



# **Two Houses Half-Buried in Sand: Oral Traditions of the Hul'q'umi'num' Coast Salish of Kuper Island and Vancouver Island**

*Chris Arnett*

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A vital collection of writings about First Nations people and culture as it existed on the island coasts of the Depression-era Pacific Northwest and originally published in the pages of Victoria's oldest newspaper, the *Daily Colonist*, the sixty stories included here are the result of a unique collaboration between a middle-aged woman, Beryl Cryer, of upper-class British ancestry, and well-known Hul'q'umi'num'-speaking cultural elders, keenly aware of the punitive anti-land claims legislation passed by the Canadian Parliament in 1927, and therefore eager to have their stories told and published.

Mary Rice from Kuper Island, who lived next door to the Cryer family home in Chemainus, BC, is well remembered even today for her storytelling abilities; she taught Beryl Cryer, with whom she became close friends, countless aspects of indigenous culture, particularly as experienced by women. An elder in a thriving native culture, she introduced Cryer to the many other authorities from whom these stories were gathered for the newspaper.

Although she was not a trained anthropologist, Beryl Cryer was an honest observer and careful recorder. She embellished the material she collected with minor anecdotal introductions that give the reader a vivid sense of the person telling the story. The accounts themselves are valuable documents of Coast Salish oral traditions dealing with a wide range of subject matter from known sources, almost all of whom were well-versed in English.

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