

REPORT COVERING ROBERT (BOB) GRAHAM'S ALBERTA STORYTELLING TRIP SEPT. 25TH TO OCT. 1ST, 2016

I flew out of Toronto's Pearson Airport on Saturday Sept. 25th arriving in Edmonton and then catching a flight to Grande Prairie. All went really well. Stayed at the Holiday Inn Express in Grande Prairie and it was very nice. Went to another Holiday Inn first rather than the Express and it took me a while to find the right one. Might as well tell you now that I had some fun during the week finding where I was going as they don't over use signage on their streets and highways. I made some wrong guesses but all in all I was always early for each and every Telling.

When telling my Cecil Stories I sit on a small, low chair so I am just above the kid's eye level. I was able to do this everywhere except the Library in Medicine Hat as we used their presentation theater which had seating. I sat on the stage and it worked very well.

With each telling of my Cecil Stories I was introduced and I then would explain to each group the difference between a Story Teller and an Author. I also explained that my stories were my own and came from my active imagination and from what I remembered about my time spent with Cecil who was a People of the First Nations. I spent basically an hour with each telling except for one and they only gave me half an hour. That was at George Davison and the kids were disappointed. I tried to get the teachers to stay as it was recess and let me story tell during their recess but they would not.

I use props during my storytelling (Beaver, Large Brown Bear & a Brown Bear Cub). I call ducks in with my own learnt Duck Call plus a few other calls to the wild to bring the animals around. I must tell you now that I made a big mistake at Dr. Roy Wilson Learning Centre when asked by a student at the end of my telling to show him how to do my Duck Call. I am afraid all the kids watched and then the room exploded with their Duck calls. The teachers had a hard time getting them to stop and back to their rooms. There were about 100 students going down the hall and most had nailed the call. I am surprised the parking lot outside was not full of Ducks. I did not do that again. I am up and down a fair bit from my chair. I use my arms when telling of Cecil's paddling (every stroke was true, deep & powerful) or swimming under water. I stress the importance of Mother Earth to our survival and how we must respect her and take care of her. The biggest thing that I do and it is at the very end of my session is that I give every kid a Nickel. One of my stories is about a Silvery White Beaver and of course our Nickel has a Silvery White Beaver on it. I tell the kids that it is special as I washed it in the sand and water out in front of where Cecil's cabin was. I suggest they keep it on their dresser at home and look at it every now and again to remind themselves of my friend and now their friend, Cecil. I also suggest they show their parents and tell them the story of the

Silvery White Beaver. You would think I was giving them a million dollars. I went through 1400+ nickels while in Alberta. I had to find out when I arrived, how many classes I would be telling to and how many kids in each class. I then counted out the number I needed for each class and put in envelopes so the teachers could give them out when they got back to the rooms. I heard that the kids demanded them as soon as they got back. It was not uncommon to have a few emotional teachers and parents in attendance and I saw their tears after one of my stories caught them off guard. That is a compliment to me. From the kids at all the venues I received applause, smiles, high fives, handshakes and a few hugs. I received a number of notes right after I finished a visit and a few gifts. Mikyla Young from the Grande Prairie Public Library wrote "Thanks so much for coming to our Library. Your stories were so engaging and vibrant. The teachers, parents and kids were so enthralled (and so was I). Thank you for your time, dedication and energy". From the staff & students at Dr. Roy Wilson Learning Centre their card reads "Thank you so much for sharing enthusiasm for stories with us. The students & teachers all thoroughly enjoyed your presentations. I've had many students & teachers already today tell me about how interesting your stories were, how well they connected to valuable life lessons, and what a good story teller you are. All the best, Bob".

Monday Sept. 26th

Bright and early I headed north on Hwy. #2 on my way to Woking. Saw an incredible sun rise and two different herds of Elk. Did not realize how big and fast they were. Their racks were also huge. Arrived in Woking just before 8:00 AM as planned as I wanted to sit and have a coffee before I went to the school. Problem was that in Woking there are not coffee shops. I sat in a parking lot across from the General Store that was not open. Had a few folks look and probably wonder who I was so I did not stay long and drove around the town. That took about 8 minutes and ended up at the school around 8:30. The principal Danelle Boychuck made me feel at home. I knew I was in the country when I noticed that Mrs Boychuck was driving a Ford 150 and in the back she had a 200 gallon gasoline tank with pump attached used, I would imagine to fill tractors etc. The total school had about 85 students. My first telling started at 9:00 AM and went for 1 hour and included grades 1, 2, 3 & 4. My second tell started at 10:30 and included grades 5, 6, 7 & 8. All the kids were attentive and asked questions after each of my stories. 85+% of the students where off the farm and they connected well with my stories.

My next stop was Rycroft School which is another 25 KM north of Woking. This is also a farming community but is much larger with a large Co Op grocery store, gas station, farm machinery dealership & a couple of motels. I had two story telling's here one at 1:00 PM (grades 1 to 4) and the other at 2:00 PM (grades 5 to 8). The librarian that

originally set up my visit had left the school and had been replaced but she came back that day just to hear me. She said she was curious as to how a Story Teller was different from an Author. She said she was glad she came and complimented me on holding the interests of all the kids from all the grades. We used the school Library. There were about 150 kids total in the school.

After I finished in Rycroft I drove the 100Km back to Grande Prairie and for my 2nd night at The Holiday Inn Express. It was an early night as I was ready for bed. I felt I had done a good job and that I had made Story Tellers of Canada proud of me. I also felt that Storytelling was going to be discussed that night around the kitchen table and maybe some stories would be told.

Tuesday Sept. 27th

I arrived at the Grande Prairie Public Library around 9:15 AM. One of the staff saw me sitting out in the parking lot and wondered who I was. She then saw my big brown bear and knew I was the story teller that was coming to visit. I had two story telling's 10:00 AM grades 2 to 5 and 10:50 AM also grades 2-5. These folks mailed me their cheque and I received it prior to leaving on my trip. I waited till I got home to deposit though. Again, the kids where all special and attentive. I think the teachers and parents that attended hold the record for the most tears, a tissue box sure made its way around. I noticed how close the adults seemed at the end of my storytelling that day and how they came together. Hugging each other & laughing. There was one little girl aged 8 who was home schooled. Her question was "Besides Cecil, did anyone else in my life take the time that he did with me?" I said for sure my Mom & Dad and because of how they made me feel my wife and I always spent time with our kids and grandkids. Cecil helped us all by letting us connect through the telling of his stories. After I finished at the Grande Prairie Library it was onto the airport and 1 1/2 hour flight to Calgary. There I picked up a car at Alamo and was off to Medicine Hat rolling in there around 7:00 PM. It was a rather long day and I was glad to check into the Medicine Hat Lodge. Even found it fairly easily. From the staff I got directions to my first tell the next day at the Medicine Hat Public Library. I had rented a GPS from Alamo and they had set it up for me to find my way to the Medicine Hat Lodge. Unfortunately it was set up wrong and I did finally just put the darn thing in the trunk as I could not get it working and used good old questions as to how to get places and a map. That works well. Go figure.

Wednesday Sept.28th

Made it easily to the Medicine Hat Public Library with my map and what a beautiful well organized busy Library it is. I was ushered into the theatre with a stage, lighting and seating. My first group was made up of grades 1, 2 & 3's and started at 9:15. My second group was made up of grades 1 & 2's. There were 100 in each group. They were from

different schools and one of the schools walked to the Library. Sitting on the stage looking out over my audiences was amazing. Sometimes when the kids are on the floor and there are a lot of them I don't see the kids at the back as well as I would like. No problem in this theatre as the seats were terraced. After one of my sessions here a father (who had the day off) came up to me with his daughter. He said his daughter after about 5 minutes of listening put her head on his shoulder and held his hand for the rest of my stories. When I finished she asked him to bring her up to meet me. Her dad took our picture with her holding my large Brown Bear. He told me they camped a lot and storytelling was going to become a big part of it from now on. His daughter was just so excited about getting back to her school so her teacher could give her a nickel. Quietly he said to me that the hour he spent with her listening was one of the best times he had ever had and how close he felt to her during my stories. He shook my hand and his daughter gave me a big hug. I met a little girl just prior to me starting my stories and I asked her name. She told me it was River. She was sitting in the front row and when I told my story about the Foot Race I named the girl in it River rather than Echo. I watch the expression on her face when I first said it and her eyes just brightened and the biggest smile came. I know it made her feel special and her classmates would have noticed also. I do that every now and then and it always gives joy to that person. I do have to be careful that it is a name I can remember easily and not forget half way through the story though. River was easy. My 3rd group was very different that day. It started at 1:10 PM and they started to arrive around 12:30. The Library called it a special group and they certainly were. There were 30 in the group and at least 1 care giver to every 2. Their average age would have been around 35. They certainly knew one another and called out often to each other before I started. They were anxious to make sure their friends were seated and happy. Some wore their hats sideways and when I offered to trade my hat for one of theirs I was told that was a no go. They sat really well during my stories and had questions for me at the end of each. I could not understand what the questions were but the grunts and squeals told me they loved the animation especially my duck call. There was also knee slapping and many smiles. My Beaver and two Bears were a real hit. At the end one fellow about 6+ ft. tall and weighing about 250 lbs. rushed to the front intent on giving me a hug. His care giver, a lady about 5 ft. nothing, caught up to him just in time and probably saved my life. I did shake his hand and he told me he loved my stories. Apparently this group comes once or twice a week to the Library and they try to have an event planned each time. Reading of course is the biggest but they draw some times also and one of the staff may tell a story. I have a better understanding of how valuable Public Libraries can be and are, in a community. The Medicine Hat Library was certainly a Bee Hive of activity. One lady who was a patron came in and gave the staff a bag full of plastic bags she had saved so they could be used by people to carry their books home. Had a quiet evening, but then every evening was quiet. I just made sure of how to get to where I was to be the next

day.

Thursday Sept. 29th

I spent the entire day at Dr. Roy Wilson Learning Centre. I found out that schools are starting to become known as Learning Centers. This was my longest day with 4 sessions. I did my storytelling in the school's Library. It was a very large Library and one could tell very well used. I sat there before I started and listened and watched a lady volunteer help a small group of kids that were refugees. She was speaking slowly and showing them how to take books out. All the kids were attentive and speaking English with her help. They all selected about 4 books each and she was explaining how these books would help them to understand Canada. Kelly Marshall was the Teacher-Librarian and of all the support people I met while on tour she was the most gracious, not that everyone else I met wasn't, but Kelly just had a way. She also, in my opinion, introduced me in a way that allowed my audience what I was all about. Each session had close to 100 kids. 9:00 to 10:00 were Grade 3, 10:30 to 11:30 were Grade 4. 12:45 to 1:45 were Grade 2 and 1:50 to 2:50 were Grade 1. The day went really well. So many kids put their hands up with questions but what was interesting I did not get too many questions. What I got was how much they liked my stories. They just wanted to say something and be part of the experience. When the day was done and I headed to my car a little girl stopped me and introduced me to her Grand Dad who had come to pick her up. She really wanted me to meet him. Just as I got to my car I noticed another little girl showing her grandmother her nickel. When she saw me she yelled out "there he is". Her grandmother told me she was so excited and that they had been standing there as she told her all about the storytelling and Cecil. I realized I had made a real impression. As I left, the grandmother thanked me for making a difference and the little girl gave me a hug. I was over the moon. Went back to the Lodge and relaxed.

Friday Sept. 30th

My last day and it was spent at the George Davison School. It had been mentioned on Thursday at Dr. Roy Wilson Learning Centre that today was 'Every Child Matters Day' and a great many kids and teachers had orange on. It was a very emotional day for me even though this is where I taught the grade 5 & 6's how to do the duck call and know I was not really popular with a couple of teachers for a short time. 9:00 AM to 9:45 grades 5 & 6. 10:00 to 10:30 grades 3 & 4. 11:00 to 11:45 grades 1 & 2. I had two outstanding experiences this day. The first happened with a young fellow named Tyson who was in grade 6. He came up after I had finished telling and just wanted to shake my hand and tell me how much he loved my stories. He was wearing a Beaver Canoe pull over and I explained the name Omar Stringer was a famous canoe paddling instructor and had taught a friend of mine how to paddle. He did not seem to want to leave and was the

last one to do so and go back to his room. At their recess he came back to find me. I was all alone in the Library and he came up and asked if I could tell him another story. I explained we just did not have time and that I needed to go and get some water as my throat was dry. I did however take the time to talk to him and from my presentation book gave him a picture of myself and Cecil and wrote a note to him on the back of it saying he was my friend and a lover of stories and signed it. He really appreciated it, I could tell. I also suggested he look for books in the Library about Mother Earth and people who lived off the land as Cecil did. I was sad to see him go but excited for him as I knew his world just got bigger and he had found a real interest. After my last telling, which was grades 1 & 2, and while I was mulling around packing up, one of the teachers came back with one of her students. Her name was Abby and she insisted her teacher bring her back to see me. She had made a drawing for me. It had a big heart drawn on the page along with the names Bob, Cecil & Echo. She said to me that when she grew up, married and had kids she was going to name them those names. Both the teacher & I broke down and cried. I don't think anything has ever touched me as much while storytelling. I was speechless as was the teacher. She then hugged me. It had been a great day and great week. I went to my car and drove back to Calgary smiling all the way. I returned my car to Alamo and mentioned to the lady that checked it over that I felt the some of the charges were questionable. She knocked \$50.00 off the bill. I stayed at the Delta right at the Airport and it was very nice.

Saturday Oct. 1st

Great breakfast at the Delta but it was not complimentary like my others. Caught my flight home and used the time on the plane to make notes of my trip to Alberta. It really was a great experience for me and I thank you all. I do believe I did Storytelling justice and hope that I instilled in those that heard me, the never ending want for more stories. It is often said that it is not so much the story that is remembered, but the feeling, a feeling that one wants to recapture and the knowledge that storytelling may give it to them. I really appreciate the fact that besides TD Bank, two other sponsors were publishers. It has been suggested to me that I put my Cecil stories into book form. I like the idea of storytelling only. I think, for me, storytelling is the best way to go. It is my own and I don't need the assistance I would need with a Book. It was nice having not to think about book sales this past week which I would think was on the minds of the Authors. So as Roy used to say "until we meet again" thanks for everything.

Bob (AKA Papa Bob)