



Vancouver KIDS

Lesley McKnight



VANCOUVER KIDS



THE COURAGEOUS KIDS SERIES

Vancouver **KIDS**

Lesley McKnight



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To my three favourite Vancouver kids and their dad.

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For a glossary of words used in *Vancouver Kids*, and for more information about the *Courageous Kids* series, visit courageouskids.ca.

GREATER VANCOUVER AREA (Map A)



List of Locations for Each Story

- | | |
|--|--|
| ❶ The Two Sisters: (imagined) | ❹ The Intruders: Chaythoos (Map B) |
| ❷ Why I Loathe Captain Vancouver: Beach where Thomas Pitt slept (Map A) | ❺ That Fearsome Iron Horse: Kanaka Ranch (Map B) |
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| ❹ Story Blankets: Silvey Home (Map B) | ❻ My Lucky Automobile Accident: Roedde House (Museum) (Map B) |
| ❺ Vancouver is Burning! End of Carrall Street (Map B) | ❼ House Girl: Chinatown (Map B) |

VANCOUVER (Map B)



- 11 Robbery of the Century: (Map A)
- 12 My Friend Rat: Vancouver Harbour (Map B)
- 13 Don't Be Such a Chicken: (Map A)
- 14 Broken Promise: (Map A)
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- 17 Nickels on Pender Street: Dawnne's house (Map B)
- 18 Just Concentrate: Lord Nelson Elementary (Map B)
- 19 Going Out for the Team: Steveston (Map A)
- 20 Never Eat Ice Cream Before Hamburgers: Expo grounds (Map A)
- 21 The Day I Danced for the Entire World: BC Place (Map A)
- 22 Biking Backwards: (Map A)

Introduction

A promise to readers

I remember sitting in a class about Canadian history, and feeling so sleepy that I wondered if toothpicks could hold my eyelids open the way they do in cartoons. I'm glad I never tried that because I think it would have hurt.

Imagine how surprised I was to find out a few years later that I loved history. I adore stories and that's all history is—a collection of stories about the past. Hey, the word “story” is hiding right there in the word “history.” The past can mean yesterday, last week, a hundred years ago, or longer. You name it—if it's over, it's history. If you came home from school yesterday and told someone about your day, you were documenting history. You historian, you.

The stories in this book are about Vancouver's history from a perspective that I think is too often ignored. All of the stories in this book are told by kids. If you live in Vancouver, or have visited it, you are a part of Vancouver's history too.

I am a Vancouver kid myself. I moved here when I was thirteen, thinking I was the luckiest person ever. I gobbled up the city, big mouthfuls at a time. I wanted to see all of it, from the tiny alleys of Chinatown to the entire length of the seawall. My new friends laughed when I became so distracted by the gorgeous views from the top of Grouse Mountain that I had trouble learning how to ski. Taking a water taxi to shop for food on Granville Island was so much more exotic than going by bus to an ordinary grocery store (even though we did that too).

On a sunny day, Vancouver shines. I head down to Spanish Banks, stake out a spot on the beach, and soak it all in. I look towards downtown and I imagine the corner of Robson and Burrard, cars streaming by and pedestrians twenty deep on each street corner. I squint over at the North Shore seawall and I picture the steady flow of bikes, strollers and rollerbladers. Then I look up to the top of the mountains. I close my eyes and imagine the quiet of the peaks with the wind swirling and the clouds overhead.

Vancouverites like to grumble about the rain, but I don't mind it. The city looks different when it rains. One of my favourite things to do is to find a window seat in a café. I peer out at the passersby. I try to imagine where people are going and where they are coming from. I wonder about their stories. There are more than two million people in Metro Vancouver, so I'll never run out of people to observe.

Which brings me to one of the big reasons I wanted to write this book. I believe that history is all about observations and I think kids have a unique outlook on the world. The questions you ask are different and the answers you accept are different too. Seeing the city through the lens of a kid is one of the best ways to take a snapshot.

The stories in this collection are all snapshots in time, giving you a peek into the life of a Vancouver kid living in the past, whether thousands of years ago or just last year.

Now let me explain a couple of things. First of all, the stories in the book work forward through time, starting a long, long time ago and making their way up to this year.

Secondly, this book is a work of creative non-fiction. Maybe

you know the term, or maybe you are wondering what it means. Well, here's the deal: I have searched through books, transcripts, archives, and old pictures to find stories about real kids living in Vancouver throughout this area's history. I have also interviewed lots of people about their childhood and borrowed their pictures to publish in the book. I have used my imagination to bring each true story to life, but I can promise you that I stick to the facts as I know them. At the end of each story, you will find a little section called *What do we know for sure?* There, I will tell you exactly what parts of the story are facts and what details are imagined, and I will tell you how I found the story.

I have worked hard to track down the most up-to-date and accurate information for this book. I have tried my best to find the correct contemporary spellings of First Nations names for people and places—one of my toughest challenges in writing this book.

Let's say you read something here that you want to find out more about. Maybe you want to investigate your neighbourhood or your own family history. There are lots of ways to get in touch with the history of the Vancouver area. Most of the municipalities around Vancouver have their own museums and archives. Many of these places offer great programs for kids. Don't be afraid to just go in, browse, look at old pictures, and ask questions. If you want the feeling of stepping back in time, visit places like Fort Langley, Burnaby Village Museum, or Roedde House. The Museum of Vancouver and the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia can offer you more information than you could absorb in a lifetime, but I urge you to give them a try. Check out the website

vancouverhistory.ca. It is an incredible resource spearheaded by the late Vancouver historian Chuck Davis. Get creative. Go to the public library, walk around the city, ask questions of the people around you and read the little plaques attached to the sides of old buildings. You can also look on the *Courageous Kids* website, courageouskids.ca, to see a Vancouver timeline and additional information that I couldn't squeeze into this book. Take the stories you uncover and use your imagination to make them come alive. Wherever you are sitting right now is a part of someone else's story. Look around you and imagine.

Kids have been living on this land for thousands of years, but as a city, Vancouver turns one hundred and twenty-five years old in 2011. When you look at the history of the cities of the world, Vancouver is still a kid—full of adventure, energy, and courage. There have been growing pains, hard lessons, and lots of changes in the past century and a quarter. The city's story is still unfolding.

Who are you, I wonder? Are you a Vancouver kid? Did you come here on a trip? Or maybe you are planning a visit to Vancouver? Since I wrote this book, and you are reading it, we are both a part of the story. You and I are Vancouver kids when we find ourselves between these pages. I hope you enjoy the book.

Lesley McKnight
Vancouver, 2011



The Two Sisters mountains.

MARIUS GRIGORE, ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

The Two Sisters

*An unknown girl and her cousins
in Squamish territory, in ancient times*

Tiny hairs on the back of my neck tickled. They stood up on end. They twitched. I stopped walking and looked around me.

I was carrying the basket of roots my mother had asked me to collect. It had taken me longer than I'd thought to find them. The sun was low in the sky and the forest was dark. I squinted through the trees. I couldn't see anything, but I heard a strange rustling in the bushes.

Sometimes the little hairs on my neck noticed things that I didn't. I had learned to pay attention to them. One time, the little hairs warned me about a mother black bear close by with her two cubs. When I stopped to look around, she passed me with her babies walking behind her. A mother with cubs can be dangerous, but I wasn't moving and she saw no threat in little me.

This time it didn't sound like an animal in the bushes.

"Who is there?" I shouted to the trees. My voice echoed. The sun dipped further and I wanted to get back to my mother.

The rustling continued, then the sound of giggles. That was no animal.

"Stop fooling," I yelled.

Two of my little boy cousins burst out of the trees, waving pointed sticks and shouting.

"We are Stek'in. We are here to take you away with us, girl," said one cousin, pointing his stick at me. The two boys jumped around hollering. They were both younger than me, smaller than me, and much sillier than me.

I ignored them and started walking again. They followed a few steps behind me, carrying on with their game.

“It’s no use, you are ours now,” they shouted. “You won’t see your people again!” I kept walking.

Suddenly, the point of one of their sticks poked into my back. I could tell by their sudden silence that it was an accident, and it hadn’t really hurt, but I’d had enough. I stopped and turned around to face my would-be captors.

“Don’t you know the story of Sch’ich’iyúy, the Two Sisters?” I asked. “The Stek’in would not behave like you two beasts.”

The boys looked down. They knew they had gone too far. They weren’t warriors anymore and I wasn’t their prisoner. I was their older cousin and they were in trouble.

“I don’t have time to waste standing here. Come and walk with me. I will tell you the story again, so that you can see how silly you are being.”

I set out again, glancing behind me to see that the little boys were following. They had dropped their sticks and they ran to walk beside me and listen.

“You are right that the Stek’in were once our enemy,” I began. “In the past, they would steal away our women and children, but not anymore. Once, long ago, the twin sons of a highly respected Stek’in chief came here in a raid. They were young and it was their first raid so the warriors told them to stay with the canoe while they went to watch the Squamish village they planned to attack. They wanted the boys to stay safe, but the boys were like you. They didn’t want to wait by the canoe. They wanted to be part of the action, so they decided to see the Squamish village for themselves. They set out alone.

“When they reached a ridge overlooking the village, they stopped. They spotted two Squamish girls walk out of a longhouse. It was first thing in the morning. The girls walked to the river to bathe. The twin brothers watched the girls and decided then and there that they wanted these two girls for their wives.

“The twins ran off to find the raiding party to tell them they wanted no harm to come to these two girls when they raided the village. They explained to the warriors which longhouse the girls lived in and got them to promise to protect them. The twins were the sons of the chief, so the lead warrior had to agree.

“The raid was a success. When it was over, the warriors brought the captured girls to the twin brothers. The sons of the chief were surprised when they saw the girls up close, because they were also twins.

“The twin girls were taken to the Stek’in village. At first, the girls were terrified that they would be mistreated and enslaved, but the opposite was true. They were cared for with kindness and respect. They married the twin sons of the chief and were happy.

“Only one thing made them sad. They missed their Squamish family. Sometimes, the sisters would cry, and when the Stek’in asked them why, they told them it was because they wanted their people to know how happy they were and how well they had been treated by their husbands’ family.

“The twin brothers went to their father and asked him to make peace with the Squamish. The twin sisters had so impressed the chief that he agreed. The chief, his sons, and the twin sisters sent word to the Squamish offering peace. It was accepted.

Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the help and support of many wonderful people. I am most grateful for the Vancouver kids of the past and present who inspired and guided me in my quest to tell their stories. I was able to speak personally to some of the kids who made their way into this book, but many of the children's voices had to travel a great distance through time to land in these pages. I am grateful to the kids who spoke the words that were recorded and I am indebted to those who valued them enough to record them.

As I sifted through material at the public library, archives, and on the Internet, the children of the city jumped out at me. Vancouver's history has been a constant topic of conversation for me, in coffee shops, at dinner parties, and with friends. Generous people have offered me the stories of their grandparents, aunts and uncles, or their own childhood tales of adventure and courage. I wish I could include all the stories I've come across, but every single anecdote or story I've heard has played a part in the journey of this book.

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