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 2(1):13-19.
- Lee, R 1992. Art, Science or politics: the crisis in hunter-gatherer studies. *American Anthropologist* 94:31-54.
- Lee, R 1999. Hunter Gatherer Studies and the New Millennium: A Look Forward (And Back). *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology* 23(4):821-845.
- Lee, R & Daly, R 1999. Introduction: foragers and others. In Lee, R & Daly, R (eds) *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Hunters and Gatherers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:1-19.
- McClellan, C 1956. Shamanistic Syncretism in Southern Yukon Territory. *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences*. 2nd series. 19(2):130-137.
- McClellan, C 1975. *My Old People Say: An Ethnographic Survey of Southern Yukon Territory*. Publications in Ethnology, 6. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada.
- Nadasdy, P 2003. *Hunters and Bureaucrats: Power, Knowledge, and Aboriginal - State Relations in the Southwest Yukon*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Nasady, P 2004. *A Contiguous Line? Kluane and White River First Nations and the Problem of 'Overlap' in Yukon First Nation Final Agreements*. Paper delivered at the 31st Annual Meetings of the Alaska Anthropological Association, Whitehorse, Yukon, 8 April.
- Nasady, P 2007. The gift in the animal: The ontology of hunting and human-animal sociality. *American Ethnologist*. 34(1):25-43.
- Nasady, P in press. *Wildlife as Renewable Resource: Spatiotemporal Topology and the Politics of Wildlife Management in the Yukon*. In Ferry, E & Limbert M (eds) *Resources and Their Temporalities*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of Advanced Research Press.
- Simeone, W 1995. *Rifles, Blankets, and Beads: Identity, History, and the Northern Athapaskan Potlatch*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- White, Leslie A 1966. The Social Organization of Ethnological Theory. *Rice University Studies - Monograph in Cultural Anthropology* Vol 52, No 4.