

- Alex Mah: 0:00 The track you're about to hear is part of Earth Witnessing, an audio project for Vines Art Festival that invites you to engage with this park through this audio track, using each of your senses to connect to the earth. First a word about the land this park is on.
- Senaqwila Wyss: 0:21 [Speaks Skwxwú7mesh sníchim, Construction in Background]
- Senaqwila Wyss: 0:37 Good day, everybody. My name is Senaqwila and I come from the village known as Eslha7an, which is just behind me in the North Shore from the Skwxwú7mesh Nation. It's always important work that we start off by looking further than just land acknowledgement of Coast Salish people, but specifically within Vancouver. We have our hən̓q̓əmi̓ñəm-speaking and Skwxwú7mesh sníchim-speaking people which are the Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh, and Tsleil-Waututh. And here for the Skwxwú7mesh Nation, what today is known as CRAB Park, that was the village known as Lek'lekí. And so this was an original area known to the Skwxwú7mesh people. So as we look further into bringing that awareness, not only that we're in the unceded lands and waters of our people, but looking further to bring that dialogue and discussion about the areas that today we might take for granted: open spaces and public parks and having access to the ocean and to forests and mountain areas. And these are areas that our people have existed in health spaces since time immemorial.
- Erica Masuskapoe: 1:45 [Speaks Nehiyawin, Helicopter in Background]
- Erica Masuskapoe: 1:52 And this is a message for you, the non-indigenous colonist: Get the fuck out! Turn around. Get out of this fucking park! Now!
- Sound Effect: 2:06 [Helicopter Gets Louder, Roaring Then Fading Away]
- Erica Masuskapoe: 2:14 [Speaks in Nehiyawin]

Erica Masuskapoe: 2:24 Thank you for allowing me to be here. Hello, it's Erica and I'm from Ahtahkakoop. "Ahtahkakoop" means star blanket as I am both from the stars and on this beautiful ground, all with all of you and we are all stars now, all in this star blanket. And I'm recording this audio recording for the Vines Art Festival and have been given the assignment to attempt to try to make some sort of connection with the so-called CRAB Park at Portside in so-called Vancouver.

Erica Masuskapoe: 2:57 I do frequent this place a lot, and I've gotta be honest with you, in trying to establish a connection that might be some sort of pleasant, auditory recording, unfortunately, it is a bit triggering for an indigenous person coming down here. My elder for one calls that little pool of water down there that you're not allowed to go and swim in, and yet people still do, as "the toilet." It's called the "toilet" simply because of the, well, all this human shit that's in there. Not to mention that out just past the pier over there, there is a, uh, mostly there's some storm drainage runoff that's, uh, currently shooting out some stuff from the downtown eastside, primarily paraphernalia amongst all the other things that go on unchecked within, uh, storm water runoff in this town. Then of course, there's the, uh, the port that's currently being developed, um, to what end it's unsure, but all kinds of silt and debris are down there.

Erica Masuskapoe: 3:57 And so it's been a bit of reflection to sometimes come down here. I know when I first came down here, I don't know, I'd say, well, over a decade ago, it would be a common thing to see, uh, families of seals come down here and all the different wildlife that does congregate in this beautiful inlet. And well, I think I'm lucky every once in a while, I might see one seal that shows up from time to time. I'm grateful though that there's still a lot of Canada Geese that frequent here. And also, I suppose I could be grateful that I also do see a lot of my relations here. Um, we do often do host fires down here every Saturday between 2:00 and 8:00. Sacred fires, a wonderful example of an outdoor indigenous safe space and provided a lot of refuge and a lot of healing, especially during these times when we're just post-pandemic and even during the pandemic itself.

Erica Masuskapoe: 4:51 Then there's the connection just to the houseless people as well that often frequent here, just geographically, just down the street, uh, you have what's called the downtown, so called downtown eastside. Uh, there's the so-called four corners. And of course, uh, I don't know what to even honestly say about that. It's, it's such a tragic scene, but nevertheless I suppose coming down here to CRAB Park and walking down there is a refuge for those folks, be it during the day or during the evening, trying to escape that hell that is the downtown eastside. Of course it's not really that safe. You've got this weird little issue now with your Parks Board people where, uh, instead of, I don't know, taking care of a park where they're there, they now seem to be more interested in wearing bulletproof vests and participating in the act of the displacement of houseless peoples of Vancouver. Um, I do my best to liaise with them as I am a volunteer over with the, uh, with some of the congregation that gets going here with the tents that happen.

Erica Masuskapoe: 5:57 Um, and of course there's been some history here with tent cities in this park. Um, I don't know. I have really zero problem with that dynamic. I think these people do need a place to come and, and, uh, have a landing spot and, uh, and to have be able to have an interface with, uh, you know, any kind of social infrastructure that might be able to help them do their next step, even if their existence is just that as being, uh, by choice, being out there, being houseless. I think we're all members of a community. And I don't think, uh, even during, if I'm to repeat some of the words of my indigenous elders, these things weren't here, uh, before contact. And I suppose that's where it gets down to a lot of bitterness here at this CRAB park. This so-called CRAB park, is that it is really is so-called, everything you see around here is so-called, it's all been propped up. It's an illusion. Even this park itself is nothing more than an industrial colonialist-era wasteland site. Perhaps there was some mill or some refinery, or goodness knows what's down here. One thing's for sure is the soil is so contaminated, you can't develop it. All you could do is turn it into a park.

Erica Masuskapoe: 7:15 And then what's even more weird is that most of your parts in Vancouver are within this status. You know, sometimes I've wondered if I go to a park, if this is somehow the last remaining green space that we can cling onto. When in fact here in Vancouver, it seems to be quite the opposite. It seems to be just leftover wastelands and hoping in earnest that someday the land will return to its natural form. Still, it's a little hard when park rangers are more focused in on houseless displacement than maintaining and bringing back that park.

Erica Masuskapoe:

7:51 So I suppose there are prayers down here for this little spot of land here. Recently, uh, got a chance to plant 215 trees in a commemoration of some children that were found, uh, buried outside of a school in a local so-called city there called, uh, Kamloops. And so those, those things I suppose, will grow back and help the land. Cedar is very important of course to the west coast and to all indigenous peoples on Turtle Island. If there's any redeeming value to this place that my elder calls, "the toilet", this so-called CRAB park, is that it does provide a nice view of what you call those Lions. But unfortunately since time immemorial those two figures up there in those mountains that you can see there, those two peaks that jut out, you know, whether they've been folded by these, I guess the, what is it, the buttressing of lava pools underneath the ocean, pushing up these giant monstrosities to these things called "mountains" or whether or not they were dropped here or molded by things called Thunderbirds. I'm not so sure, but one thing is for sure, is that everyone I know and that you might not know, simply call these things, "the sisters" or "twin sisters." They do have a name and I'm not even going to try to pretend to pronounce it, but there they are, looking down at you. I suppose there's some relief in that and that these sisters have risen above all the colonialist nonsense and look down upon you. There's some sort of relief in that - an Indigenous woman looking down upon us all. Well, after all, I think this line was more so forged in matriarchy, if I'm not mistaken, and is maintained still in matriarchy.

Erica Masuskapoe: 9:53 I think something that we often forget is that on unceded territories, the political roles and functions in the villages of these places, they haven't gone away. They're not extinguished. They are here, and they've been here since time immemorial, and they will be here long, long after this so-called thing called Vancouver, or this so-called thing called CRAB park, or even this so-called thing, this notion of paper called Canada. Those things, those villages, those people, those unceded territories or nations will continue to be here, and same with their political functions, and same with their, their festivities, or rather simply ceremonies, or their arts, or their talents, or their movements. Because those people are everywhere. Those people are even the things that you even breathe, because to say something like people here on these unceded territories, it is everything. It is those two mountains up there. Those are two sisters up there looking down at you.

Erica Masuskapoe: 11:08 I suppose if there was some sort of hope or opportunity, which of course there always is, there is a word in my Cree language that comes to mind and that's called "waniskâw". Waniskâw, if you were to look it up in a Cree dictionary to translate it into some conversational value, simply means the word "arise". Waniskâw might be something you say to your child when they wake up in the morning, "get up, arise". Waniskâw might be also something that a fierce warrior might simply say to himself as he hops on his horse off to kill the colonizer. Waniskâw. I think though, if I were to be honest, it's not that image of a warrior that I see when I hear that word. There's something that happens all across this planet and all across this Turtle Island, or rather there's an opportunity for something to happen across this planet and all across this island. It was something that would have happened and occurred regularly every single day. Waniskâw.

Erica Masuskapoe: 12:27 You see each time that that sun comes up, that thing that warms us, that keeps, the thing that keeps us alive, the very first time it cracks across the horizon, wherever you are on this world, life will stop, the trees, the grass, sometimes the wind, the birds, and definitely you will stop. Perhaps just for a quick few seconds. But I've heard from some that meditate at dawn still on the prairies, it can still go on for a few minutes. And it's within that effort, I think that that "waniskâw" word comes from. It's something for us all to arise. I think the problem and the notion of being able to make this connection here without these beautiful ladies looking down at us, is that they're the ones that have been able to rise, and that are able to look down.

Erica Masuskapoe: 13:35 And yet here we all are creating all this noise and this racket, and this so-called achievement of a postmodern city, the so-called idea of civilization, civilization that even in this park you can see simply displaces and kills houseless peoples by park rangers. This is the so-called civilization that makes that little tide pool down there to my elder, "the toilet." But I think all down here, they use ones that look down upon us and wait for us as we waniskâw each day, as each day, each living thing has the opportunity to stop and appreciate that thing that comes our way, simply it's what you would call the day.

Sound Effect: 14:33 [Fire Crackling]

Alex Mah: 14:57 Thank you for listening to Earth Witnessing presented by Vines Art Festival. This is part of a series of six audio works related to parks in Vancouver. I hope this gave you a chance to deepen your connection to this place. As you take a pause here in CRAB Park, consider what is offered to *you* at the break of each day?